

## “It Seems Like Nonsense... But Is It?” // Luke 24:1–12 // In Step #20

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.

“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. 6 “He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, 7 saying, ‘It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?’”

8 And they remembered his words.

9 Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. 10 Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. 11 But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went away, amazed at what had happened.

**Summit Church and guests: Jesus is risen, Amen?** The heart of Christianity is not a new approach to morality; it’s not new insights into the nature of the universe; the heart of Christianity is a dead man walking out of a grave and how that changes everything.

**Because of him**, the curse of death, in all its forms, has been broken, if you are ready to receive it.

And I **know some of you have a hard time believing that**--it seems like a wishful fairy tale to you--and that’s what today is about.

**But, one more time**, for those of you who do believe, in wonder of all that we’ve seen today, and as a testimony that YOU do indeed believe Jesus has risen from the dead, **put your hands together** as a declaration of that faith.

### PRAYER / Be Seated

**What I can’t help but notice as I read this passage** is the sense of wonder that pervades it. These events seem too good to be true. Like nonsense, it says, imagine as you were going through your grandfather’s assets, you learned that he had bought a few hundred dollars worth of Apple stock in the early 1980’s, but he forgot to mention it to you, and now it’s worth 500 million dollars. Like that. Or, my oldest daughter just turned 18 on Wednesday. It would be like finding out Justin Bieber was going to emcee her birthday party. I don’t know. Is the Beebs still cool? Or you found out that Nicolas Cage was going to emcee your birthday party. That’s trans-generational. **Too good to be true.** That’s how they felt, just a million times more intense.

And so, vs. 11, “These words seemed like nonsense to them...”

**Sometimes we read these ancient texts** and think that people back then, being a lot less scientific, were much more likely to believe in things like a resurrection; but that’s not true. **They knew how death worked.** Most of them had seen more dead bodies up close by the age of 12 than most of us we see in a lifetime. And **when someone was dead, DEAD**--like, *“I saw the man’s heart punctured by a spear and blood gushed out of it like it was a fountain”*--they knew that you didn’t come back from that. Plus, they knew a **garrison of Roman**

soldiers had been appointed to guard the tomb, so **the report that the body was gone seemed like nonsense to them.**

BTW, **the women who came to the tomb that morning weren't looking for a Resurrection.** They weren't **starry-eyed, gullible miracle-seekers** who showed up with lawn chairs or paraphernalia for Jesus to sign. **Vs. 1 says they showed up with spices**--and when Luke says spices, don't think 'garlic, oregano or Lawry's Seasoning Salt'--which, by the way, **when I think of the great contributions** Western society has made to the world, Lawry's Seasoning Salt is near the top of my list. **It's the Nicolas Cage of spices**; it's presence makes every other actor in the meal better.

**No, the spices these ladies brought were spices used to preserve dead bodies.** And there would have been a lot of them, and they would have been heavy. IOW, they weren't expecting to meet a living, breathing Jesus, they were expecting to find a cadaver. There was **not even a suspicion in their minds** that the tomb might be empty. They didn't come to the tomb that morning looking for a miracle, they came looking for **closure**.

**The story was over.** It was time to anoint the body and move on.

**BTW, the Apostle John tells us that one of the women in this story, Mary Magdalene, after she reported the missing body to the disciples, returned to the tomb**, where Jesus appeared to her personally. But she was so blinded by her tears and anger that she didn't recognize him. She thought he was the gardener and in rage she yelled at him: "*Where have they taken his body?*" IOW, even after all this, **she still is not looking for a resurrection.**

(BTW, I have to point out the **significance of God choosing women to be the first ones to testify to these things.** You see, in the first century, the testimony of a woman was not considered valid evidence. **Josephus**, the Jewish historian from the 1st century, tells us

that even the witness of multiple women was not acceptable "because of their levity and hysteria."

And sure enough, btw, **Celsus, an early Roman critic of Christianity**, mocked the idea of these women being the witnesses of the resurrection since they were, his words, "hysterical female(s)... deluded... by sorcery."<sup>1</sup>

So, here's the question, if Luke were making up stories to bolster a fairy tale, why choose women as your first witnesses? If you were trying to invent evidence, you wouldn't choose those whose testimonies were considered most unreliable at that time. No; the Gospel writers report the women as the first witnesses because *that's what happened*. **It was God's way of giving us a clue that these weren't made up stories.**

**And to everybody that heard them, they seemed ridiculous, like made-up-nonsense, too good to be true.**

**Check out Peter's response in vs. 12.** Luke says that when he got to the tomb, he walked away amazed. Dazed. Confused. Not sure what this could mean.

(BTW, in John's Gospel, John gives us a little more detail about this moment. John tells us that he also ran with Peter. **In fact, just let me read it:** **4 The two** (that is, Peter and John) **were running together, but the other disciple** (that's John) **outran Peter and got to the tomb first.** **(BTW, why did John point that out?** That he outran Peter? What relevance does that have to the story? None, really, just that when you are a guy telling a story and you best another guy in a feat of strength, you always include that detail, even if it is not germane to the plot.) **5 Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. (John 20:4-5)**

<sup>1</sup> Dan Darling, *The Characters of Easter*, 164

**He couldn't even bring himself to go in.** It was like he glimpsed something too good to be true; something so wonderful that it took his breath away; something he couldn't let his heart entertain for fear that his hopes would be crushed again. So he stood outside the tomb and refused to let himself entertain it for fear of being disappointed.

**What was it about the resurrection that seemed too good to be true?**

#### **4 Things That Make The Resurrection Seem Too Good to be True:**

##### **1. If it's true... Jesus has redeemed us from our sins.**

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 4 that Jesus' resurrection was **the verification** that God had accepted Jesus' sacrifice as the payment for our sins.

**Think of it like a receipt.** When you are shopping at Walmart and you pay for your items, they give you a receipt and tell you to hold onto it, so when that elderly gentleman stops you at the door, you can show him that receipt and say, "This is the proof my items have been paid for!"

**The resurrection is the proof**, Paul says, that God has accepted Jesus' death as the payment for our sins.

If you look **down in vs. 21**, two of the disciples, walking along a dusty road to Emmaus later that afternoon, explained to a Stranger--a Stranger who turns out to be Jesus incognito, btw, but they don't know that yet--**They explain to this stranger** why they were so devastated by Jesus' death: **21 "But we were hoping that he was the one who was about to redeem Israel."** The Old Testament prophets had promised that God would send a redeemer, a deliverer, and they had always assumed that would be a political Redeemer; a warrior-king who would establish the kingdom of God and bring

justice and peace to the earth. And for a while **Jesus looked like he could do all that**, because of the miracles and whatnot.

But then, when he died, **they naturally assumed he'd failed**. The Redeemer of the world couldn't die; he was supposed to overcome, not succumb!

**But the resurrection showed them that perhaps he had been up to different kind of redemption.**

You see, in addition to prophesying that a Warrior-King would come who would bring peace on earth, the Old Testament prophets also taught that our sin incurred a penalty. In Genesis 3, in the Garden of Eden, God had said that the soul that sins will die.

**Sin, in its essence is rebellion; mutiny; cosmic treason; regicide.**

We're telling God, "You shouldn't be in charge. I should be in charge of my life." Something all of us have felt and said at some point. **And that brought on all of us a curse of death.**

The cross was Jesus **redeeming us from that curse**. **Paying its price** for us. The **prophet Isaiah said** in Isa 53 that God would "lay on him (the Messiah) the iniquity of us all," and "the price for our peace would be put upon his head."

I think of it like this. **BOOK ILLUS**. This is what the death of Christ was. **Christ taking the** curse in our place.

It's **why the Apostle Paul says in Corinthians** that when Jesus died, he took the **sting out of death**. The **sting of death is the curse**--death ushers us into eternal judgment.

