

IV. Holy Week in Biblical Perspective
Sunrise Service
“Convicted”
Luke 24:1-12
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We will be looking at Luke 24 but I want to begin with a confession and that is I need a special week of Holy Week so that I will intentionally focus on Christ the way I should always focus on Christ, not just of what factually took place but to gain a deeper understanding of Christ and what He did (His sacrifice for me). As Holy Week comes each year, I use a couple of different tools that are known as the harmony of the Gospels to help me gain a deeper understanding of the events that took place that week. A harmony of the Gospels is hearing from multiple people about each event that took place and assuming they all tell the truth you would then think you are going to get one story, but you will get four different perspectives from each of the Gospels plus from any others who give an account. So, you will have to listen to all those different perspectives, not contradictory in Scripture but complementary – they harmonize but it takes putting them all together to get the real story.

This takes place in my family all the time. One of the things I enjoy about the Easter season is being able to get everybody together. So, my children, their spouses and the rest of us all get together but the problem is inevitably they want to all tell the story from their own perspective but they all want to talk at the same time. Because they are all talking at the same time, they feel the need to talk louder than the person next to them and honestly, I just sit there and stare at them. I can't understand a word they are saying and it doesn't sound very harmonious to me.

The blessing of Scripture is that it's not verbal. We can study it, read it, set it down and look at it and compare all the different Gospel accounts. As I did that this year there was something that kept pressing on my heart and mind. That is, in trying to understand the actual factual account of the empty tomb and the resurrection, it seemed to me that there was someone missing. I read through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and tried to figure out who all was at the empty tomb yet there seemed to me to be someone missing. I believe there is a character missing in this story. That as perplexed me now for several weeks so let's read the Luke account and I will fill in the blanks from the other Gospels to see who is missing and why.

Luke 24:1-12 says *[1] But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. [2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, [3] but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. [4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. [5] And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." [8] And they remembered his words, [9] and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. [10] Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, [11] but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. [12] But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.*

When you look at what Matthew, Mark and John say about the tomb and His resurrection there are no contradictions in their stories. They all harmonize but it takes all of them to find out who all is there at the tomb. So, who are the characters there at the tomb? Don't miss Jesus. Obviously, we have no story if Jesus is not there. He is there in risen form although not everyone recognizes Him. Obviously, the angels are there. All four Gospels mention at least one or two angels that are not only there but communicate to them. Jesus and the angels are in their own category.

Who else are there? The guards are there. The guards are there by order, they have been placed there to guard the tomb. This is a unique job to be called to guard a tomb of a dead man and they will report back what actually took place. Then there are a group of women there and this is where the study of this gets interesting, because it takes all four Gospels to figure out who all the women are who are actually at the tomb. We're not even sure we can conclusively figure that out because one of the accounts says 'and the other women' which is an open ended statement, but we do know at least half the women there were named Mary. Each of the Gospel accounts tells of the Marys who are there – Mary the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Salome, Joanna and Susanna.

Then there are the Disciples but not near as many as you would expect. There are only two – Peter and John – and they are there because they have been told that Jesus has risen and at first it seems like an idle tale but these two, run to find out exactly what has taken place. They actually want to see inside the tomb.

Ok, so who is missing? To figure this out, let's look at what this group of people have in common who were at the tomb. All of them had been informed by Jesus that He would die and rise again. None of them just accidently showed up for all were informed. Now some of the references Jesus made were somewhat general. When the Jews asked Him for a sign He said 'Destroy this temple and I will rise it again in three days.' We know that is a prophetic statement but if you hear that you might not conclude that it means that Jesus Himself is going to die and rise again from the dead. Six days before Passover when Judas gets onto Mary about using this expensive perfume to wash Jesus' feet, Jesus responds in John 12:7-8, [7] *"Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. [8] For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me."*

Jesus does tell the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 12:39-40, [39] *But He answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* That's pretty specific but He is using Jonah as an example which creates a whole other challenging conversation one would have to have but there are three very definitive times when Jesus was very clear with the Disciples.

When Jesus asked the Disciples who they say who He is and Peter says 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus acknowledges that the Spirit revealed this to Peter and then we are told right after that in Matthew 16:21, [21] *From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* That's pretty clear.

In Luke 9 after Jesus heals a boy with an unclean spirit, He says to them in Mark 9:31-32, [31] *for He was teaching His disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And when He is killed, after three days He will rise."* [32] *But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.* This tells us that

they understood at some level but the most definitive one happens just before they go into Jerusalem, literally one week from the day He will be killed.

Mark 10:32-34 says [32] *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, He began to tell them what was to happen to Him, [33] saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. [34] And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise."*

It doesn't get any more clear than that and so all they needed to do was remember this for a week. We know the Pharisees, scribes and chief priests were informed even though they don't believe Jesus will rise from the dead, they do believe that the Disciples will remember that He is supposed to rise from the dead, and how do I know that? They paid the money to have guards at the tomb, not to necessarily see Him rise from the dead, but to make sure the Disciples didn't steal the body.

