Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

An Empty Tomb with an Angelic Explanation
Scripture: Luke 24:1-12
Code: 42-291

A NOTE ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

The following sermon transcript does not match the*video*version of the sermon—it matches only the audio version. Here's a brief explanation why.

John MacArthur routinely preaches a sermon more than once on the same date, during different worship services at Grace Community Church. Normally, for a given sermon title, our website features the audio and video that were recorded during the same worship service. Very occasionally, though, we will post the audio from one service and the video from another. Such was the case for the sermon titled "Losing Your Life to Save it," the transcript of which follows below. The transcript is of the audio version.

Well, we come to a wonderful milestone today in our study of the gospel of Luke. We come to chapter 24 and the account of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus: the resurrection, long awaited. And, I just want to give you a little bit of a sort of an introduction to the message this morning by telling you that preaching is a unique and wonderful adventure. And because of the nature of the text itself, it changes, it ebbs and flows, it takes on different forms and different styles, and that’s part of the adventure of it. As we approach the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we’re going to work our way through this account very carefully and very thoughtfully. Since all four gospels deal with the resurrection, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all deal with the resurrection, they bring to bear upon the account of this most significant of all events in human history their own perspectives. They all cover some of the same things and yet each of them has its own special emphasis, and details common to each writer that are not in the other accounts. What this means is: we have to weave all of this together to get the full picture. My hope will be that you will be able to follow this multi-faceted event as I endeavor to weave the accounts together around the main focus of Luke.

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest event in history, as I said. It is the main event in God’s redemptive plan. It is the cornerstone and foundation of the gospel. According to Romans 10:9 and 10, in order to be saved you have to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, we understand that the message that God has delivered to sinners throughout all of Scripture is that death does not end our existence. That is the message of Scripture from the start to the finish, that death is merely the doorway into eternity. And everyone goes through that doorway and everyone lives forever, some to the resurrection of life, and some to the resurrection of damnation, to borrow the words of John 5.

Every human being ever born will live forever, fully conscious either in everlasting joy or everlasting suffering.

For those who, by faith, have come into the Kingdom of God, into the realm of salvation, the promise is that they will experience a resurrection unto life, that not only will their spirits dwell forever in the presence of God in eternal bliss, but they will receive a resurrected body fit for that everlasting joy. This has been the hope of God's people throughout all redemptive history. It was the hope of Abraham, as Hebrews 11 tells us. It was the hope of Moses, as we learn in Scripture as well. It was the hope of Job. It was the hope of Isaiah. It was the hope of Daniel, for example. This has always been the hope of God's people, whether it is the psalmist who says, "I know that someday I will wake in His likeness," or whether it is Job who says, "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." The hope of resurrection has always been at the heart of believers' faith. It comes to crystal clarity through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who says in John 14:19, "Because I live, you will live also." He is the firstfruits of the resurrection. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me though he die, yet shall he live."

In that great 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, we are reminded of the centrality of the resurrection in words like this: "Now, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep, for since by a man came death," namely Adam, "by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive, but each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits and after that, those who are Christs at His coming." Resurrection has always been anticipated. It has been fully realized through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first apostolic sermon, the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost, is a sermon on the resurrection. We don't have time to go through all of it, but Acts chapter 2 records that on the Day of Pentecost, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up and said, "Men of Israel, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs, which God performed through Him in your midst just as you yourselves know, this man delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."

After then, quoting from the Psalms, Peter said, "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us today. On the other hand, this Jesus God raised up again to which we are witnesses and He has been exalted to the right hand of God and received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." You crucified Him, God raised Him. God raised Him in fulfillment of the Psalms, Psalm 16, and God has exalted Him to be both Lord and Christ. He is the firstfruits of all who are raised. He is, that means, the reason for the raising of all others. This became the constant theme of apostolic preaching. In chapter 4, Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, verse 8, speaks and says, "Rulers and elders

of the people, let it be known to all of you," verse 10, "and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name the man stands here before you in good health," speaking of the man who was healed. You killed Him, God raised Him.

