

VOTC – March 2016

#### 4. Angels Testify on Easter

Hello dear listeners,

The good news of salvation is that we don't find Christ in our passage. From the beginning of his account, Luke has set out to give the reader "certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (1:4). On every page of his account, we find Christ. But when we come to the account of his resurrection, our Lord is noticeably absent.

Now why is this good news? Wouldn't it be more reassuring if we *could* read of Christ emerging from the grave on Easter morning? Not at all. Our passage impresses on us that *no amount* of words themselves will convince us that Christ rose from the dead. The women of our text had to *believe* this. They had to have *faith* in what was promised, that Christ would *rise*. The resurrection of Christ calls for faith. You either believe the message of Christ's resurrection, or you don't.

At early dawn on that Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and some other women went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. Our text itself does not give us these names, but we read of them in the other resurrection accounts in the Bible. These women had been following Jesus and his disciples around for quite some time already. They are genuine disciples. They had followed him faithfully to the end.

After Christ's death, these women watched Joseph of Arimathea take down Jesus' body from the cross, wrap it in linen cloth, and place it in a tomb. They saw where Joseph lay Jesus. They saw him carefully place the body in what they thought would be its final resting place.

And so they went home and busily prepared spices and perfumes. They wanted to come back later and anoint his dead body, to give a proper and respectable burial to their Lord. But before they could, the Sabbath day came. So they *rested* before paying their last respects.

So now at the earliest opportunity on the day after the Sabbath, they come. Light has just begun to creep over the horizon. There is *excitement* to finish their work, to show their devotion to their Lord.

At least, that's how they thought it would happen. They went to the grave fully expecting to find the dead and decaying body of their Lord. They had seen him die on the cross, after all! They saw Joseph place him in his tomb. The events of a couple days ago were etched in their minds. That was to be expected.

Well, it does not go as they expected. A number of surprises awaited. First, "They found the stone rolled away from the tomb." What is going on here? Is it possible someone has messed with the burial site? Is there a grave robber on the loose? Well, that wasn't all. They entered the tomb in search of the body of Jesus. That is because they were convinced he had to be there. But to their dismay, they did not find his body. Their expectations had been flipped upside down!

Vs. 4 says they were perplexed about this. There was great confusion and anxiety among them. "Could not at least the *body* of our Master be left in peace?! What has happened here? We saw Joseph lie him down. We *witnessed* everything." It is hard for us to appreciate how surprised they were. But if we think about it, we would likely react no differently today. We all know that death cuts off the dead from the living. We can no longer talk with or embrace our loved ones who have gone before us. But, the misery of these women deepened. When they encounter the *empty* tomb, this would have intensified their sadness. The one they loved was crucified, dead, buried, and now lost. We can understand, then, their reaction.

Nevertheless, their reaction is the result of *unbelief*. For all their eagerness to bury properly the body of their Master, they had not believed what he had earlier told them. Jesus was clear time and

again. He would be betrayed. He would be handed over to death on the cross. But that would not be the end! He will rise again!

These women knew that. They attended and served him during his work. And so we read in the second half of verse 6 the words of the angels, “Remember how he told *you*, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and on the third day rise.’ And they remembered his words.” They knew what he had said. *And they just saw that it all came to pass.* But they did not immediately remember Jesus’ words, “I shall rise again.” In fact, they did not yet believe his words. That is why they were perplexed. This is what happens when we do not take God at his Word. Then we don’t have peace in our hearts. We lose our focus, our direction. Things don’t add up when you don’t believe and trust. The women’s problem is often our problem. So we do well to keep going in our passage.

Instead of finding the dead body of the Lord Jesus, the women found two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning. These men were angels, messengers from heaven. While the women are wondering what has happened to the Lord, God answers. Because they did not have faith in the word of Christ, God sends two of his heavenly messengers to earth. These “two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.” That shows they are divine messengers. This is something that happened more often in Scripture.

The question is, why does it happen here? And for that matter, why are there *two* of them? Why couldn’t just one appear? That’s what happened, after all, when God announced to Mary that she would bear a child; God sent *one* angel, Gabriel. But now, the Lord sends *two* angels at the *resurrection*. Here’s why. Deut. 19:15 tells us, “Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.” When it comes to establishing the truth, particularly in a court of law, this is what God required. Not *one* witness. You need at least two. This is why there are two angels in our text. God sent them to give rock-solid testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *They were there*, in heaven, when it all happened. Last week we saw that on Good Friday Christ entered Paradise. Well, Christ *left* Paradise on Easter Sunday. And these heavenly beings saw it. Heaven witnessed it. So these angels testify to Christ’s resurrection. He has risen!

Perhaps, dear listener, you struggle with believing the resurrection of Christ. Many in our world say the bodily resurrection did not really happen. But we learn from Scripture that it did. *Heaven* witnessed Christ’s resurrection. Therefore, these angels could say to the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” A beautiful testimony from heaven.

Oh yes, this is a great *mystery* for us. The physical body of Christ was raised from death to life by God. It defies scientific knowledge. But it calls for faith. The Saviour rose again. That is impossible for us to wrap our human minds around. But we can believe with our heart and soul. We have the testimony of Scripture, we have the testimony of heaven.

Do you believe Jesus Christ has risen from the dead? The fact of the matter is, there is nothing in this world that can convince a sinful, evil heart that God raised Christ from the dead. The only way we can believe it happened is if Christ himself raises us up from death to life, by the power of his Spirit. And he does that. How? How does he bestow faith upon us? “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard *through the word of Christ*” (Rom. 10:17). Christ proclaimed to his disciples, to these women, that he is the resurrection and the life. Christ proclaims to the church today every week, and calls her to believe he is the resurrection and the life. That’s why those who want to know and serve Christ come to church. That’s why they *have* to come to church, every week. To hear Christ, to see Christ. You will not find him in the world. Look for him among the living, among God’s people, in the congregation of Christ.