There is a huge difference between being informed about something and being convinced of the something. We can be informed about something but not convinced about whatever that something is. In 2011 most of us would have all been informed about the tsunami that hit Japan. Tsunamis are not as common to us here in the states so we watch as those events take place from the news and the unbelievable destruction it caused along with 29,000 people who lost their lives in this tsunami. One story from this was published and was proven to be accurate that throughout that part of Japan there are literally hundreds of these stone markers that have writing on them that basically says this; do not build anything below this level. The reason they were put there was because of previous tsunamis and so the country warns to remember the destruction that could happen if things were built below these markers. The Japanese people even learn about this in grade school by taking field trips to look at these markers to understand why they are not to build below those markers. But they did not listen, for they not only built homes and villages but they also built a nuclear power plant below those markers. They were informed but not convinced for if they had been convinced there is no way they would have built a nuclear power plant below the level they were supposed to.

So, what character is missing from the resurrection story? In my opinion, the convinced character. Where is the Disciple that woke up early before dawn, went to the tomb, expecting it to be empty? Perhaps would we not expect that someone like Peter would have been convinced? He is convinced about fishing matters. Does not John, not declare it but perhaps sneak out on his own to the empty tomb because he is thinking 'Jesus might rise from the dead and I want to be there for I love Jesus and He loves me'? There is no one in this story whose actions reflect that they were convinced of what Jesus previously told them. It's a missing piece to me to come and understand the sovereignty of God. Many knew about it and many were informed about it yet not convinced.

We have a distinct advantage from everyone we are referring to here, for we by faith believe in looking back at what has already happened, but they by faith had to look ahead to what had been prophesied to happen, yet we get the benefit and it is a tremendous blessing for us to be able to understand and believe the points of the Gospel looking back. I want to ask you this day, do you live informed or do you live convinced of the claims of Jesus Christ and the empty tomb?

If you answered that question that you are not quite convinced then I have great news for you. You can be, for everything we do, celebrate and worship this Day in terms of what is told

to us about the resurrection story, we not only hope it to be true but we know it to be factually true. There was a Jesus Christ who did die on a cross, was buried and rose from the dead as He was seen later and all that is a historical fact. Therefore, by God's grace and the power of the Spirit we can surrender our life to Him and His work on the cross because we see the power of the resurrection.

If you were to answer that you are convinced but are not sure that your life reflects that, then I would encourage and admonish you with what Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16, "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man (Matthew 16:21-23)." You are allowing the world to come in and crowd out your devotion to Christ.

You may say definitively that you are convinced for by God's grace others are being encouraged, challenged and coming to Christ through His power in my life, then I praise the Lord for your life because that is what the empty tomb is all about. It is us living lives convinced in a broken, lost and bewildered world and because we are convinced, we have the peace of God and that peace shows forth to others. It is not just internal and hidden for it shows in our lives, but we're not done.

For all the claims of Christ and the empty tomb we can look back and know what has happened but this is not all that Christ has said to us. He not only said He would rise again on the third day but then He said "I'm coming back." He said He was going to be with the Father but said He would return and He has informed all of us about this. Jesus said in Matthew 24:27, *[27] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* He also told us that no one knows that day He will return, but only the Father (Matthew 24:36). He told us to be on guard, keep awake since we do not know when that time will come.

Jesus says in Mark 13:32-37, *[32] "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. [33] Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. [34] It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. [35] Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— [36] lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. [37] And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."*

We have been reminded of Christ having once to bear the sins of many will come a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him – waiting for our blessed Hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. I Thessalonians 5:2 says *[2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* So, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink back from Him in shame at His coming. You are now informed that Jesus is coming back and that is right from God's Word. It is Jesus and the Apostles declaration that Jesus is coming back. So, are you living informed about the return of Christ or convinced? Remember, you don't get to measure that just by how you feel for our lives will reflect when we are convinced. If we are convinced, we show up at the empty tomb ready to give tours. If we're informed, we hope it happens. If we are convinced of the second coming, it alters our actions – the way we live before Him.

I would ask you today to ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct your heart that you might know your heart. Are you informed of the promises of our Lord or are you convinced? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Most gracious heavenly Father, we thank You so much for Your Word and through Your Word You open our hearts, minds, eyes and ears to the Good News of the Gospel. Lord, thank You for informing us and for allowing us to hear. Thank You for guiding and directing us by Your Spirit. Lord, thank You that by Your Spirit we are convinced because You have given us such faith for, we don't generate that in ourselves. It's not our work that we trust and rely on, Lord – it is Your work in us so we pray that You would allow us not to be deluded by the world and fix our eyes upon our resurrected Savior. May we eagerly await Your return to us and we do pray, come quickly Lord Jesus, Amen.