**When Jesus died, he took that sting into himself, so that there's no judgment left in death for us. There's nothing left to fear**, if we're in him.

- Did you know that a **honeybee** can't sting you twice? That's because when a honeybee pushes its stinger out, it ruptures the bee's digestive tract, which leads to a quick and certain death.
- **Death put its stinger into Jesus, and when it did**, the internal workings of death itself was disrupted and died.
- **At some point the honeybee of death will come for each of us.** But if Jesus has taken that stinger already, then your death won't have any curse in it. In fact, it won't really be a death at all, but a transition to new life.
- **No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ, in me**

**2. If it's true...** (The Resurrection means) **The power for new life is here.**

- Sin had not only put a curse over us, it had released one into us.
- Death is at work in us. That shows up in the form of addictions, hate and selfishness in our hearts; anger and idolatry and ruined relationships.
- **Jesus' resurrection means** that there is a power in the world available to overcome that.
- **Already this weekend you've seen a baptism.** A verse we often quote in baptism is **Romans 6:3-4**, *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that just like Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also can walk in newness of life."* His resurrection is the pattern for ours.
- And this: **"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation**--not a reformed one or a cleaned up one--but a new one. **Old things are passed away and behold, all things have become new!** (2 Cor 5:17) ("Behold," by the way, is the word in the Bible that indicates a miracle is about to happen--behold points to something God does, not something that you do. The **newness in your life** is not you resolving to be better, but the release of his power in you.
- **This means that Jesus is not only able to forgive every sin; he can reverse and restore anything sin has ruined.** He puts together broken hearts. He renews and rebuilds what sin has wrecked.

- **I told you that one of the women that went to the tomb that morning was named Mary Magdalene.** Let me tell you a little bit more about her. When Mary first met Jesus, the Gospel of Mark tells us that she had 7 demons. Not 1; not 2; **SEVEN**. That's Mark's way of saying she is hopelessly consumed by the demonic.
- Her life would have been a mess. With 7 demons, she would have looked like she was mentally ill. She would have been grossly immoral, Scripture says a prostitute, with lies built upon lies and immorality layered on top of each other. Everyone thought of her as beyond redemption.
- **Imagine her life before Jesus: Hopeless, destitute (Who hires someone with 7 demons?)** She's outcast. Forgotten. Given up on.
- But, in Luke 8, she fell at Jesus' feet and found healing.<sup>2</sup>

**And she's the first person Jesus appears to.** In fact, it might be the most beautiful scene in all the Gospel. Mary Magdalene is in the garden and she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. **But then Jesus said her name: "Mary" and she recognized him.** What a beautiful moment. Calling her name woke her up. He's doing that with some of you today. He's calling your name. Right now.

- **That voice has the power** to put back together whatever sin has broken. **Listen** to him. **Follow him.**
- **You too can be a new creation**; you'll watch as old things pass away and BEHOLD!, all things will become new.

**Maybe, like Mary, you're literally struggling** against spiritual forces. Or maybe Or maybe it's addictions or sinful habits you can't break. Relationships that you've destroyed. Maybe your life feels so hopelessly wrecked by sin you don't see a way out.

- Mary says to you this morning: I know! I was there. I had 7 demons in them. But there is more healing in him than there is sickness in you. As dark as the sickness is in you, the light of Christ can dispel it. There is more forgiveness in him than there is sin in us.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Dan Darling for this insight

- The resurrection means that power is available to you.

