

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR FAITH

Luke 24:1-12

By

Steven J. Cole

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Luke Lesson 113

The Foundation for Our Faith Luke 24:1-12

I spent the summer of 1969 with some other seminary students at the "Jesus Christ Light and Power House," a study center near the UCLA campus founded by Hal Lindsey and Bill Counts. That summer the streets of Westwood were swarming with vibrant, happy young people who would invite us to meetings where we could learn how chanting a Buddhist mantra had changed their lives. They testified of dramatic results from practicing this chant. Some had received new cars. Others had been reconciled to parents from whom they had been seriously alienated. Although I never attended their meetings, those who did told me that it was like going to a Campus Crusade evangelistic meeting where everyone was sharing testimonies. The difference was, instead of Jesus Christ being the significant reason for their newfound happiness, it was that they had taken up chanting.

Perhaps you have tried to witness to someone who said, "Christianity is fine for you, but I'm not into that. I've found great happiness in my own way of believing. But, if it works for you, that's great!"

That kind of thinking is pervasive in our day. But how do you counter it? At its root is the notion that spiritual "truth" is relative and subjective. As such, the only verification is, "Does it work? Does it help you?" If it does, then it must be valid or true.

Perhaps you have wrestled with serious doubts about your Christian faith. How can science and the Bible be reconciled? Isn't Christianity just based on legends that evolved among Jesus' followers? If the Bible is true, then what about all of the people who have never heard about Jesus? How can God condemn them to hell when they never had a chance to believe? How can a good and loving God allow all the evil and suffering in this world? These and many similar questions can plague you with doubt.

While I cannot deal with these questions individually in this message, our text provides the necessary foundation that will dissi-

pate our doubts and enable us to stand firm in our faith. Luke's account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ teaches us that ...

We must trust in the risen Lord Jesus Christ,
who is the foundation of the Christian faith.

The Christian faith is unique to all of the world's major religions in that it is founded on the living person of Jesus Christ, who was raised bodily from the dead. It is not primarily a system of moral or doctrinal beliefs, although it has definite moral standards and doctrinal truths. Christianity is founded on the living Lord Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and returning soon in power and glory.

If Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, then He Himself was a liar, since He predicted His own death and resurrection on numerous occasions. Why believe in and follow a liar? If Christ is not risen from the dead, then His death on the cross did not secure the forgiveness of our sins. The resurrection was God's seal of approval on the sacrifice that Christ offered for His people, so that Paul could rightly say, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). The resurrection declared Jesus to be "the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4). It substantiated that Jesus is the son of David, the Messiah, of whom David prophesied when he wrote, "You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay" (Acts 2:27; cf. Ps. 16:10). The resurrection guarantees us that Jesus conquered sin, death, and hell, and that He will make good on His promise to come again and take us to be with Him eternally in heaven. A dead man could not do that, but the risen Savior can! A dead Savior is no Savior at all. So everything in Christianity rests on the historical fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Darrell Bock writes, "Without resurrection, Christianity is just another human approach to reach God; it is emptied of transforming power and hope; it is a mere shell, not worth the energy one devotes to it.... To believe in Christ is to believe not merely in his example, but in the power of his resurrection to grant new life" (*Luke* [Baker], 2:1881). Thus we must affirm that ...

1. Our faith rests on the historical event of Jesus' bodily resurrection, not in subjective experience or feelings.

What evidence is there for Jesus' resurrection? If we included the entire chapter, we could add more. But in these 12 verses, we find a number of evidences for the resurrection.

1) The day of the resurrection.

The gospels emphasize that the resurrection occurred on the first day of the week, namely, Sunday. The fact that the early church changed the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday can only be explained by the fact that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning. The apostles were all steeped in Judaism with its strict observance of Saturday as the day of rest and worship. Why would they change the sacred day from Saturday to Sunday? Clearly, it was not a strategic planning decision that was made to distinguish Christianity from Judaism! Rather, they did it to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Sunday became "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10), when the church gathered for worship and instruction (Acts 20:7).

While I realize that in Jewish, Muslim and Hindu cultures, Sunday is a normal workday that makes it difficult for Christians to gather, I do believe that we must attach a special significance to gathering on Sunday, to worship Him. Many progressive American churches offer Friday or Saturday night worship services as an alternative to Sundays. While you can perhaps justify Saturday night, since the Jewish day began at sundown, I am not ready to jettison the concept of worshipping on the first day of the week. It is a testimony to the fact that our Lord arose on that day. And, while it is permissible (although there is no biblical precedent for it) to celebrate one Sunday a year as resurrection (or Easter) Sunday, *every* Sunday ought to be resurrection Sunday with the Lord's people. We worship on Sunday to celebrate and proclaim that our Savior is risen from the dead!

2) The moved stone.

Mark 16:3 records the women discussing on the way to the tomb, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Luke merely records the fact that when they arrived, they found the stone rolled away. This would have been a large, round stone placed in a groove in front of the tomb. It would have taken several strong men to roll that stone out of the groove. The

Roman soldiers guarding the tomb would not have moved the stone nor allowed anyone else to do so. Matthew 28:2 states that an angel of the Lord moved the stone. He did not do this so that Jesus could get out, but so that the witnesses to the resurrection could get in to verify that the tomb was empty!