And this continues, and I won't show you all the illustrations throughout the book of Acts for at least a couple of illustrations. Acts 10:38, this time speaking to Gentiles, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with powers and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him, and we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross." Then this, "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is to us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead." You can go on to chapter 13 and hear another apostolic sermon on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This becomes a ringing theme through the epistles. Romans 6 talks about our salvation being a union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Second Corinthians 4 talks about the fact that there is a resurrection of Christ that applies to us, and by that resurrection we are raised. Ephesians 1, Colossians 2, 1 Peter 1. It becomes the theme of apostolic preaching and apostolic writing. The reality and power of the resurrection then permeates if not dominates the rest of the New Testament.

And, of course, as I said, all four gospel writers deal with the resurrection. They record its amazing truth and effect. Now, we remember, don't we, and we've sung about it, and heard it sung that the death of Christ was the result of God's wrath falling on Him instead of us. His resurrection was the result of God's reward falling on us because of Him. And so, we benefit in His death because He bears our sin, and we benefit in His resurrection because we bear then His life.

As we come to Luke's final chapter, the resurrection will dominate this whole chapter for this is the clear purpose of His incarnation; this is the reason for His coming, that He might conquer death for us. And the only way He could conquer death for us is to conquer sin for us, 'cause the wages of sin is death. And if the wages are paid, then there is no more death to fear. He pays the wages in full for us, and therefore death has no sting. Death is simply the door that opens up, and we are ushered into eternal glory. Now, as I said, Luke's account does not give us all the details. It doesn't repeat some of the things that are in Matthew, Mark and John, but he also has some facts that the others don't have. And we're going to look at all of these things.

Luke knew more than he wrote, okay? I'm convinced that he knew the full story. But each of the gospel writers inspired by the Holy Spirit is so inspired to write in a unique way, consistent with their own theme and intention. We know that he knew more because he wrote the book of Acts and this is

how he started the book of Acts, verse 1, “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” He knew about many infallible proofs. He knew about many appearances of Christ. He knew about 40 days of instruction that Christ gave as He appeared to His own, but He only gives us a few insights. We also know that he was a companion to the apostle Paul. And, he must have therefore known what Paul knew, and Paul knew a few things that Luke doesn’t include. For example, that Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:5, appeared to Peter; that He appeared, verse 7 to James. So, Luke knew more than he wrote, but he wrote what the Spirit of God inspired him to write, consistent with his theme, and it blends in magnificently with the other writers.

There’s no contradictions here. There’s no disagreement here. But, there’s also no manipulation of the information. There’s no sort of a fake effort to try to make everything perfectly coalesce. There’s no contrived sort of fumbling effort to match up with everybody else. There’s no evidence they were, as some critics say, copying a common source. There’s something so natural, and so wonderful, and so personal, and so unaffected, and uncontrived about the way each of the writers write, as to belie any kind of concerted effort to blend everything together. If that’s what they were trying to do, they failed. But they weave together so beautifully in their natural sense.

Now, there are some things that all four writers tell us. One, that Jesus was truly dead, a very important fact. Two, that on Sunday morning, the third day after He was placed in the grave, the tomb was empty, another important fact they all tell us. They all tell us that angels explained what had happened, and they all tell us that the first eye witnesses to the risen Christ were the women. And they all tell us that the apostles and the disciples of the men, if you will, refused to believe the testimony of the women. So, while varying details occur in each writer, these are the core truths: he’s really dead, the tomb is empty on Sunday, the angels explained what happened, the women are the first eyewitnesses, and the men did not believe. These are absolutely crucial features to the validity of the resurrection. That is why they are repeated all four times. And that little list I just gave you will become the outline that we’ll look at today and next time.

By the way, Luke omits one thing; and they all do. All four gospels omit one thing. What is it? The actual resurrection. So, if you’re looking for it, it’s not there. There are no verses in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John that explain the resurrection. There’s no description of it. No one was there. No one saw it. That it happened is obvious. How it happened is inexplicable and known only to God.