#3. *The Resurrection means...*

### 3. If it's true... One day, every sad thing will come untrue.

- The **Apostle Paul** calls **Jesus' Resurrection** is the "firstfruits" of the new creation; a taste of what is to come.
  - **Back in those days, farmers didn't know how a crop** was going to turn out. How good was the seed? What about the soil? Would the weather cooperate?
  - **So when those first fruits appeared**, they gave an indication of what the rest of the crop would be like.
  - **Right now it is the prettiest time in NC, because those "first flowers" on the dogwood tree** are here. They show you that a sea of green, the new creation of Spring, is on its way.
  - **The resurrection is the dogwood flower of the new creation.** An indication of what is to come.
- **There is nothing more terrifying**, or that feels more final, than death. And I know that some of you have dealt with that this year. **You're sitting here broken with sadness** over somebody you've lost. **Maybe it was expected**--a mom or a dad, or **maybe it wasn't--it was sudden, tragic**--the death of a spouse or a brother or sister or a child.
- **Or maybe you are afraid of your own death.** (And apart from Christ you should be. Because it's just a matter of time.)
  - **I did that 23andMe thing**, and it gives you all these percentages: "You're only 30% likely to lose your hair as you age. You're 40% likely to have mid-digit hair" (the little hair between your knuckles, which I have).
  - It even told me I was **73% likely** to not have a fear of public speaking. **Which was... affirming.**
  - Other things that were encouraging--I have the genetic makeup of an elite power athlete. Discouraging was that it said I had **40% more neanderthal DNA** than the average human.
- What **23andMe doesn't give you is the percentage** of your probability of death, because that holds steady for all of us at 100%. It's coming for all of us.
- **And death feels devastating to us. Permanent.** Like you are losing stuff you'll never get back. You even get a taste of that as you age, right? Things in my body are not improving--I don't get better looking and stronger and healthier every year. Things are getting worse, and that's depressing.
  - I feel that at the gym. Every year, I put in the same amount of effort but the results I get back are smaller and smaller. Same effort; less results.
  - I'll **wake up sore** now just from *sleeping...*
  - **I don't even do the 'body fat' content anymore**, because it's depressing. I used to measure it. I have a new method...
  - And I know some of y'all are going to be like, "Use **this vitamin, this essential oil, this herb**, and you'll feel younger every year..." And maybe some of that stuff works for you, but the point is at some point, all that stuff fails. **Your body is aging and you can't reverse** that and you're going to die.
- **But the Resurrection shows that us if we are in Christ, none of this is true.** There is a great reversal ahead. A day is coming when God will **remove the curse of death entirely** from our lives. He will undo every injustice and heal every hurt. On that day God will wipe away every tear and make all things new. To use the words of **J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings***, he will on that day "make every sad thing come untrue."
- **One of my favorite sections of Scripture** is the end chapters of Isaiah, where God describes for Israel what that day will be like:
 

6 The wolf will live with the lamb... the calf and the lion together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain (Isaiah 11:6-9) All the beauty of creation, working in harmony.

Or how about this one: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “[In that day], I will give a signal... They will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.” (Isa 49:22 NLT) That means that believing couple who lost their five-year-old son to tuberculosis will have him brought back on the shoulders of angels. Oh what a day that will be!

“Then your heart will *tremble* and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea will become yours, and the wealth of the nations will come to you.” Isa 60:5 All the beautiful things of all the world will be ours. There is no pleasure, no beauty, that will be withheld from us. And we’ll be so happy we *tremble*.

- **Every sad thing comes untrue.** And here’s what’s even more amazing: the death and sadness that we went through will become a part of the story of our victory so that victory seems sweeter and richer for having gone through it.
- **Paul says that in the resurrection, “Death will be *swallowed up* in victory.” (1 Cor 15:54)** When you swallow something, it becomes a part of you, right? You swallow food, and it becomes a part of you.
- **The pain and the struggle of life become a part of our victory**, so that **the final product is better** for having gone through it. **One day we’ll see that God used all those things in our lives** to make us more like him and increase our enjoyment of him.
- **One of my favorite biographies** is the story of **Joni Eareckson Tada**. Joni was paralyzed as a teenager in a diving accident. She was beautiful, popular, athletic, brilliant, a great artist; she had it all; but as a teenager she was wandering far from God. **God used that accident to bring her back to himself**. She has now lived as a quadriplegic for more than 50 years. In her biography she anticipates that moment of seeing Jesus in eternity: “When I get to heaven I am going to push my wheelchair to the throne of Jesus.

