

How Did Death Die?

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

My name is Carrie Moulton and I'm a member of the Welcome Team and a scripture reader. And the Gospel lesson for today is a reading for the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 24, verses 1 through 35.

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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.

[1 : 18] But the men said to them, Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee.

The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.

Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

[2 : 27] As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up. And walked along with them. But they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along?

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

What things, he asked. About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed, before God and all the people.

The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but they didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.

[3 : 37] Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But they did not see Jesus. He said to them, how foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, stay with us, for it is nearly evening.

The day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

[4 : 45] They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, it is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Happy Easter, Christ Church. It's so good to see you all this morning. And for those of you who are guests with us today, maybe you came with a friend or Googled church near me.

We are delighted that you're here. My name is Jonathan. I'm one of the other pastors here. And this is such a rich chapter of scripture.

In fact, we didn't even read the whole chapter. We're going to read the rest and talk about the rest next week. But there's so much here today. We're just going to dive straight in. And we're going to talk today about three headings.

[5 : 49] We're just going to explore this story under three headings. And we're going to talk about wondering minds. Wondering minds, burning hearts, and opening eyes.

Those are three things that are happening in this story. Wondering minds, burning hearts, and opening eyes. And I just want to let you know, give you a heads up that my last point is going to be much shorter than my first two points.

So if you find yourself getting nervous, feeling a little anxious, just know I probably want to get to the Easter reception more than you do. So we're going to make it happen. All right? But we're going to talk first about wondering minds.

Luke, he recounts the details of this first Easter morning. And in doing so, in verse 10, he names these female disciples of Jesus. Mary, Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the other women.

And he says that they took spices to the tomb. Why did they do that? Well, they wanted to honor Jesus one last time by embalming his corpse with these spices.

[6 : 56] And they were not thinking, hey, we've got the spices in case he's still dead. But let's hope that he's alive again and we can all sing the Hallelujah Chorus. Right? They knew what we know, which is that dead bodies stay dead.

And this is not a princess bride situation. If you grew up in that movie where Jesus is mostly dead but a little bit alive. Right? The Romans were masters at crucifixion.

Jesus is all dead. And these women were not at all prepared for what they would find. When they arrived at the tomb, they had an incredible shock. And they're asking themselves, like, who rolled away this massive stone?

What happened to the Roman guard that was here guarding this place? And why is Jesus' body not inside the tomb? And it says in verse 4 that they were wondering.

Their minds were wondering. They were perplexed. They were bewildered. And maybe that's how you feel today. You're wondering. