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Dead or Alive
Luke 23:50-24:12
April 20th, 2014 (Easter), Jeff Germo

If someone came up to you and told you that they had been raised from the dead, what would you think? Now, I'm not talking about dying during surgery for a couple of minutes. We've heard of lots of stories like that. I'm talking about dead for three days, their body already decomposing, and smelling, and then coming back to life. What would you think of a story like that? I'm sure that you would likely be as skeptical as I would. You might humour the person telling you the story, but that's probably as far as it would go. Being raised from the dead like that is impossible. It doesn't happen, and so any rational, normal person would, and should, be skeptical.

We are in the twentieth first century in a civilized country. We are scientifically enlightened. We do not believe that someone can be brought back to life. To tell you the truth, the people of the first century were just as skeptical as we are. Even the disciples were skeptical.

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None of them expected that Jesus would rise from the dead.

And yet, he told them many times that he would.

Luke 9:21-26

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21 Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was. 22 "The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things," he said. "He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead."

Luke 18:31-34

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31 Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, "Listen, we're going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. 32 He will be handed over to the Romans, and he will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. 33 They will flog him with a whip and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again." 34 But they didn't understand any of this. The significance of his words was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what he was talking about.

In the Gospel of Mark, three times in three chapters (8, 9, 10), Jesus tells the disciples these same things. He will be arrested, tried, crucified, and then on the third day he will rise again. Now, I would imagine that these weren't the only times Jesus told the disciples this. The writers of the Gospels didn't record everything that Jesus said. Likely this was a prominent topic in Jesus' conversations with his disciples. "We're going to Jerusalem, and when we are there I am going to be betrayed, handed over to the religious authorities to be tried and unjustly convicted, I will be killed, and then **on the third day I will rise from the dead**. Over and over again he told them that he would rise from the dead. And yet, when he was eventually killed they thought it was the end.

Let me just stop here for a minute because we are not so different from the disciples. How many times does God tell us in his Word to not be afraid? Three hundred and sixty six times. One for each day of the year and one thrown in for the leap year. How often do we worry about things that God is big enough to handle and then in the end find out that we worried for nothing? How often do we forget how God was good to us in the past? As soon as we encounter trouble again we forget that God is still good.

How many times do we have to remind ourselves that "**there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" – and yet we go on living in shame over sins that Jesus died for? We easily forget. God is always good! He is always faithful! We can bring everything to him in prayer, but we so easily forget. We are no different than the disciples.

They weren't prepared for him to rise. They thought that their champion had been defeated. The disciples sort of saw themselves as Jesus' campaign managers, like he was running for office and they were cheering for him along the way, trying to get as many people to sign up for their party so that their leader would be able to rule. And they were expecting that they would get set up in some pretty cushy jobs if he won the "messiah-ship". And when "election day" came and their candidate didn't get voted in they were disheartened.

Now, over the last few of millennia, before Christ and after, there have been dozens of people who have claimed to be the Messiah. Some of them gathered huge followings, sometimes hundreds or thousands of people, and then when the leader died, their followers disbanded realizing that they were following a lie, and the movement died with the leader.

Such was not the case with Jesus and his disciples. This is one of the reasons why the Gospel accounts are credible. None of the disciples expected the resurrection even though Jesus had continually prepared them.

Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples for a minute. What would it have been like? Jesus had prepared you for this time. Over and over again he told you that he would be arrested, killed, and not to worry because on the third day he would rise from the dead.

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And then it happened. He's **arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane**. And all of his followers scurry away like rabbits. You flee with them. What would be going through your mind? Perhaps, in your panic, you would have forgotten all the times Jesus told you not to worry because these things had to happen.

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Maybe you would have gone with Peter when he followed Jesus to Caiaphas' house to be tried. And you stood outside with him and the crowds wondering what was going to happen to Jesus. And, perhaps you were with Peter when three times he was asked if he was a disciple of Jesus and three times he denied that he even knew him and then fled. What would be going through your mind? Would you, unlike the other disciples, be thinking that this was no big deal, and that all of these things, including the crucifixion have to take place? Would you be expecting that everything would turn out just as Jesus said?

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Imagine you were **outside with the crowds when Jesus was tried by Pilate** and the crowds were shouting for Jesus to be crucified and Pilate finally gave in to their pleas and handed him over.

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And you were there walking at a safe distance when **Jesus was carrying his cross** to Golgotha stumbling under the weight of it. And you were with some of the other disciples and Mary, Jesus' mother, and the other ladies when the

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Romans put him on the cross, and you cringed as turned away as they pounded the spikes through his wrists and through his ankles.