Notice, I’ll be walking.

And I am going to thank him for every character-refining work he did in me and through me because of this wheelchair.

And then I’m going to ask Jesus to send this wheelchair straight to Hell, because it was only needed because of the wreckage of sin.

**Oh, what a beautiful day that will be for all of us!** Hey, over the past 12 months, many of us have wondered where life is all headed. **I can tell you: it leads to the grave.** Vaccine or no vaccine, you’re going to die eventually.

But **your story doesn’t have to end there**. Because of the empty tomb, our road doesn’t end at the grave. If anything it **BEGINS** there for those in Christ.

**Let me quickly tell you about one of the other ladies at the tomb that morning.** Her name was Mary, also. This was Mary the mother of Jesus. (There were **actually 3 Mary’s at the tomb** that day. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and “the other Mary,” (that’s what Matthew calls her, at least),<sup>3</sup> You can **see all 3 of them together in John 19:25.**)<sup>4</sup>

**For Mary the mother of Jesus, this was an especially devastating day, right?** A mother feels the pain of their child probably more acutely than they feel it themselves. To be a mother who is forced to watch your son executed unjustly? To watch him humiliated, mocked, and tortured?

Mary had remained at the cross when everyone else left. **Because that’s what mothers do.**

- When everybody else dispersed, when the crowds had gone home, Mary stayed there.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:1. That Mary

<sup>4</sup> This Mary was probably Jesus’ aunt and the mother of James the Apostle.

- **Mothers are the ones** who **sit beside prison cells** or answer the phone in the middle of the night when you call or get up to pray in the middle of the night when no one else is thinking about you.<sup>5</sup>

**Imagine Mary's sadness in this moment turning to joy**, knowing that her son is not dead and gone forever but has ushered her into an eternity where there will be no more pain or crying, where the sun never sets and no one ever has to say goodbye.

**It seemed too good to be true**, but **this is what the resurrection promises for all of us whose families die** in the Lord; for every mother in Christ who has had to say a tearful goodbye to their child. And that leads me to the **4th and final "too good to be true"** thing that the Resurrection means.

#### **4. If it's true... Those who wait upon God will not be disappointed.**

**The Resurrection** shows that in those moments where you feel abandoned, like God has forgotten you or he's not even real, it's **not true**.

Question: **Why didn't God raise Jesus from the dead immediately? Why have him die on a Friday but not get raised until Sunday morning? Why not do it later Friday evening or Sat morning?**

In part, because that **time gap is a METAPHOR** for what life sometimes feels like now. **Where is God? What's he doing? Has he forgotten me?**

No. **God keeps his promise to those who wait upon him**. You may feel like you're living in a Friday or Saturday but the Sunday is coming.

## MUSIC

He is the *"He's the Way maker, miracle worker, Promise keeper, light in the darkness; And even when we don't see it, he's working; Even when we don't feel it, he's working; he never stops, he never stops working."*

It's like I often tell you. At any given moment, God is up to 10,000 different things in your life and you are aware of only, at most, about 3 of them. **This Resurrection assures you of that.**

- **If God did not abandon you**, when our sin had literally crucified his Son, you can be sure he's not going to abandon you now. He'll come through. Hang on.
- **"The Lord is good to those who wait for him; to those who hope in his steadfast love."** Lam 3:25; Psalm 147:11

**If you feel like you are in a season of darkness--waiting for God to answer a prayer;** waiting for God to bring back a child; waiting on God to heal a hurt or bind up a wound, **DON'T GIVE UP**. God is up to something good and soon you will see his deliverance.

I am convinced I will see... (PS. 27:13) David goes after it—not waiting to give God glory I'm heaven, but giving it to him here, in the land of the living. Even in Friday and Saturday, with all of the questions and unanswered prayers he believes he will see the goodness of the Lord here and now...

