

April 17, 2022

Luke 24:1-12

# “The Defeat of Death!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In *Meditations on the Gospels*, and within a section called *According to St. Luke*, the author meditates on our gospel lesson for this morning and makes the following observations:

We will probably never be able to fully comprehend the utter despair of the hours between Good Friday and Easter Sunday for the disciples of Christ. Our faith rests on the knowledge of centuries. We know that the death of Jesus did not end - did not even interrupt His work, but was the direct road to victory and glory. The eyewitnesses did not know that. Yes, they could have known and should have known because Jesus had told them. But the fact is, they did not know.

How about you? What do you know? “And they [the women] found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.” They found the stone. They did not find the body. They were perplexed. But while the women were initially perplexed, they would come to understand that what they were witnessing was **The Defeat of Death!** Two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. They said to the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you? ... And they remembered his [Jesus’] words.”

Today is the high point of what began on Good Friday and is celebrated by every believer in Jesus throughout the world. Today we rejoice in the historical fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Through the eye witness account of the women at the tomb we behold **The Defeat of Death** through their eyes. No matter how bad things might be today or tomorrow we have the hope of being with the Lord God forever!

But can we just pause and think about that for just a moment? Like any special occasion in the church year there is often an expectation that the preacher will preach the best sermon of his life. He will have a sermon of great power. He will pull out all the stops to make it captivating to those who have decided to attend church. But I ask you - Is there anything that can be more powerful or captivating than simply saying and taking to heart that he who was dead and buried is now alive and rules the universe? Is there anything that can somehow top the words of the men in dazzling apparel and the specter of an empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus? The eye witness testimony of the women should cause the whole world to stop and think hard about what is written - what happened - and what it ultimately means! **The Defeat of Death!**

We certainly need to hear that when considering how much we have been hearing about the possibility of dying since the pandemic started in December of 2019. No doubt the intensity of the thought from one person to another varies in differing degrees. It gets real when you come close to death or you know someone who died. When you don't have it you are afraid of getting it. When you get it your mind wonders if you are one of those who might die. When symptoms grow worse you might panic.

This kind of thing can actually be cleansing when it compels us to examine our faith in Jesus by racing to the facts and promises of Scripture. However, when the prospect of death doesn't lead us to Jesus

and the facts and promises of God's Word it can create a living hell in us - a raging turmoil. We are all going to die from something. Paul makes it perfectly clear: "the wages of sin is death ... (Rom. 6:23). And if death is the final word that is used to summarize up our life today then what will the word be when we meet God? Paul says in the same verse: "... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Beautiful words. May we take them to heart so that all despair may be pushed back.

Is it that people today do not want to believe the eye witness testimony of women? Doesn't Paul say that he appeared to the apostles and on one occasion 500 of the brothers all at the same time? People don't want to believe it since they love darkness instead of the light because their desires and deeds are evil. If Christ has not been raised from the dead then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain. We are people to be most pitied. Yet Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Yes! For all of us who know and believe in Jesus, the empty tomb is truly **the defeat of death** for us! And for all those who do not believe, it is for them a resurrection unto eternal death in hell.

Therefore, it is good on this Easter morning that we pause and ponder where we stand in our relationship to Jesus. In the face of death and eternity, we are invited to consider Jesus and his promises as they stand in the Holy Scripture. What do we need to know and believe to participate with Jesus in **the defeat of death**? This is what we are to believe. The Triune God must rescue us from our evil desires and deeds by showing us how filthy they are and where our filth finally takes us. He must bring about in us the death of ourselves that we might be truly filled with his righteousness and salvation. We must go to the cross to see that the Son of God was made flesh to become sin for us, to suffer our sufferings, to experience our hell, to die our death, and to rise from the dead so that believing in him we might not perish but have eternal life. And Jesus says in John 6:40, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Paul writes in Romans 4:25 that Christ "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." There are moments when we find ourselves looking so deeply at our trespasses that we begin to see nothing but them and the death and punishment they bring. There is terror and despair. The consideration of nothing but sin and punishment in the solitude of a moment or at the prospect of dying will destroy us. But in Romans 4:25, Paul turns our eyes away from them and directs our focus to Christ. We are invited to see what our trespasses have done to Jesus. On Good Friday, they nailed him to the cross and killed him instead of us. It was the will of the Lord to crush him. It was the will of the Lord to put him to grief instead of us.

But where is our Savior having now been crushed for our trespasses? What shall become of him in our death and grave? What now? God appears and delivers Christ and makes him alive. Not only does he raise him from the dead but takes him to heaven to rule for our salvation. What then has become of our trespasses? They have been conquered by Jesus and are forgiven. Since Christ has taken our sins upon himself and has died for them they can no longer harm us. Christ is too strong for them. He breaks out of the tomb on Easter morning and makes it clear that they are entirely vanquished and we are forgiven.

If we cling to this, then we are able to push back a guilty conscience. We are able to even have a cheerful conscience in the face of death and the grave. In Christ we can defy death and hell. While we may physically die as Jesus did, yet shall we live for Jesus is the resurrection and the life and whoever believes in him will never die. In Christ we are able to have a clear conscience so that we may be joyful and happy and no longer afraid of the tyrant called death and hell. To paraphrase Luther: “Christ has taken our sins away and has made them his own. Because they cannot remain upon him: what then becomes of them? They must disappear and be destroyed. This then is the effect of faith. We who believe that Christ has taken away our sin, are now without sin like Christ himself and they can no longer harm us.”

Christ delivered up for our trespasses and Christ raised for our justification is **The Defeat of Death!** And it is ours by grace through faith. This is the very heart of Easter and what makes it powerful. When you see your sin resting on Jesus and see it overcome by his resurrection from the dead, then you are truly in the spirit of Easter. Easter is in you! And when Easter is in you ... like the women at the empty tomb you remember Jesus’ words and tell it to anyone who might listen to you. Some will think that what you say is an idle tale - a fantasy. Maybe they will believe later. Some will never believe. And others may stop by the empty tomb by reading Scripture and marveling at what has happened.

As for you and me, I pray that we are able to know and believe that the fact of the empty tomb has dealt a mortal blow to death. For us - Christ the life of all the living! Christ the death of death our foe! “Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto Thee (LSB 420)!”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott