

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Luke 24:1-12

It must have been quite a day in heaven. I can only imagine what the atmosphere and mood must have been for the angels in heaven. The day I'm thinking about is not the first Easter Sunday, so many years ago. The day I'm thinking about is the first Easter Saturday, before Christ rose from the dead. Angels are not omniscient beings and they don't know everything. They are servants of the Almighty sent to do his bidding. So, what was it like on that first Easter Saturday as the angels were poised to do his will, poised to make an announcement of Easter victory? At some point, did they wonder who would go...who would be sent to roll away the stone? Suddenly, God the Father speaks the word to two angels: "Go and roll the stone away!" These angels came to earth, terrified the guards so they became like dead men, and with an earthquake rolled away the stone. Now you and I sit here, gathered in Jesus' name and bought by Jesus' blood, staring at a tomb with a stone rolled away. What does it all mean? **"A Stone Rolled Away... first of all, Reveals the Living Lord! And if that weren't enough, it also Recalls the Powerful Promises!"**

1. It Reveals the Living Lord

If we're going to talk about and celebrate a Resurrection Festival today, we must consider how the Lord Jesus ended up in a tomb in the first place. Joseph of Arimathea had asked for the right to bury Jesus' body. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate had consented, albeit a little surprised that Jesus was already dead. Then with Nicodemus' help Joseph took the body of Christ and laid it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. The women were there watching, but there was no time for them to anoint the body with spices and perfumes. That would have to wait for Sunday.

The women returned to Jesus' grave on the first day of the week, very early in the morning. They brought with them the spices, which they had carefully prepared for their Lord. Their hearts were no doubt heavy with the sorrow of the past few days. The images of seeing their Teacher and Friend abused and crucified must have flashed before their eyes. The image that met them as they approach the tomb must have been just as eerie and disconcerting. They saw **A Stone Rolled Away!** And when they entered that tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. His body was gone!

What was their reaction at the tomb with the stone rolled away? Luke tells us they were "wondering about this". The women were asking each other, "What does this mean? What's going on? Where's the body? Who's done this? What's happening now?" Their wondering was an anxious perplexity combined with fear. They had come to the grave to care for Jesus' body and possibly get some closure, but there was only more uncertainty. Life is already upside down. Jesus the One they had followed from Galilee had died on Friday, and now on Sunday the tomb is empty! They must have felt like a stone was rolled right onto their backs. More anxiety, more uncertainty. They couldn't even say good-bye to Jesus' earthly remains. What now?!

"While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them." These angels asked the frightened women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen!" What a question these angels asked the women! In the midst of uncertainty, the angels guided the women to see the truth. They ask, "Why do you consider your miracle working Savior to be a puny, defeated man?" It's not a rebuke, as much as a wakeup call. "Look," they say, **"the stone rolled away reveals the Living Lord!"** The angels didn't come to earth to help Jesus out of the tomb. They came to help us see

that Jesus is already out. Jesus is not here. He has risen! You have a Living Lord. Your Jesus lives for you. Rejoice, rejoice believers!

The unique claim of Christianity stands out in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Most world religions hinge on a single person, whether it's Mohammed or Buddha or Confucius or Joseph Smith. But none of them, not a single one, has their founder saying to his disciples: "You'll know I am who I say I am, when I die and come back to life three days later. Trust me." Christ alone made that claim. Christ alone kept his word and demonstrated his power over death and the grave. No tomb could keep Christ locked up. He rose, not spiritually or in our hearts—he rose bodily, physically from the grave. The announcement of the angels was intended to lead the women to say, DUH! I knew it had to be this way! DUH! I knew my doubts about Jesus were wrong. DUH! I knew his power over death was real. I knew it, but I let sin blind me. I forgot that the one who raised Lazarus wouldn't rot in the tomb! DUH!