And you heard Jesus cry out to the heavens, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?

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And then with one final breath, "It is finished." What would you have been thinking? Would have thought, "No worries. Jesus said this all had to happen. Everything is going to be ok"?

And then you watched in horror as a Roman centurion walked over to Jesus and stabbed him in the side with a spear. Water separates from his blood indicating that he is, in fact dead. What are you thinking? Would you think, "That's ok. On the third day he's rise. No worries"? I would imagine, that, along with the other disciples, you would not be expecting that Jesus would rise. They all thought that this was the end of their movement.

Let's take a look at our passage and see some examples.

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Luke 23:50-24:12

⁵⁰ Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, ⁵¹ but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come. ⁵² He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock.

Joseph of Arimathea was a Pharisee. We usually think of the Pharisees as enemies of Jesus, but this was not always the case. Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, the Gospel of John says, "**but secretly for fear of the Jews.**" In this case though, he faces his fear and courageously goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus body so he could prepare it for burial. The Gospel of John tells us that Nicodemus was with Joseph and he brought 75 pounds of the spices that they used to prepare bodies for burials. **They were not expecting a resurrection.**

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⁵⁴ This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation, as the Sabbath was about to begin. ⁵⁵ As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

So, they hastily prepared his body, but did not have time to finish because by law they had to wait until after the Sabbath, which would be after sundown on Saturday. Now, if you were one of the disciples back then would you have been looking forward to Sunday expecting that Jesus would rise from the dead just like he said?

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Luke 24:1-4

¹But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ³ So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

It was the third day since Jesus had been crucified and yet they had no thought that Jesus might be raised from the dead. None whatsoever. They went looking for a corpse.

Now, you have to wonder where the rest of the disciples were. Where were the men? They were hiding out for fear that they would meet the same fate as Jesus. Nobody was expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead. It's like all those times that he told them exactly what was going to happen went in one ear and right out the other.

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⁵ The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? ⁶ He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.”

“Remember?”

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⁸ Then they remembered that he had said this. ⁹ So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. ¹¹ But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it.

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¹² However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.¹

Of course it sounded like nonsense to them. People do not rise from the dead after three days. It's physically impossible. Nobody was expecting Jesus to rise. Not the twelve closest disciples of Jesus. Not the crowds. Not the religious leaders. And not the Romans. Both the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders were concerned that the disciples would try to steal his body so they put a huge stone at over the entrance of the tomb and put a seal on it so that they would know if anyone tried to tamper with it. And they put a Roman guard at the tomb.

Now, there are still people today who say that the disciples concocted this story, but that doesn't make sense. If this was just another one of those movements attempting to perpetuate a legend by making up a story they would not have used women as eye-witnesses. Women, in that time were not seen as credible witnesses.

Here's what Timothy Keller in *The King's Cross* wrote about that.

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Celsus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the second century A.D., was highly antagonistic to Christianity and wrote a number of works listing arguments against it. One of the arguments he believed most telling went like this: Christianity can't be true, because the written accounts of the resurrection are based on the testimony of women—and we all know women are hysterical.

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And many of Celsus' readers agreed: For them, that was a major problem. In ancient societies, as you know, women were marginalized, and the testimony of women was never given much credence.

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Do you see what that means? If Mark and the Christians were making up these stories to get their movement off the ground, they would never have written women into the story as the first eyewitnesses to Jesus' empty tomb. The only possible reason for the presence of women in these accounts is that they really were present and reported what they saw. The stone has been rolled away, the tomb is empty and an angel declares that Jesus is risen.²

He is risen!

There are many other proofs of the resurrection that we could look at such as the many other eye witnesses, but I think the greatest proof of the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus is the changed lives of the disciples. They had been ego-centric cowards up until this time. And **when you witness the change in their lives you cannot ignore it.**

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Add to that the fact that **every one of them**, with the exception of John who died in exile on the Isle of Patmos, **died a martyr's death.** People do not die for a lie. They were not making these stories up. They were eyewitnesses and they were willing to die for their beliefs.

The reason the tomb was empty was because Jesus rose from the dead even though nobody was expecting it to happen.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2007). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. (3rd ed.) (Lk 23:50–24:12). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Timothy Keller, *The King's Cross*. Pp. 216-217

So, what does all this mean for us today? Maybe we understand that because of the resurrection I have been reconciled to God and have a hope of eternal life, but what difference does it make right now where I live in 2014?