With that as sort of an overview, let’s begin by looking at Luke and we’ll blend in the other three. Now, you’re going to have to bear with me, folks, because this process of helping you to understand the sequence of events is going to demand that you keep focused, okay? You might lose your way. But let’s break the text up into those important parts that I mentioned. Now, we already covered that fact

that Jesus was dead, right? We know that. That's why the soldiers didn't break His legs. They rammed a spear in His side and out came blood and water, meaning His heart had opened up and poured its blood out, mixed with the lymphatic fluid contained in the pericardium, plenty of indication that He was in fact dead. They handled His body, they put it in the tomb, they wrapped it, they knew they were dealing with someone who was really dead.

But when it comes to the resurrection, there are four key truths that all four writers deal with. Number one, the empty tomb. Let's look at verse 1. "But on the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared, and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus." Clearly, the testimony of Luke is the tomb is empty. The stone is rolled away, and a group of women go in and see that. They are eyewitnesses to the reality of the empty tomb.

By the way, it is the first day of the week, that is, Sunday, which fits perfectly the prophecy Jesus gave that He would be in the ground three days. They got Him in Friday, He's there on Saturday, He's there a great portion of Sunday because Sunday begins at six o'clock the night before, and so He fulfills that prophecy. The prophecy we talked about last time from Matthew 12 and verse 40, the first day of the week. By the way, they had no names for days. They didn't have a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. All they had was numbers, and everything was numbered in connection with the Sabbath. So, the first day of the week is the first day after the Sabbath, that is Sunday, and it's the third day that Jesus has been in the ground. And by the way, it's dawn or just before dawn on the morning of Sunday, but Sunday began at sundown the night before. So, you're probably twelve hours into Sunday.

This is the very day that was prophesied and this becomes the new day of worship for the church, so that the Saturday in which Jesus was in the ground is the last official legitimate Sabbath. That's why after this, the writers of the New Testament say that the Sabbath is no longer to be commanded. It is no longer the day. Sabbath law is gone. All the Old Testament dietary laws are gone and so are any Sabbath prescriptions as well. Some people still want to honor the day, you don't want to ride across their conscience and be insensitive to that because they're well trained in their Judaism to observe the Sabbath. Give them time to develop an understanding of why that is no longer necessary, but it is no longer necessary. There are no more Sabbaths. Paul says to the Colossians, "There are no more feast days, new moons." That Saturday was the last legitimate authorized, authentic Sabbath. And from this resurrection moment on, Sunday becomes the Lord's day, Revelation 1:10. "The church," Acts 20 verse 7, "meets on the first day of the week." First Corinthians 16:2 says, "When you come together on the first day of the week, bring your offerings."

So, the very day that the Lord said He would rise, the third day, is the first day of the week. The first day then becomes the day of worship for the church. I still think there's something very wonderful about that. I think this is the Lord's day, Sunday, and I think it's wonderful that we continue to

celebrate and worship Him as a testimony to His resurrection on this day. And I love the idea that we give the whole day to Him. I love the idea that we have a Sunday morning and a Sunday night service, so it is the Lord's day. I'm not thrilled with the trend to slap in a one-hour service on a Saturday night so that you can do whatever you want on the Lord's day.

On the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb. Now, why did they come? You remember how the chapter ended, chapter 23? They had come with him, these women out of Galilee. And they followed, you remember, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who showed up. They followed them to the tomb. They were still stunned. They were still in shock. They had just lived through the most bizarre, horrific experience. The one who they had put their trust in, the Lord Jesus, had been arrested, He had been beaten, He had been crucified, He's dead, and here are these men now putting a few spices on His body, not really a few, a hundred pound weight that Nicodemus brought and they're anointing His body and putting it in the grave. And the women are still stunned, they're not helping, they're just looking and watching. But they determined that they wanted to have a part in it. And so it says in verse 56 that after watching His body being laid in Joseph's tomb, they returned and prepared spices and perfume.

So, they went back on Friday night before the Sabbath began. They couldn't do that, they honored the Sabbath. It says that on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. So, they honored that final Sabbath. But they had before Sabbath began, prepared some spices and now they come back with the spices. Verse 1, "They came to the tomb on Sunday morning, bringing the spices which they had prepared." Now, at early dawn would be, I guess, in our vernacular, the crack of dawn. Now, this is where we begin to put the pieces together. Mark says the sun was risen. Matthew says it began to dawn. John says it was still dark. Now, I guess it's a matter of perspective. You could say that, well, at the very crack of dawn, you might say the sun has risen. But on the other hand, you might say it's still dark because the sun has not fully risen. But, I think the interesting note is you put all these together, and clearly they all understand that it is dawn.

