

LUKE 24:1–12. (EHV)

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women[a] went to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. When they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothing. The women were terrified and bowed down with their faces to the ground. The men said to them, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has been raised! Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again?” Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Yet these words seemed to them like nonsense, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over to look in, he saw only the strips of linen cloth. He went home, amazed at what had happened.

Who are the first unbelievers named in Scripture after Jesus’s resurrection?

The eleven apostles—the Twelve minus Judas Iscariot. The same people who would later pen books of the Bible. The same people who would later be described as the foundation of the Christian Church.

And why did they not believe at first? Luke tells us: “These words [of the women] seemed to them like nonsense.” No one wants to be known as the one who believes in nonsense.

1.

Why did the words of the women seem like nonsense to the eleven apostles?

First, because of *whom* those words were coming from. Between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we know four of the women who went to Jesus’s tomb early that morning.

There was Mary the wife of Alphaeus and mother of James—not James the brother of John, but the other apostle James. In fact, “the other James” is basically what he’s called. Mark calls him “James the Less” or “James the Small”—probably not because he was small in stature, but just because he wasn’t the more well known James.

There was Salome the wife of Zebedee. She *was* the mother of the more well known James, and of his brother John. But she seems to have been just a little over-zealous. She was the one who came to Jesus once and asked him, “Lord, grant that one of my two sons may sit on your right and the other on your left when you come into your kingdom.”

There was Joanna the wife of Cuza. Cuza was the manager of King Herod’s household, so we might think that Joanna at least had some standing among women. But then again, we have to wonder just how close a relationship she enjoyed with her husband, since we hear that she was constantly wandering around Galilee with Jesus, caring for his needs along with the other women. And if it’s true that she didn’t enjoy a particularly close relationship with him, perhaps it’s because earlier in Luke Joanna is included in a list of women who had been cured of either diseases or evil spirits, or both (Luke 8:1–3).

And speaking of evil spirits, there's finally the most prominently mentioned of the women in all four Gospels—Mary Magdalene. She's the most prominently mentioned, but all we know personally about her is that she was from the town of Magdala along the Sea of Galilee, and that either Jesus or one of his apostles cast out seven demons from her (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2).

So, even though all these women were close to Jesus and had cared for his needs and had supported him out of their own means, you can imagine why the apostles didn't just drop everything they were doing and start jumping for joy when these women told them what they had seen and heard.

And the *timing* of their report didn't help either. It was already expected of all Jewish adults that they would keep vigil all Thursday night, the night of the Passover. Then Jesus was crucified on Friday, and these women were watching from a distance. Then he was buried late Friday afternoon, and these women were sitting opposite from the tomb, watching. We're told they rested on the Sabbath, which began at sundown on Friday, but we're also told they were basically counting the seconds until sundown on Saturday when the Sabbath ended, so that they could go out and purchase spices to prepare for anointing Jesus's dead body. And that's just what they did. As soon as the Sabbath was over on Saturday evening, they went out and bought spices, then came back and prepared them. And sometime very early Sunday morning, while it was still dark, they set out together for the tomb.

Just how much sleep were these women running on that first Easter morning? A few hours over the past two and a half to three days?

And then there was a violent earthquake as they were going to the tomb, which the apostles, wherever they were sleeping, doubtless also felt. So when these women came back all emotional and excited, you can only guess what a tired, grumpy, depressed group of guys is going to think about their report.

And then there was the *report* itself.

"The stone to the entrance of Jesus's tomb was rolled away! And the tomb was empty! We saw two different men in clothes gleaming like flashes of lightning—in fact, their clothes were so bright that we couldn't look directly at them. But we heard what they said: Jesus is not among the dead, but is alive!"

And let's not pass over this so quickly. It was rare enough for people to come back from the dead. It only occurs nine times in the Bible besides Jesus, by my count. But if you narrow that count to the number of times someone brought himself back to life... Well, then this would be *numero uno* in the entire history of the world.

And let's not forget how Jesus died: He was crucified. He was as dead as dead could be.

There aren't just a ton of principles that you can live by that will hold true in any and every situation, but if someone is telling you that something has happened, and that something has never, ever happened before, it's a pretty good bet that it's nonsense.

Jesus isn't dead. He's alive. — It doesn't seem any less like nonsense today, does it? And for the same reasons. The people who believe it and report it today also aren't anything special. Generally speaking, Christians are ordinary folk. They're nurses and doctors, farmers and factory workers, ranchers and real estate agents, carpenters and electricians, servers and secretaries, teachers and tradesmen, managers and underlings. The apostle Paul himself suggests that

Christians as a whole are foolish by the world's standards (1 Cor. 1:26–31). Most of the time no one is asking them to lecture at universities or give addresses at seminars or political events.

When I vicared in New Hampshire, once a month I also traveled to Maine to serve the one Wisconsin Synod congregation there. That congregation used to have over a hundred members, but for various reasons they dwindled and had to sell their church building and now there were eight men and women who met in someone's house once a month. And we always had a meal together after the service. And at one particular meal, each one of those eight after the other were talking about their recent hospital visits or personal issues. Finally the host mother realized what was going on and blushed and looked at me and said, "Sorry, Vicar. All we're doing is talking about all our problems." But then she thought twice and said, "But then again, that's probably why we're all here." I think that's a fair characterization of Christians: They are keenly aware of their weaknesses and shortcomings.

