

# **Sermon: Unbelievable**

**Text: Luke 24:1-12**

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**Introduction:** Just like last week's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, all four gospels record their perspective of the day we call Easter or Resurrection Sunday. Every writer has his unique perspective.

Let's listen to what Luke has recorded for us: [Luke 24:1-12 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>1</sup>On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup>While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup>He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup>'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words. <sup>9</sup>When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup>It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup>But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup>Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Months ago as I was preparing ideas for Lenten messages on the cross I looked ahead to Luke's account of the resurrection and for me one word came to mind for this Easter's sermon: "Unbelievable."

Have you ever received news that was simply beyond your imagination? It would be like the Cubs winning the World Series, Kentucky winning the national championship in football, or me ever getting on Dancing with the Stars.

Maybe the news of Easter was simply too overwhelming for them to believe. Many years ago, a friend of Thomas Long's told him that his young son was a great fan of both Captain Kangaroo and Mister Rogers. The boy faithfully watched both of their television shows, and one day it was announced that Mister Rogers would be paying a visit to the Captain Kangaroo show. The boy was ecstatic. Both of his heroes, together on the same show! Every morning the boy would ask, "Is it today that Mister Rogers will be on Captain Kangaroo?"

Finally the great day arrived, and the whole family gathered around the television. There they were, Mister Rogers and Captain Kangaroo together. The boy watched for a minute, but then, surprisingly, got up and wandered from the room.

Puzzled, his father followed him and asked, “What is it, son? Is anything wrong?”

“It’s too good,” the boy replied. “It’s just too good.”(Illustration by Thomas G. Long from his sermon: *Empty Tomb, Empty Talk*)

The whole past week of Jesus’ life had been very surprising: from the details of his coming to Jerusalem, to how the crowd had turned on him. He had went from King to condemned prisoner in less than a week. Jesus died on the cross that dark Friday and with his death the hopes and dreams of his followers.

This morning, I want to walk through these twelve verses in Luke and share seven (7) impressions that I think most people would find “unbelievable.”

After everything that Jesus had endured in his last week before the cross, it is unbelievable to me that:

**I. People Still Cared (v. 1).** -After all that was no way to treat a real Messiah.

There is information found elsewhere in the Gospels that tells us: as Jesus died, two men stepped up to care for the proper handling of his body. Joseph of Arimathea donated a never-before-used tomb, got permission from Pilate to take Jesus’ body, and with the help of Nicodemus wrapped it in linen and put Jesus in the tomb ([Mark 15:42-47](#); [Matthew 27:57-61](#); [Luke 23:50-53](#); [John 19:38-42](#)).

Both of these prominent men most certainly were putting their lives and positions in jeopardy. Chrysostom said, “Joseph of Arimathea’s concealed discipleship became revealed in his courageous act of devotion.” - *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament II, Mark, p. 237

Discipleship is not discovered in verbal confession, but by deeds of devotion.

The women mentioned throughout the Gospels, but especially prevalent in Luke’s account, were last at the cross and first at the tomb. These were the disciples who did not betray him or deny him and certainly did not desert Jesus while he was in agony on the cross. And they still cared.

As soon as it was legal and safe to travel after Sabbath the women started out to the tomb to attend further to Jesus’ burial. All the writers say it was very early in the morning. They had passed the Sabbath waiting, and now they could not delay going anymore.

After the tomb had been sealed with the body of Jesus in it, it must have seemed unbelievable that:

## **II. The Stone Was Moved (v. 2).**

Some have estimated this stone could have been quite heavy, as much as 3-4 thousand pounds. Mark describes it as very large (16:4). If it was rolled down an incline, it would have been very difficult to roll back uphill. Some stones used to cover the openings of graves during this period were actually rectangular.

It is Mark who tells us:

**Mark 16:2-3 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup>and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

Sometimes when you want to do something very badly you don’t even think about how.

Yet the women did not need to worry about the stone. God had taken it out of the way. In John’s account of that morning (20:1) he uses a Greek word (αρω) that indicates that the stone was “lifted out of the groove in which it ran.” - Rienecker, p. 260, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*.

**Illus.** Have you ever seen the results of a tornado? Huge trees, cars, houses are no match for the power. Certainly removing a stone was no big deal for God.

The stone was taken away not for Jesus’ benefit because he was not restricted in anyway. He would appear bodily in a locked room later. No, the stone was taken away for the witnesses who would come to discover the tomb was empty.

The stone was not removed so Jesus could rise from the dead, but that through faith we might follow Him to the Father someday.

After all the precautions that had been taken with the Roman guards, it must have been unbelievable that:

## **III. Jesus Was Gone (v. 3)!**

All kinds of things must have rushed through the mind at this point. Someone had taken him they thought. At least that is how John saw it.

**John 20:2 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>So she (*Mary Magdalene*) came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

Roman guards had been assigned the task of guarding against this very thing happening. Matthew tells us:

**Matthew 28:11-15 (NIV)** <sup>11</sup>While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. <sup>12</sup>When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup>telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ <sup>14</sup>If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” <sup>15</sup>So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Why wouldn't the Roman soldiers have gone to their commander? Because they may have paid with their lives for that kind of mistake.

Whatever the problem was, the women knew that the body of Jesus was gone and they were unable to do what they had come to do.