And here is where you see the first reason that I explained to you: there's nothing contrived about this, there's nothing manipulated about this. It's not some kind of a thing where they all had a common source and they wanted to make sure they worked really hard to match up every detail. It's perspective. The sun may have risen over the eastern desert so that you could see the outline of the sun as we see it in Southern California when it's on the backside of the mountains before we see the sun. But until the sun came over the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem, everything behind the Mount of Olives, west of the Mount of Olives would have been in the shadows. From one perspective it would have been dark; from another perspective you could say the sun has risen. It has begun to dawn. And yet from another perspective, you could say that it was still dark. As the sun finally comes across the top of the Mount of Olives, the light dawns in Jerusalem.

But there's something even more going on here than that. In fact, there is some specificity in what John says that I think is fascinating. Now, remember, John said it was still dark. Everybody else has got the sun up, beginning to dawn, crack of dawn. John says it is still dark. John says that in this way: in John chapter 20, you can look at it for a moment, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb while it was still dark and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. And so she ran and came to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him." Peter therefore went forth and the other disciple, John, and they were going to the tomb. Now, why am I reading that? Because I want you to notice this is one lady. This is a very singular experience. Mary Magdalene came early while it was still dark. She saw the stone. She didn't go in. She saw the stone; she drew a conclusion that somebody had taken the body. Without ever going in to see it, she ran, came to Peter by herself. This is Mary all alone. She's not with a group, she's not with anyone else, and she gives the report that body snatchers have stolen the body and they don't know where it is. Peter then, and John after processing this, head for the tomb, which is a couple of miles away. They're probably in Bethany.

So, the point is this: Matthew says Mary Magdalene didn't start out alone. Mary Magdalene was accompanied, the Scripture says, with another Mary: Mary, the mother of James and Joseph; Mary also called the wife of Clopas, another Mary. So, these two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, also known as the wife of Clopas, they start out together in the early dawn. Most likely, Mary Magdalene is the youngest of all. There are other women, right? Verse 1 of Luke 24, they came to the tomb. Who are they? Back to verse 55, "The women who had come with Him out of Galilee," and that's a larger group of women. So, Luke doesn't mention Mary Magdalene in his opening section, although we'll get to the mention of Mary Magdalene down in verse 10 in a minute.

Here's what probably happened. The women all go to anoint the body of Jesus. Mary Magdalene starts out with Mary, the mother of James. They're moving faster than the rest who may have been older. They're stringing out in the darkness as they begin. The two Marys head for the tomb together. Matthew 28:1 says, "Those two Marys headed for the tomb," kind of the first of the women. But John says, "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb," which means she outpaced the other one. She gets there by herself according to John's account. It's still dark at this point and it's light enough maybe that she can discern when she gets close to the tomb that the stone is gone. She spins on her sandals and head the other direction. She arrives in the dusky dark side of the dawn, but clear enough to see the stone is removed. She's the first one there. Her companion Mary is somewhere back progressing in that direction. And the other women, perhaps near her, coming in the dark at a different pace.

John says that Mary Magdalene saw the open entrance and immediately left, didn't go in, bolted. Probably didn't go back maybe the same way the other women did, so that there's no indication she ran into them. She heads directly to Peter and John and the apostle, and she gives this report that the

body of Jesus has been stolen. That's an assumption she didn't check. And for that moment then, when John says it was still dark, it was the darkest part of any experience that these women had because she was the first one there. And as the others came progressively, it became light, and that's why the other writers when the whole group comes say what Luke says, "At early dawn," or, "The sun had risen."

So, the timing is so wonderful, the explicitness of Scripture. The earliest one there is Mary. The rest come, verse 1, to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the same thing Mary had found. She's there and gone, headed for Peter and John. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. This is a shocking sight. This is a stunning sight because, frankly, they had been having a discussion on the way, according to Mark 16. Listen to what Mark says. "Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen and they were saying to one another on the way, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'" Remember now, they were there on Friday night when Jesus was laid in the tomb, and Joseph and Nicodemus rolled the stone over the entrance. They knew it was there and they asked the question: who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? "And looking up they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large." So, on the way they're having the discussion. We're going to go there, we've got all these spices we've prepared on Friday, we're going to do our part to show our love to the Lord by putting spices, more spices on His body, but who is going to roll away the stone?