Years ago, an attorney named Frank Morison set out to refute the evidence for the resurrection. While he appreciated the life of Jesus, he thought that early followers had attached the myth of the resurrection onto the story of Jesus. But as he examined the facts with his legal background and training, he eventually wrote a best-selling book, *Who Moved the Stone?* in which he set forth the evidence for Christ's resurrection (in Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* [Living Books], pp. 97-98).

3) The empty tomb.

While critics have pointed out a number of harmonistic problems between the various gospel accounts of the resurrection, none can deny the fact that the tomb was empty. If the tomb had not been empty, when the apostles began preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the Jewish leaders would have marched to the tomb, produced the body, and the disciples would have been laughed out of town.

Those who deny the fact of the resurrection have several ways to explain the empty tomb, but none of them are plausible. *Jesus' enemies could have stolen the body.* But they had no motive for doing so, and they would have produced it to quench the disciples' preaching. Besides, the tomb was guarded to prevent any theft of the body.

The Roman guards stole the body. But they had no motive to do so. They didn't care about this Jewish religious trial. If they had stolen the body, they could have sold it to the Jewish leaders for a lot of money, but that did not happen.

The disciples stole the body. The Jewish leaders tried to promote this theory (Matt. 27:63-66; 28:11-15). But, the Roman guards would have prevented this. They would not have risked their lives (the penalty for not properly standing their watch) for a bribe. The disciples could not have moved the heavy stone and stolen the body without the guards' knowledge or permission. Besides, the

disciples were too depressed, confused, and fearful to pull off a daring grave robbery. And if they had done so, it is inconceivable that they would have boldly preached the resurrection in the face of persecution. The initial thought of the women was that someone had stolen Jesus' body. If that had been confirmed, the apostles would not have preached the resurrection as they later did.

4) The angelic witness.

Luke records that the women encountered two men in dazzling apparel who gently rebuked them for seeking the living One among the dead. They then said, "He is not here, but He has risen" and went on to remind them of Jesus' prediction that He would be crucified by sinful men and rise again on the third day (24:5-7). If there is any doubt as to the identity of these "men," verse 23 affirms that they were angels. While Matthew and Mark only mention one angel, they are not in contradiction with Luke and John, who mention two, since they do not affirm that there was *only* one angel. Rather, they simply refer to the angel who spoke to the women. While critics may doubt the existence of angels, they do so because of a naturalistic bias. But they must deny the testimony of several credible witnesses to the event.

5) The predictions by Jesus.

On several occasions, Jesus predicted that He would be crucified and that He would rise from the dead (9:22, 43-45; 17:25; 18:31-33; 22:22). The disciples' minds were closed and could not comprehend what He was saying (18:34) until after the fact. But, Jesus would have been a liar or greatly mistaken if He had repeatedly predicted this, but it had not come true.

6) The witness of the women.

Under Jewish law, women were not considered qualified as witnesses (William Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* [Eerdmans], p. 589). Thus, it is significant that the gospels uniformly agree that the women who followed Jesus were the first to see the risen Savior. They were obviously not expecting to find an empty tomb and risen Lord, or they would not have brought the spices to anoint His body. The early church never would have invented this story if it were not true. The apostles did not at first believe the women, but thought that they were speaking nonsense (the Greek

word was used to refer to the delirious stories told by the very sick or to tales told by those who fail to perceive reality (Darrell Bock, *Luke* [IVP], p. 381). That leads to the next evidence:

7) The doubting of the apostles.

This is a powerful evidence, the fact that the men who should have believed were at first skeptics of these women who testified of Jesus' resurrection! If someone had invented this story, they would not have made the apostles to look so skeptical and unbelieving. If the apostles had been hoping for the resurrection, perhaps they could be accused of being gullible and ready to believe anything. But they ridiculed these women as being out of touch with reality! Peter wanted to check it out for himself, so he ran to the tomb and saw the linen wrappings. But at this point, he marveled but did not yet fully believe. What could have changed these men into bold witnesses, willing to suffer persecution and even death, if not the fact that they saw the risen Lord Jesus?

8) The linen wrappings.

Peter and John (John 20:1-10) saw the linen wrappings lying there, but Jesus' body was not inside of them! If someone had stolen Jesus' body, they would not have waited to unwrap the linen and leave it there. Jesus' body passed through the grave clothes and left them lying there intact. Jesus' resurrection body could be felt, He could eat and drink, and yet He also could pass through closed doors and instantly appear or vanish from sight (John 20:19-29; Luke 24:31, 36-43). But the fact that both Peter and John, who were not expecting a resurrection, saw these linen wrappings in the tomb is an evidence for Jesus' resurrection.

