

## The Empty Tomb

D'Angelo groaned and rolled over. His head was throbbing with a hangover. It was Sunday morning, and his family was preparing to go to church. Although he was home from college on semester break, he would be expected to go, too.

He had left for school three years ago with a reasonable grasp on his faith in Christ. Now D'Angelo found himself questioning the validity of some of the theories that sought to debunk the bodily resurrection of Christ—the women went to the wrong tomb, Jesus didn't really die on the Cross but “swooned,” the disciples stole the body, or it was a “spiritual” resurrection, not a physical one.

D'Angelo's thoughts were interrupted by the knock on the door. “Good morning, son,” Mr. Martin said. D'Angelo tried to smile, but even his face seemed to hurt.

“I wanted to make sure you are OK, and say we'd like for you to join us at church.” During his break, D'Angelo and his dad had spoken at length about D'Angelo's doubts, questions, and the new direction of his life.

D'Angelo loved his dad. He could always count on his father and his love. And he said as much.

Mr. Martin smiled. “My love for you is only a fraction of how much Christ loves you. You can come to the Lord with your questions and setbacks. But you won't find hope and eternal life by embracing dead ideologies and deceptive people.”

- 1.** *How can we know the resurrection of Jesus actually happened?*
- 2.** *What might you say to someone who says, “You don't have to believe in the Resurrection to believe in Jesus”?*
- 3.** *How does believing in the resurrection of Jesus help us answer hard questions in life and give us hope?*

## The Women Encounter the Angels

*Luke 24:1-8, KJV*

1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words.

*Luke 24:1-8, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup>While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup>He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup>"The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words.

It was now early Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus had been crucified and placed in a tomb. Some of the women who had followed Jesus (some of whose identities would soon be revealed) came to Jesus' tomb that morning, bearing "spices they had prepared" (vs. 1) to

anoint His body, perhaps because they wanted to express their personal devotion to Him. As they approached, they asked themselves, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” (Mark 16:3).

However, upon arriving at the tomb, they discovered to their surprise that the immense stone had already been rolled away—and the tomb was empty! And yet, at this stage the women did not appear to be frightened, only confused. “While they were wondering about this, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning” (Luke 24:4)—angels—appeared beside them. Now the women were frightened, and “bowed down with their faces to the ground” (vs. 5).

The angels, on the other hand, seemed amazed by the women’s surprise and lack of understanding: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (vss. 5-6). They reminded the women that what they were observing had, in fact, already been promised to them by Jesus: “Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again’” (vss. 6-7).

Thus, this section closed with a simple statement: “Then they remembered his words.” The women had an a-ha moment. Although they had not yet seen Jesus resurrected in the flesh, they knew His words to be true—and the empty tomb had proven that those words had been fulfilled. Therefore they believed, even now, that Jesus was risen indeed.

**4.** *Why were the women at Jesus’ tomb? What did they find?*

**5.** *How do the women react to the angels—and how do the angels react to the women?*

**6.** *What is the significance of Luke’s statement in verse 8?*

## The Disciples Doubt the Women

*Luke 24:9-12, KJV*

9 And [they] returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

*Luke 24:9-12, NIV*

<sup>9</sup>When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup>It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup>Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

After this amazing turn of events, the women returned from the tomb, and told “the Eleven” (“the Twelve” chief disciples minus Judas Iscariot) and “all the others” present what had happened—that Jesus had indeed conquered death. It is here that the identities of at least some of the women were revealed: “Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James.” However, it is clear from verse 10 that other women were present as well. Several of these women—at least Mary Magdalene and Mary—had been on the Mount of Olives and witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion as well (Matt. 27:55-56). All these women told the apostles what they had seen.

And yet, the disciples “did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11). Perhaps the women’s excitement overpowered their message; perhaps the men’s grief overpowered their

ability to accept this new information. Very possibly, the men of that day struggled to accept the women's word over what they already "knew" to be true. And after all, the women hadn't actually seen Jesus—but they'd seen angels? The Greek word translated "nonsense" here, *leros*, was a medical term that could also be translated "delirium." Put in modern, if unflattering, terms, the men likely thought the women were crazy.

To his credit, and despite his doubt, Peter determined to check out this report for himself. He ran to the tomb with the apostle John (John 20:3-4) and saw the stone rolled away, Jesus' body gone, and "the [burial] strips of linen lying by themselves" (Luke 24:12). Peter "went away, wondering to himself what had happened." John, however, "believed" (John 20:28). Peter likely wanted to believe—otherwise, why run to the tomb? Something amazing had clearly taken place there. Yet Peter still could not bring himself to believe at that moment that Jesus had truly come back from the dead. Something more would have to happen in his heart to finally bring him to that point.

**7.** *What did the women do after returning from the tomb? What else are we told about these women?*

**8.** *How did the disciples, as a group, react to the women's report?*

**9.** *How did Peter respond?*



*A first-century tomb with a rolling stone in Nazareth.*

## The Wonder of the Resurrection

At first the women took their observations of the empty tomb at face value. Only when the angels appeared with news of much greater significance were they frightened. In their fear, perhaps they wondered if they could truly believe what they had seen. Not only was the tomb empty—which perhaps could be explained away—but the angels gave them a message straight from God. Jesus had risen, just as He said.

Once they accepted this wonderful news, the women ran to tell the other disciples. They had witnessed the reality of Jesus' crucifixion, and now the truth of His resurrection. But the disciples had their own questions. Peter and John went to the tomb to check out the story for themselves. They saw the same tangible evidence: an empty tomb and "the [burial] strips of linen lying by themselves" (Luke 24:12). John believed (John 20:8), but Peter still wondered. The other disciples had only Peter, John, and the women's word.

Often we see evidence of God's hand at work, but still we wonder, *How can this be? Are we deceiving ourselves? How is it that Jesus lives again, here and now?* We believe God with our whole hearts and trust Him with our lives, but we want detailed answers. We want to know the how and why in the great disappointments and uncertainty of life here on earth. Even without having all our questions answered now, through Jesus' resurrection we have hope in our inheritance of eternal life.

**10.** *Why did the disciples at first doubt reports of Jesus' resurrection?*

**11.** *Why do people today doubt Jesus' resurrection?*

**12.** *What is the significance of Jesus' physical, bodily resurrection from the dead and later appearances?*

**13.** *In what other types of circumstances do we doubt or question God's actions? Why?*

## Sharing God's Truth

The angels at the empty tomb reminded the women of Jesus' promise to rise from the dead. Scripture records that more than 500 people witnessed Jesus' bodily resurrection. Today we believe the truth and power of the Resurrection through faith.

► *What questions about the Resurrection have you had answered? How could you help answer others' questions and lead them to accept not only the truth of Jesus' resurrection, but also its relevance for their eternal salvation?*

### KEY VERSE

They said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. —Luke 24:5b-6a, KJV

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" —Luke 24:5b-6a, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of April 3 through April 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** John 20:11-18—I Have Seen the Lord!
- Tues.** John 20:19-31—Blessed Are Those Who Believe.
- Wed.** Psalm 118:1-14—The Lord Is My Strength.
- Thurs.** Psalm 118:15-29—I Shall Not Die, But Live.
- Fri.** Luke 24:13-24—Jesus Meets Two Disciples.
- Sat.** Luke 24:25-35—Jesus Opens the Disciples' Eyes.
- Sun.** Luke 24:36-49—You Are Witnesses of These Things.