Remember that they had rolled the stone across the front. Mark 15:46 says that he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb, did Joseph of Arimathea. They had no idea how they were going to get that stone out of there.

Furthermore, they had no idea of something else that had happened. The day after the preparation, Matthew 27:62, "The chief priests and Pharisees gathered together with Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive, that deceiver, Jesus, said after three days I'm going to rise again. Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure till the third day lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people He has risen from the dead and the last deception be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard. Go. Make it as secure as you know how.' And they went, made the grave secure and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone."

The women had no idea that had happened on Saturday. On Saturday the Jews who were afraid that the disciples would steal the body to fabricate a phony resurrection asked Pilate for a guard. They got a guard. The tomb is sealed with an official Roman seal, not to be broken. And a Roman guard is placed in front of the tomb. They have no idea about that. They're going to go thinking it's just the tomb but the only obstacle they're going to have is the stone. So, they would not have known about the guard. Now, when they get there, interestingly enough, there's no guard there. It doesn't say anything in any of the four gospels about the women ever meeting the Roman guard, never. You say, "Well, where did they go?" Well, for that you have to go back to Matthew 28. And here in Matthew 28

verse 2, what happened on Saturday was they set a guard. What happened in the early dark hours of Sunday, verse 2, “Behold, a severe earthquake had occurred.” This would be the second earthquake. There was one on Friday, equally severe, that split the rocks, threw open tombs. “A severe earthquake had occurred, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came, and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow, and the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.”

Well, some interesting things have been going on while these ladies were away. The guard is set on Saturday and on Sunday morning an angel comes down out of heaven, there is a massive earthquake, the angel rolls the stone away and the guards are shocked into some kind of a coma. By the way, the angel did not roll the stone away to let Jesus out, he rolled the stone away to let the people in. Jesus could walk through walls. He did that a little later, right? The door being shut, He appeared to the apostles.

Now, what happened? Well I’ll tell you basically, it’s pretty obvious. By the time the women get there, there aren’t any soldiers there. If there were any soldiers there, they would have commented about them, they would have had a conversation with them. They would have asked them: how did this happen? What happened? It is reasonable to assume that in the deep dark night of that Sunday morning when the earthquake came, and the soldiers were knocked into their coma, they eventually they came out of it and they realized what had happened. The stone was gone, they had these shaken visions of a blazing angel, the reverberations of a massive earthquake. They realized that the body of Jesus is gone. They had therefore failed in their duty. They understood the implications of that. They know something powerful, if not supernatural, has happened. They head back into the city.

As soon as they wake up, there’s no reason to stay there anymore ‘cause Jesus is gone. They must have gone inside in the pitch darkness and found that He was not there. So, they have to face reality. They have to go to the Jewish leaders to try to explain to them what happened. And by the time the women get there, they’re gone. They’re gone.

Now, we’ll get back to the soldiers later and what they reported. But let’s go back to the tomb. Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb, doesn’t look in, just sees the stone away. Concludes, “Oh boy, somebody’s stolen His body.” Spins, goes and tells Peter and John. They’re pretty incredulous about it. They’re going to check it out for themselves. They start back to the tomb.

By the way, Mary Magdalene did not think for one split second of a resurrection. Never entered her mind. Instinct conclusion, somebody stole His body. Had no concept of a resurrection in her mind. John then follows the story. If you follow John’s account, of Peter and John as they rush to the tomb. And John being younger, remember, runs faster and gets there first. What are they doing? They’re running to verify Mary Magdalene’s story that somebody has stolen His body. So, in the dawn, the women are already approaching the tomb, the men are still a couple of miles away headed in that

direction.