Again, Timothy Keller continues:

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And to the extent that that future is real to you, it will change everything about how you live in the present. For example, why is it so hard to face suffering? Why is it so hard to face disability and disease? Why is it so hard to do the right thing if you know it's going to cost you money, reputation, maybe even your life? Why is it so hard to face your own death or the death of loved ones?

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It's so hard because we think this broken world is the only world we're ever going to have. It's easy to feel as if this money is the only wealth we'll ever have. As if this body is the only body we'll ever have. But if Jesus is risen then your future is so much more beautiful, and so much more certain, than that.

Keller goes on to tell about Joni Eareckson Tada. She was paralyzed from the neck down from a diving accident when she was seventeen. She's been an inspiration to countless people over the last few decades. In the beginning of her life as a quadriplegic she was struggling to come to terms with her limitations, but she would faithfully go to church in her wheelchair.

The church she was going to had a liturgical worship style, which meant that there were times they would stand, and other times they would kneel. Joni, of course, couldn't kneel or stand. She was confined to her wheelchair. She recalled one time when the pastor asked everyone to kneel.

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"With everyone kneeling, I certainly stood out. And I couldn't stop the tears."

The tears weren't because she was feeling sorry for herself. She got a picture of what heaven must be like, countless people bowing in adoration before Jesus.

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Sitting there, I was reminded that in heaven I will be free to jump up, dance, kick, and do aerobics. And...sometime before the guests are called to the banquet table at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees. I will quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus.

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Then, she adds: ***"I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness ~ powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope that the resurrection gives someone who is spinal cord-injured like me?"***³

There is nothing that gives hope like the resurrection of Jesus. It gives us hope for the future. It offers us the realization that there is a better tomorrow. What limitations do you face in your life right now? What pain, what suffering, what loneliness, whatever it is that is hard in this life can be put in perspective when we live in the reality that this is not all there is.

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One day, because God, the Father, God the Son, and God, the Spirit paid the penalty for our sins in full all things will be made right.

All that excess baggage that we like to carry around, because of the resurrection, we can drop it at the cross.

Romans 8:1-2

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

That is what the resurrection means for us today. Without it we are lost. Praise be to God! Because of it we have everything.

³ Keller, pp. 222-223



Dead or Alive
Luke 23:50-24:12
Week of April 20th, 2014

Object of this study: To allow God's Spirit to speak to us about things we've heard before but haven't taken in, to make more real to us the promise and hope of Heaven, and to respond in cooperation and worship.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Isaiah 53 meditatively to the group. (after each phrase pause and let the Lord speak to you before reading the next)
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

When have you really really missed something that later seemed obvious?

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
 2. Read Luke 23:50 - 24:12
 3. What do you notice?
 4. Who are the characters in this narrative? Describe them, what they did, and what motivated their behavior.
- For more on Joseph of Arimathea see John 19:38-42. We can see that all of the characters were motivated by a deep love for Jesus. What else, i.e. what beliefs motivated their actions?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

1. In last week's sermon we saw that the people around Jesus weren't expecting him to suffer or die. This week we see that they weren't expecting him to be resurrected. Who in this narrative had their beliefs addressed directly and changed? How did it happen? Were they shamed in how it happened? What was the demeanor of those who revealed the truth to them?
2. Why is this encouraging to us? Who plays this role in our lives? See John 14:26. How can we cooperate with him?
3. What are the things we've heard many times, but somehow can't remember, take in, or act on? What is God's Holy Spirit patiently reminding you of currently?

Sermon quote: "So what does all this mean for us today?" (that is, Christ's resurrection and his promise of eternal life for us).

And from Timothy Keller's book: "To the extent that that future is real to you, it will change everything about how you live in the present. For example, why is it so hard to face suffering? Why is it so hard to face disability and disease? Why is it so hard to do the right thing if you know it's going to cost you? Why is it so hard to face your own death or the death of loved ones?"

"It is so hard because we think this broken world is the only world we're ever going to have. It's easy to feel as if this money is the only wealth we'll ever have. As if this body is the only body we'll ever have. But if Jesus is risen then your future is so much more beautiful, and so much more certain, than that."

4. So what DOES all this mean for us today? Maybe the promise of Heaven is to us like Jesus's promise of his resurrection was to his disciples -- they heard it but they didn't take it in. If we took it in and acted on it, what would it mean to us, and how would it affect our beliefs, emotions, and actions?

5. Read Revelation 7:17, 1 Thess. 4:17-18, Hebrews 13:14-15. Spend some time worshipping God in response.