*"Even when you don't see it, he's working; Even when you don't feel it, he's working; he never stops, he never stops working. He never stops."*

**So, again, 4 things about the Resurrection, each almost too good to be true:**

- 1. He has redeemed us from our sins.**
- 2. The power of new life is here.**
- 3. One day, every sad thing will come untrue.**
- 4. Those who wait upon God will not be disappointed.**

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Dan Darling for this insight, from his *Character of Easter*.

**No wonder it seemed like nonsense. But that's what these women coming from the tomb are testifying to you today.** Do you believe it?

Some of you are like, "This does feel too good to be true. Aren't these just hopeful fairy tales for those who can't cope with the harsh realities of life?"

**I used to suspect that myself, and I doubt there's any one-liners** I could give to you that could convince you on the spot, but could I just ask you to **consider something**: Isn't this what you've been searching for, yearning for, all your life? Isn't there something in you that knows this is the answer to life you've been looking for? You know that we're not a big cosmic accident, that love and meaning and consciousness are just biological illusions, that in the end we just return to dust and nothingness and that all of life is, in the words of Shakespeare... There's something in your heart that says, "This is true." **Blaise Pascal famously said...**

**Imagine for a moment what life would look like** if these 4 things were true!

**It seemed like nonsense to these people, too.** But it was true. It was God's answer to our deepest longing.

**4 things that, if the Resurrection happened, seem too good to be true.**

**But it is true, and everything is different now.** These first disciples were normal people just like you and me, and they came to believe in this resurrection not because they were silly and superstitious, but for 2 reasons: **the OT Scriptures prophesied it**, and they **saw it with their own eyes**.

**It's all here for you, too.** You have the same OT prophecies that point to it, and the reports of these unlikely 1st witnesses which verify it.

**Do you believe it? Are you ready to receive it?**

## 2 invitations:

**1. Get saved: (Lead in prayer.)** In just a moment, get up and go. At home?

- **BTW, maybe you're not ready to become a Christian**, but want to explore, to learn more about what it means?
  - **I know with it being Easter this weekend, many of you came because you think you are supposed to do that because that's what people do on Easter**: come to church. But you have questions about what it really means to be a Christian.
  - Others of you have become followers of Christ, but you are still forming foundationally what it means to truly follow Jesus.
  - We are **starting a class where we will explore** with you the basics of Christianity and answer some of the harder questions of our faith.
  - If I have described you, or you are interested in this call, all you have to do is **text ready to 33933** and we'll follow up with details. There's nothing wrong with questions--a lot of us have them, even those of us who have walked with Jesus for 50 years. That's not me, since I'm only 35 years old.

*Second invitation:*

**2. Be baptized: In just a minute**, invitation to get up and go.

- **Baptism is...** public profession; like the wedding ring. Supposed to do it as soon as you receive Jesus as your savior.
- You say... **No clothes**
- **Not sure I'm ready**: stake in the ground. Direction you want to go. We want to start a convo with you. If not ready, you can press pause.
- **I've already been baptized as a baby**: We respect that, but did you know there are 27 baptisms in the book of Acts and all 27 times they believed first.

- **I don't want to shame my parents:** You're not, you're fulfilling their hopes! I don't want to become a Baptist. You're not being baptized in the name of a denomination, but in the name of Jesus.

**PRAY: Get up now and go...**salvation, prayer for deliverance, baptism--start a conversation about any of these.

At home? **Text READY to 33933**

**For worship leaders in the 2nd call:** PJD talked about a Mary Magdalene coming to Jesus with 7 demons, and I feel like we ought to extend an invitation for you to be delivered today from some stronghold of sin or affliction in your life. I just have this sense that for some of you Mary Magdalene's story really resonated. You need deliverance. I'm not saying you have a demon, or that you are saying you have a demon, just that there's some addiction, some physical curse, that you can't seem to shake. **You don't need to know what it is to know that Jesus has power over it.** The Resurrection covers everything in your broken life. It is more powerful than every weapon in Satan's arsenal! **Come to us this morning** and let us take you to Jesus together in prayer! In just a moment, get up and go.