So, let's go back to the tomb and pick it up with the women. Verse 3, "When they entered, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus." Unlike the impulsive Mary Magdalene who drew a conclusion without looking, they go into the tomb. All the natural assumptions would be that Mary Magdalene was correct: somebody had to steal the body because dead people don't go someplace. Dead people don't get up and walk out of a tomb, they have to be taken out. So, her conclusion is a very reasonable conclusion. But there's just a beautiful little indication by Luke here that I love. "When they entered, they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus." They could have said the body of Jesus. Lord Jesus, that is not a title used in the description of the death and burial of Jesus, but it's a title of His by way of resurrection. God raised Him from the dead and declared Him Lord. In fact, that is exactly what Peter said on Pentecost, "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ." He is now the Lord. "He has now been given the name which is above every name, the name Lord, that at that name every knee should bow."

What do we need to draw from this? The tomb is empty. The tomb is empty. The soldiers know it's empty. That's why they left. If the body was still there, they would still be guarding it. They're not there; they're not in the scene. They never interact with the women at all. The women never see them. They're gone. Why? Cause there's nobody there. Clearly the women look and find no one there. Amazing, because He was stoned in, sealed in, guarded so that there was no way that anybody could come and remove the body, yet it's gone. Clearly, the followers of Jesus didn't steal it because their assumption was somebody else stole it. They didn't expect the resurrection.

Whatever did happen to the body of Jesus no one saw; soldiers didn't see it. They were hit with a divine anesthetic, the blazing appearance of an angel in an earthquake. It wasn't the followers of Jesus who came and stole the body, they knew that. Soldiers knew that. They knew something very powerful, very unnatural had happened.

So, let's pick up what they said. Go back to Matthew 28. When they finally got to the Jewish leaders to try to explain. Verse 11, "While they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city, reported to the chief priests all that had happened." Just exactly what did they say? Well they reported all that had happened. What would they then say? "Sir, there was this really, really severe earthquake, and then there was this blazing, flashing, dazzling being who rolled the stone away. And then we were knocked out. And when we came to, the body was gone." That's what they said because that's what happened. Verse 12, "And when they had assembled with the elders and counseled together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers." Really? You reward them for that? Oh, they said to them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.'" Huh, they're not likely to say that because a Roman soldier who slept on his guard would be more than court marshaled; he could even be executed. But you're to lie. And if it comes to the governor's ears, Pilate, who was the commander in Chief of all soldiers, they knew they would be

in trouble. The Jewish leaders say, “We’ll win him over and keep you out of trouble. We’ll save your hide.”

And they took the money and did as they had been instructed, and this story was widely spread among the Jews and is to this day, to the day that Matthew is writing, that is still the story the disciples came and stole the body. The Roman soldiers knew it was a lie; they were bribed. The Jews knew it was a lie; they paid the bribe. The tomb was empty. There was no explanation other than the soldiers’ experience and they were paid off not to tell the truth.

If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, it would have been an easy thing for the Jews to prove. Just bring out His body. But they couldn’t, so they entangled themselves in this hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain away the empty tomb. And they came up with a lie, a huge lie to cover the truth. They never, no Jewish leaders, no Jewish people ever denied the tomb was empty. They just invented the lie that the disciples had stolen it, a lie that is impossible because the disciples, the women, the men had no expectation that Jesus would rise.

It’s important, folks, to understand the tomb is empty. There is no explanation for that on a human level. The only explanation is the text of Scripture: an angel came, rolled the stone away and Christ, who promised to rise, was alive and walked out. And by the way, the empty tomb alone was enough to convince John. He was the only one really convinced. According to John 20 verses 6 to 8, “John saw the empty tomb, saw the clothes lying there, and believed.” Nobody else did.

The women are in shock. The first important testimony is that that tomb was empty. Now, some have said, “Well, they went to the wrong tomb.” No, they didn’t go to the wrong tomb, they knew the tomb to go to cause they had been there on Friday night. They knew the tomb. And the Jews knew the tomb because that’s the tomb which they sealed and guarded. And the tomb was empty, and there’s no way the disciples stole His body. What fool would steal a body and then die as a martyr for a hoax?