And the content of the message hasn't changed. Jesus died. Three days later, in the dark of the tomb, his eyes blinked open. He got up, unwrapped himself, and in the dark rolled up the burial cloth that had been around his face and placed it separate from the linen, and then left by simply disappearing. It wasn't until later that an angel came down and rolled the stone away, so that people could get in and see.

Sound like nonsense?

2.

Well, it's not. There's an important word here in Luke: "Yet these words *seemed* to them like nonsense, and they did not believe them." That means their report was *not* nonsense.

It wasn't nonsense, because Jesus more than once said it would happen, that it had to happen. At least three times before he died Jesus told his disciples that he must (1) be delivered into the hands of sinful men, (2) be crucified, and (3) on the third day be raised again.

Now if I told you, "Guys, I'm going to fly away to Mars," you'd rightly say, "That's nonsense." But if I were to say, "It is necessary for me to (1) get put on trial in the Supreme Court, (2) be sentenced to death by electric chair, and (3) three days after I'm sentenced to death I must fly away to Mars," and then I, Pastor Biebert, from 1218 East Seventh Street in Winner, South Dakota, (1) got put on trial by the Supreme Court, (2) was sentenced to death by electric chair, and (3) three days later my body couldn't be found, and the mystery of my disappearance wasn't solved and couldn't be solved otherwise, suddenly my promise to fly away to Mars wouldn't seem so nonsensical.

Jesus said he had to (1) be delivered into the hands of sinful men and (2) be crucified, even though even his enemies could not think of a single time in his life when he had sinned. Then those two things happened. Now, on the third day, when he said (3) he would rise, his body is missing and two men in gleaming clothes are saying he's alive. And this is the man whom even his enemies had to confess raised Lazarus from the dead after Lazarus had been dead for *four* days.

It sounds to me like the possibility of his resurrection is infinitely better than me flying to Mars even in the made-up scenario with me and the Supreme Court and the electric chair.

Not only did Jesus say it would happen, but he said it was *necessary*. "The Son of Man *must* be delivered..." It was necessary because it was God's foretold will. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53

not only say that the Messiah would pour out his life unto death by having his hands and feet pierced and that he would be assigned a grave with the rich, but also that he would again see the light of life and prolong his days.

But it was also necessary for another reason. We see that reason in the reaction of one of the apostles. “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb.” Why was Peter one of the only ones to say, “Maybe it’s true. Oh, please, let it be true”? Because the last words he had spoken about Jesus that Jesus knew about, and that Peter knew Jesus knew about, were in response to a man who said, “Certainly you were with Jesus.” And Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Peter was a sinner and he knew it. And he was stuck in his sins, unless... Unless Jesus was alive. Jesus’s resurrection was not nonsense to Peter because it’s exactly what Peter needed to be true.

And we need it to be true too. Jesus told his disciples that the giving of his body to death and the shedding of his blood was going to be for the forgiveness of their sins. But if Jesus’s body is just rotting in a grave somewhere, or if his disciples did steal it as the Jewish leaders later rumored, then Jesus was nothing more than a man, and a liar, and we are all still in our sins.

Your grudges and hatred, your disobedience to your parents and your bad parenting, your physical and verbal and emotional abuse, your lusts and fornications and adulteries, your coveting and stealing, your gossiping, slander, and lying—there’s no answer for any of it. You’re stuck with it and in it. If you feel guilty about it, you should. And you should remain feeling miserable until you die in misery and go to hell. This world is nothing more than a messed-up place with an infinitely more messed-up god who hates us.

That’s the reality if Jesus’s resurrection is nonsense.

But it is not nonsense, friends. You want to know what is nonsense? Looking for the One who lives among those who are dead. *That* is nonsense. He is not there. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

There’s one more reason the women’s report is not nonsense. Jesus himself actually appeared to the women later, appeared to Peter, appeared to the remaining Ten, appeared to more than 500 of his followers, appeared to his half-brother James, appeared to other apostles, and finally appeared to the apostle Paul. That’s strong evidence too, but we’re not going to focus on that this morning, because Luke doesn’t, not here. All we have here is the Word, spoken through the angel: “Remember how he told you.”

And that’s all we have today, isn’t it? He hasn’t appeared to any of us in the flesh. All I can do is point to his *words*, in both the Old Testament and the New, and say, “Remember, brothers and sisters, this is what he told you he was going to do for you. This was his plan all along. And this is what he and his apostles say in his Word that he actually did.”

And that’s enough. God’s Word is more than enough.

Jesus’s resurrection seems like nonsense, but it *only* seems that way. All your sins are forgiven. The God of the universe and we humans on earth are reconciled forever. You too will rise from the dead on the Last Day. Then you *will* see with your own eyes that your Savior’s resurrection is not nonsense, that he is in fact alive and well. For Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Amen.