Christ has shattered death's hold and now he strengthens our faith in him. If we fail to trust Christ resurrected from the dead, not only are we denying the Scriptures and creating a useless Christian faith, we are also missing out on the one piece of evidence that clinches the case for Christianity and for our eternities. We'd be like a lawyer bringing piece after piece of evidence, but then neglecting that one crucial piece which brings everything together. Yes, Jesus lived perfectly for you and me. Yes, Jesus was a man accredited to God by signs and wonders. Yes, Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. But the Resurrection of Jesus from the grave is on a whole different plane. The Resurrection is the confirmation, the proof, and the guarantee that Christ has paid our debt to the Father. "He was delivered over to death because of our sins and he was raised to life because we had been justified" (Romans 4:25). See the "clincher" in the gospel, the bodily resurrection of our Lord. **A Stone Rolled Away Reveals the Living Lord!**

Simply put the bodily resurrection of Jesus changes everything. It changes our eternities and gives us assurance to stand before God, forgiven and righteous. It changed everything those women were going through. With the simple realization of faith, they saw a living hope in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They were not lost anymore, but they were connected to the one who lives forever. Our best friend and Savior says to us, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell!" (Rev 1:17b,18). The empty tomb reveals the Living Christ.

2. A Stone Rolled Away...Recalls the Powerful Promises

Jesus had spelled out God's rescue plan for his disciples a number of times. While they were in Galilee, he told them. After they came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, he told them. Before they headed to Jerusalem, he told them. But the disciples had forgotten. They had heard his word—and they even heard the words of the women. Even still Luke tells us: "They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." When he wrote that the women's words seem to them "like nonsense", the good doctor and author Luke was using medical language. The words of the women were like the words of someone struck with delirium—and so the disciples dismissed their words. Just the ignorant babble of crazy people. But it was the disciples who had the problem. They missed that the **Stone Rolled Away Recalls the Powerful Promises.**

Remember how confused and uncertain the women were, when they first approached the tomb and saw the empty grave. They were uncertain about the future and they were like sheep without a shepherd, because their Jesus was gone. The women were not the first and they certainly wouldn't be the last ones to grapple with uncertainty and confusion. Today unemployment and uncertainty go hand in hand for many in our community. Turmoil and

tension are rocking families in this very congregation. Pride and pain combine to create stones in our lives that separate us from our God. They are stones that each one of us wrestles with—albeit on different levels. Think about the future of your family, your career, or our congregation. Do you see stones of sin and selfishness? Do you see stones of doubt and fear looming? Do you doubt that the Risen Christ can move them? Have you bought into the lie that God isn't strong enough to fix your problems or have you just lost sight of him, because the stone in life is just too big?

If you find yourself facing these stones or these attitudes, take another look at the Resurrection. Your Savior has risen. He is alive for you and me. The angels told the women: "Remember he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee." Remember his powerful promises. He promised Resurrection victory. He promised that he would give us rest. He promised that he would roll away stones in our lives. The Resurrection changes everything! Doubt and sin are rolled out of our lives. They need not control us any longer. Fear of the future, fear of the unknown are gone – because we know the one who has rolled away the stone as the Living Lord. He wins. His Victory effects every aspect of our lives in this world. Satan wants us focusing on fear and doubt and anxiety. But we follow what Paul told the Corinthians, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Compare every thought you have with the Resurrection. Is my doubt about this or that compatible with a God who has conquered death? Is my anxiety over the future of my marriage too much for a Resurrected Lord? Does my fear of change in my life square with the One who has the power to change my eternity? Trust his power to roll away the stones.

Finally, brothers and sisters, consider what the women did: "They remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others." Maybe it is lost on our 21st century ears of equality and egalitarianism, but the biggest piece of gospel proclamation came to the male disciples through whom? Who brought them the message of Christ Resurrected? A group of women—probably one of the most unlikely groups for a first century Jewish man to expect to hear such news from. Yet, that's how our God operates. He chooses the unexpected and the simple to accomplish great things. In the coming days don't discount your own ability to be the unexpected messenger of peace for a friend or an acquaintance. You might be the one who says, "Hey, come hear about the One who's changed the world!" as you invite a friend to worship or Bible Information Class. But also, don't miss out on the powerful promises our God has for us. He promises to strengthen us through the simple message of a Savior who has risen from the dead. **A stone rolled away recalls those powerful promises.**

Later this day, Jesus will appear alive to Mary Magdalene, Peter, two travelers on the road to Emmaus and to the ten disciples in a locked upper room. He will continue to prove his resurrection and to assure us that he is the Living Lord, just as the stone rolled away from the tomb does. His Easter victory is our comfort every day. He stands at the doorway of our hearts and keeps knocking; he keeps pounding out those powerful promises to work all things out for our good and to give us hope and a future. This day, brothers and sisters, take heart in the face of any and all anxiety. Chase away doubt and fear, because our Living Lord is still rolling away those stones. AMEN.