The second element of this story that is so important is the angelic messenger. The angelic messengers, verses 4 through 7. The women are in shock because the body is gone. They’re about to be terrified, verse 4, and it happened while they were perplexed about this. “Behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling apparel, like the angel who had come in the darkness when the soldiers were still there and removed the stone,” same dazzling appearance. And as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and the third day rise again.” The first great evidence of the resurrection is the empty tomb.

Listen, the second great evidence of the resurrection is divine revelation. They are perplexed, back to verse 4, they are perplexed, no idea what occurred. The whole ordeal, the trial, the cross, the whole thing is surreal, if not outright bizarre. As they stand in the dawning sunlight and shadows, they're jolted into the most frightening scene they have ever experienced in their entire lives. There's no reason to assume that any of these women had seen angels, apart from the mother of our Lord. Two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing. John describes them as two angels. Angels appear often in human form. Mark describes one of them as a young man, so they are angels, spiritual beings who can take on human form and take on the form of a young man. That would be a consistent thing for an angel to do because angels don't age.

Clearly there are two of them, perhaps because of Deuteronomy 19:15, two witnesses to validate anything. However, Matthew and Mark speak only of one who speaks. Matthew and Mark say, "An angel spoke. An angel spoke." They don't refer to two, simply identifying the fact that there were two angels but they spoke one at a time. They spoke separately, and I am sure they probably spoke repeatedly, because you have a little bit of variation of what they say. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give you a little variation on what they actually said which would indicate to me that it was a very somewhat supernatural conversation, that they would say something and the women would be hard pressed to process that. And one at a time, not in unison, they would speak. And so Matthew and Mark tell us what the individual angels said, but we know from John and Luke there were two of them.

They had a conversation with angels for the first time in their lives, trying to sort it out. There again is that wonderful, natural sense of not trying to artificially tie these things together. They said the same thing a little different ways, no doubt several times. At first, when the women saw them, verse 4, it says they stood near them. Later, John says when Mary Magdalene came back at a later time she comes back, they were sitting. There's no contradiction there. This again is a very kind of natural scene. Now, they are standing and later they're sitting at the place where Jesus had been lain inside the tomb. They're wearing these dazzling clothes, like the dazzling appearance of Jesus in the transfiguration, the blazing appearance of the saints in Revelation 19 who returned with something of the glory, the Shekhinah reflection of heaven itself. This is clearly indicating that these are divine messengers. There's no other explanation. They're not just young men. They're not just angels who are men, and you can't tell that they are really angels. They are angels who appear in the form of young men but who are dazzling, blazing, brilliant, shining beings that are obviously heavenly, and the result is predictable, as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, they are terrified, *emphobos*, an emphatic form of the word *phobos*, from which you get phobia, fear, panic, terror sets in.

And even after the message is given by the angels, their terror is not really mitigated because Mark 16:8 says that after they heard the message, they went out, fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. I mean, this is a kind of an Isaiah experience, you know, where he collapses in on himself in chapter 6. This is kind of

an Ezekiel experience where he goes in to one of those spiritual comas when in the presence of angels. This is a John experience when he falls over dead in Revelation 1 in the vision of the glorified Son. This is an experience like the transfiguration. They're absolutely terrified, and they run in astonishment.

By the way, as they run, as they head out, starts to dawn on them. Matthew 28:8, "And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy." They start to process this. The tomb is empty. We just had a conversation with angels. And as the fear fades, the joy takes over as they head to the apostles who are there, minus Peter and John who are on the way. And by the time they get there, they're just blabbering their heads off to tell those apostles what has happened, but it starts out terrifying.

They bow their faces to the ground; that's the recognition of holy presence, that kind of bowing. They know they're in the presence of angels, and angels are associated among the Jews with the giving of the Law, right? "The Law came by angels." This is so very, very important because the angels speak. And this, my dear friends, is divine revelation from God, personal testimony from God through His angels as to the reality of the resurrection. "The men said to them," in verse 5, "'Why do you seek the living one among the dead?'" A kind of mild rebuke. The living One, who is the resurrection and the life who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The one Romans 6:9 says whom death could not master, whom death could not hold. This, by the way, is the first announcement that Jesus is alive. Why are you seeking the living One? The One who is life, the One who cannot die, the One death cannot hold among the dead. And then the angels get very specific. Verse 6, "He is not here," why? "But He has risen," passive, He has been raised, *gerth*. He has been raised. This is the only possible explanation for the empty tomb, and it is the testimony of God's holy messengers. It is inerrant, it is authoritative, it is irrefutable, and it is a fulfillment of the promise. And they remind them of that, remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee saying that Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and the third die He rise again. Three-fold, delivered, crucified, risen.