Our text does not mention what the rest of the chapter and the Book of Acts proclaim as further evidence, namely, the numerous appearances of the risen Savior to the apostles and their dramatically changed lives. There is no way to explain how they were transformed from fearful, depressed, confused men into bold witnesses ready to die for their message, except for the fact of the resurrection. The evidence piles up to a powerful mountain that cannot be ignored. Jesus was bodily raised from the dead!

The British New Testament scholar, B. F. Westcott, said, "Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that

there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it" (in McDowell, pp. 96-97).

Thus the Christian faith is not based on subjective feelings or a personal experience. It is rooted in the objective, historically verifiable fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection. While most of the well-known hymn, "He Lives," is good, I have often cringed at the final line: "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart." I believe that the risen Lord Jesus does live spiritually within my heart. But that is not the bottom line for how I know that He lives, because that is subjective. What if I don't feel that Jesus lives in my heart? Does that mean that He is not risen? What if an immoral person or someone on drugs says that Jesus lives in his heart? Is it true just because he feels it's true? No, it's true that Jesus lives because there is solid evidence for it. It's true whether people believe it or disbelieve it. It's true because it happened in history and it is verified by numerous lines of solid evidence.

You may be thinking, "If the evidence is so convincing, why don't more people believe it?" The answer is, people refuse to believe in the resurrection because it has moral implications that they do not want to face. If Jesus is risen, then He is the rightful Lord of all. It means that He is the coming judge of all the earth. It means that I must turn from my sin and live under His lordship. Because people do not want to turn from their sin, they refuse to believe in Jesus in spite of the evidence. But Scripture is clear:

2. We must put our trust in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

After writing of the miracles that Jesus performed, as well as the events of the resurrection, John concluded, "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). It is through faith that our sins are forgiven and we enter into a personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ. There are several things to note about such saving faith:

- 1) While faith is based on the historical fact of the resurrection, it is not strictly intellectual.

As I mentioned, it is always moral. We all have sinned against the holy God. Our sins put Christ on the cross. Thus faith in Christ is not just a matter of weighing evidence and making a calm intellectual decision. Saving faith always involves being convicted of our sin and of our need for the Savior. The evidence corroborates that Jesus is God's anointed Savior. His death was not an accident, but rather in the sovereign purpose of God ("must," Luke 23:7), and yet those who did it were sinfully responsible ("sinful men," 23:7; see Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Thus while faith rests on the facts of history, it also must include repentance for our sins.

- 2) Since you can never completely resolve all your questions, you must take a step of faith.

I did not say, "Take a *leap* of faith," but rather, a *step* of faith. There are some questions that will not be fully resolved until we are in heaven. But God has given us sufficient evidence to trust in Christ. As John says, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater," and God's witness centers on His Son (1 John 5:9). We all believe and act on the witness of men every day. You didn't run a chemical analysis on your breakfast food to prove that it wasn't poisoned. You didn't do structural calculations on this building to make sure that it wouldn't collapse on your head if you walked inside. On your way to church, you trusted other drivers to stay on their side of the road and observe traffic laws. Thus believing the uncertain and fickle ways of men, we have no excuse for not believing the God who cannot lie. Jesus Himself said that if you believe in Him, you will have eternal life, but if you do not, you will perish (John 3:16, 36).

- 3) Our faith grows through various stages.

These women and the disciples had all believed in Jesus, but they were at various stages. The women obviously loved Jesus, but they did not yet believe His word that He would rise from the dead or they would not have brought the spices to anoint Him. Yet when the angel rebuked them and reminded them of Jesus' prediction, they seemed to believe, even though the apostles ridiculed them. The apostles had given up everything to follow Jesus, and

yet at the moment, their faith was pretty shaky. They openly scoffed at the testimony of these women. Peter, though, seemed to be willing to check it out for himself, but he was at this point marveling, though not yet fully believing. In the next incident, we see the men on the Emmaus Road who believed and yet were “slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken” (24:25). The point is, they were all at various stages in their faith.

Thankfully this story shows us that our merciful Lord is gracious to save us with just a little mustard seed of faith and He is patient not to cast us off when our faith wavers. Yet we are responsible to grow in our faith, learning to believe in all that the Bible affirms.

Conclusion

But always remember that our faith must be in the living Lord Jesus Christ, not just in doctrines or moral standards. Christianity certainly requires believing in sound doctrine and living according to God’s moral standards, but it is also much more. It is a personal relationship with the living Savior. As Paul said, his goal was “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

If your faith is shaky, first check and see if you are clinging to some sin that you don’t want to give up. You must repent of it or you will never have strong faith in Jesus. Next, study for yourself the evidence for Jesus’ resurrection. Go back to that evidence as the certain foundation, even if you can’t resolve some issue that is causing you to doubt. Finally, cultivate close personal fellowship with the living Lord Jesus, who gave Himself for your sins. Again to quote Paul, “The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). The risen Savior is the foundation of the Christian faith. Make sure that your faith is in Him!

Discussion Questions

1. What is the proper place of using reason or evidence in evangelism?
2. How can we counter the prevailing cultural notion that spiritual truth is merely subjective?
3. If the evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong, why is faith necessary?

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