

“The Resurrection & the Fear of Death” ~ Luke 23:50-24:12
Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017 ~ New City Church of Calgary ~ Pastor John Ferguson

Intro: Leo Tolstoy, “My question—that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide—was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man...a question without an answer to which one cannot live. It was, ‘What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life? Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?’ It can also be expressed thus: Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”

Woody Allen, To the press corps at the viewing of his film, *You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger*, “I do feel that it [life] is a grim, painful, nightmarish, meaningless experience and that the only way you can be happy is if you tell yourself some lies or deceive yourself...One must have delusions to live.... I find it a lousy deal, there is no advantage to getting older. You don’t get smarter, you don’t get wiser... It’s a ad business getting old, and would advise you not do it if you can avoid it.... My relationship with death remains the same. I am strongly against it. I was luck. My parents lived a long time, so maybe that will be good for me; I don’t know, I am a coward... There is a tall, dark stranger that we will all eventually meet.”

The Christian message tells us that death is not the end, but only the beginning. Are we simply deceiving ourselves with a delusion? The reason that followers of Jesus can say this with any degree of confidence is because of the event that happened 2000 years ago: the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

“The Resurrection & the Fear of Death” ~ Luke 23:50-24:12

Luke has his own purposes in writing this Gospel account.

1. Purpose: 1:1-4, “...that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”
2. Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, who was unjustly put to death by Rome. The Roman centurion has just said, “Certainly this man was innocent!”
3. Highlights important witnesses: (1) Joseph of Arimathea; (2) several women, which is staggering....

23:50 Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

The Facts About Joseph of Arimathea:

1. He was a member of the Sanhedrin—the Supreme Court of Israel.
2. He was a good and righteous man, “...a respected member of the Council” (Mark 15:43).
3. He had not consented to the decision of the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus to death.
4. He was looking for the Kingdom of God

52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid.

1. “This man” had access to Pilate.
2. “This man” asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, and Pilate granted it to him.
3. “This man” took his body, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in an unused tomb. Matthew notes that he was “a rich man” (Mt. 27:57). This tomb was probably either one he bought for himself, or bought specifically for Jesus.

54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. 24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

1. “The Sabbath was beginning...” = Friday evening.
2. “On the Sabbath they rested” = Saturday
3. “On the first day of the week” = Sunday morning.

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.

1. Luke doesn't note the presence of absence of the Roman Guard (Mt. 27:62-66).
2. Luke has other interests, i.e., he wants to highlight the first witnesses to the empty tomb.

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...."

1. "They were perplexed...."
 - Recall those times when you are trying to make sense of something, "What just happened...?" Grief + perplexity.
2. "Two men..."
 - Contradiction? Matthew only highlights one angel. Answer: There were at least two angels, and Matthew highlights for us an angel who speaks, while Luke highlights two angels and highlights the message, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"
 - Just like there may be multiple accounts of an accident, and 1 account highlights what a prominent witness said, while another might highlight the presence of multiple witnesses, and attribute to them what one of them said.
3. The message: "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 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.

1. Just as Jesus predicted....
 - Imagine the rush of emotions: Grief...perplexity...unbelief...and then it all begins to make sense. Could it really be true?
2. Mt. 28:8-10, "So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus told them, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

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.

1. Luke now tells us the identity of these women.
 - (1) It's as if he calls them forward as witnesses to the account that he is writing. Why is this significant? Because as everyone knows, the testimony of women in the first century was worthless.
 - (2) Tim Keller, "Each gospel states that the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection were women. Women's low social status meant that their testimony was not admissible evidence in court. There was no possible advantage to the church to recount that all the first witnesses were women. It could only have undermined the credibility of the testimony. The only possible explanation for why women were depicted as meeting Jesus first is if they really had.... There must have been enormous pressure on the early proclaimers of the Christian message to remove the women from the accounts. They felt they could not do so—the records were too well known."
2. Note the incredulity of the disciples....
 - They know what you know... people don't just come back from the dead...not people who underwent torture and the brutality of Roman crucifixion, and then all of sudden show up three days later in perfect health.

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.

Application:

1. Remember, death has been transformed....

(1) Death is still a great enemy (1 Cor. 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death.")

(2) Death has lost its power.

- Acts 2:24, "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.... God raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it."
- That's why the original disciples became fearless amid persecution.
- Chuck Colson, "I know the resurrection is a fact, and how Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified that they had seen Jesus rise from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a life for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

(3) Death has been transformed. Just as it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus, so it will be impossible for death to keep its hold on us.

- 1 Corinthians 6:14, "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power."
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring those with him those who have fallen asleep."
- National Post (4/11/17) "Father Raymond J. de Souza: Egypt's Coptic Orthodox are proud to be slain by ISIL for their Christianity. That is awesome" : "When each coffin was brought in to the funeral, the congregation interrupted their sobs with thunderous applause. They recognized in their dead the principal mystery of this Holy Week: that the Cross of Christ ends not in the tomb, but with the promised glory of the resurrection."

2. Remember Jesus, risen from the dead....

(1) 2 Timothy 2:8-9, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

(2) The Gospel is the Good News about Jesus Christ, specifically all that God has done to rescue and restore the world in Christ Jesus. And this Gospel calls for a response.

- If Jesus rose from the dead, then that changes everything. And this Good News lays a claim upon you. If Jesus rose from the dead, then he is the Lord of everything, and that calls for a response from us...
- Romans 10:9, "...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."