He told you, He told you way back in Galilee. This is nothing new. This is a reminder. This is why there's a mild rebuke. Why do you seek the living One among the dead? It's a mild rebuke. He's been saying this for a long time. If you go back in to Luke 9 when He's still in Galilee and verse 22, He warns them and says, "Son of Man must suffer many things. Be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." He told them that. He reiterated again in chapter 9 verse 43, "They were all amazed at the greatness of God, while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, 'Let these words sink in to your ears, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.'" But they didn't understand this statement. It was concealed from them so they might not conceive it and they were afraid to ask Him about it. Even though He said it. And by the way, He repeats it and repeats it and repeats it. He makes the same promise several times recorded in the book of Matthew, several times recorded in the book of Mark. Another time in the 18th chapter of Luke. This is what's going to happen. And it

started all the way back in Galilee; don't you remember that He's going to be delivered? He's going to be crucified? And He's going to be raised? Delivered, crucified and raised.

So, the evidence concerning the resurrection is the empty tomb, and there is no other explanation for the empty tomb than a resurrection. The Jews didn't steal His body. The Romans didn't steal His body. The Apostles didn't steal His body. The women didn't steal His body. His enemies had no reason to steal His body and fabricate a resurrection. His friends didn't even believe in a resurrection, and nor would they steal His body, fabricate a false resurrection and then go out and die as martyrs for a phony. The angels give the only possible explanation: He's not here because He's risen.

So, my dear friends, you have, as we close, the first two great proofs of the resurrection: one, an empty tomb; two, divine revelation. And you start in the book of Acts and the first sermon, "God raised Him from the dead." You come to the book of Romans, "God raised Him from the dead." You come to 1 Corinthians 15, "God raised Him from the dead." You come to Ephesians 1, "God raised Him from the dead." You come to Colossians, "God raised Him from the dead." You come to revelation 1, "He has the power of death." This is the ongoing testimony of Scripture, God's holy Word, that Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God. So, to deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is one, to deny the reality of historical evidence; and two, to deny the Word of God. And as I said, Hebrews 2:2 says, "The Law came by angels," they were used to having angels deliver the revelation of God. The issue of those who reject the resurrection is not a lack of evidence; it's a love of sin and a hardness of heart. The demon doctrines that deny Christ's resurrection are driven by wickedness. People are unwilling to accept the necessary and inescapable consequences of the resurrection, namely that Jesus is therefore Lord.

If you believe in the resurrection, Jesus is therefore Lord. If you don't want Jesus as Lord, then you better deny the resurrection. If there is a resurrection, Jesus is Lord and the Bible is true. And every man is therefore accountable to His lordship. The single greatest evidence of the resurrection, listen to me, is the testimony of God, given by angels from His presence and reiterated by the Spirit of God inspiring the writers of the New Testament. And I will say what Geldenhuys said, and it's wonderfully said, "If Jesus hadn't risen, the New Testament would never have been written." Never. "For who would have taken to write the biography of anyone who had laid tremendous claim to Messiahship and divinity, but whose career terminated inn a shameful death? But God be praised, Jesus did arise, and that is why the group of men who wrote the books of the New Testament took up their pens with such enthusiasm and holy conviction. And throughout their writings we perceived the clear note of their firm conviction that Jesus Christ, who had died, rose again from the dead and was invested with divine power and glory."

Now, that's all we can do today. We've still got the women in terror. They're going to have to stay that way for a week. The best is yet to come. Father, thank You for our time this morning in Your Word. So precious, so rich. Fill our hearts with joy in believing as Scripture says. Thank You for giving us life

through Your resurrection. Now Lord, draw to Yourself those who need to believe and be saved from sin, and death, and hell, and anticipate the glorious resurrection that awaits those who love Christ. Work Your work in every heart. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

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