When the tomb was found opened, it must have been unbelievable that:

#### **IV. Two Men Were in the Tomb (vv. 4-5).**

Not only was Jesus' body gone, there were two men there. Luke says:

**Luke 24:4 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

This is bible talk for angels. And if the situation wasn't disturbing enough, these two angels appeared with them “suddenly.”

And I have to tell you, just like any other encounter with one of God's messengers, it was a bit unnerving. The women were afraid.

The angels actually chastise them a little bit in that they seem slow in understanding what has really happened. Jesus was alive!

After all the teaching and preparation Jesus had done for this time, it seems to be unbelievable that:

#### **V. His Followers Had Forgotten His Prophecy (vv. 6-8).**

Jesus on more than one occasion had indicated both the manner in which he would die and the way he would overcome death on the third day by rising from the dead.

These women had been in Galilee with the Master and had certainly heard him say even recently:

**Matthew 20:18-19 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup>and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

We need to be careful that we also remember Jesus’ words, and live our lives accordingly. When Jesus comes again there will be consequences.

**Matthew 25:31-33 (NIV)** <sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.       You do not want to be on his left!

In light of the way women were generally viewed in first-century Jewish culture, it is nearly unbelievable that:

## **VI. Women Were the First Witnesses of the Resurrection (vv. 9-10).**

No one would fabricate a story like this. As Jesus was being led away to his crucifixion it is the women who follow and are full of sorrow (**Luke 23:27**). It is predominantly women who stay at the cross (**Luke 23:49**). The women are along with Joseph of Arimathea to see where Jesus is entombed (**Luke 23:56**). The women had been with Jesus all along. On the first day of the week it is the women who are the first witnesses. Luke makes it clear to his readers: “the women are not errand runners for disciples; they are disciples.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 283

Even though the culture did not generally hold women in high regard, Jesus did.

Have you ever noticed that it depends on whom is speaking whether or not what is said is believable (even if it is the same thing being said).

An Illustration from *Empty Tomb, Empty Talk* by Thomas G. Long:

On a Sunday morning in a certain city church, the Gospel lesson had been read and the minister was about to begin the sermon. Suddenly a stranger seated in the balcony stood up and interrupted the service. “I have a word from the Lord!” he shouted. Heads whipped around, and ushers bounded up the balcony stairs like gazelles. They managed to escort the man into the street before he could elaborate further on just what “word” he had been given.

Week after week, preachers in countless pulpits stand up and say, in effect, the same thing as the man in the balcony: “I have a word from the Lord!” But no alarms sound, no one is astonished and no apprehensive ushers race forward to muscle the preacher into the street. If a sudden unexpected shout erupts from the balcony, the place gets set on edge, but when a preacher starts into the Gospel word for the day, people crease their bulletins and settle in. No wonder some clergy, in hopes of putting a little electricity into the sermon event, have taken to wandering the aisles Oprah-like with handheld mikes.

It is somewhat reassuring to realize that the first Christian sermon ever preached did not register high on the Richter scale either. When the women came back from the cemetery on Easter morning, they brought with them word of an empty tomb and astonishing news: “He is not here but has risen!” All Christian preaching begins here, and all Christian sermons are reverberations of this Easter news, first announced by the women to the apostles.

After all the promises of loyalty, even if it meant their death, they said, it seems unbelievable that:

## VII. The Eleven Would Not Believe the Good News (vv. 11-12).

I don't think it was because the witnesses were women even though the *Mishna* reads “From women let not evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex.” I believe that means that women were known to speak before they thought.”

It certainly could be that the news of Jesus' resurrection was just so incomprehensible, so incredulous that they could not allow their minds to go there.

**Luke 24:11 (NIV)** <sup>11</sup>But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

The word translated “nonsense” (ἄηρος) was “used in medical language of the wild talk of the sick during delirium.” - Rienecker, p. 214 - maybe, too, a little like what anesthesia will sometimes produce in the way of “silly talk.”

So why did Peter run to the tomb? And even that experience leaves him “wondering” and certainly still not sure. It takes courage to develop faith. It takes the Holy Spirit, an encounter with Jesus, for the Eleven (v. 9) to actually become apostles (v. 10).

These faithful women who followed Jesus to the cross and then to the tomb to see the evidence of a risen Savior were now planting seeds of doubt about the impossibility of a resurrection. These seeds would grow, and on Pentecost the Eleven become truly *apostles* and the word goes out from Jerusalem: **He is risen!**

**If we dare to believe what billions have believed since the resurrection, we will join them in being witnesses.**

**Conclusion:** The modern world is probably even more skeptical than those first century witnesses of any talk of resurrection. Yet, the alternatives make no sense at all. The resurrection was not created by the church; rather, the church was created by the resurrection.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 606

**Jesus’ resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Even though we may die someday, we have faith that we too will rise again when Jesus comes for His own. My friends, for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, death is not the end. The empty grave that we encounter gives us reason to believe that death is merely a transition.**

**“As the biblical alternative to both reincarnation and no resurrection, we must realize we are accountable to God for what we do in life. There are no reruns, nor is there one life and then nothing. Each one of us should therefore wrestle with the reality of standing before God.” - Darrell Bock, *Luke*, p. 610**

**I agree with what Long suggests in his sermon: “Perhaps this Easter the preacher should climb not into the pulpit but into the balcony to say, “I have a word from the Lord!” Maybe this time it will be the congregation that heads into the street — sent with good news to the ends of the earth.”**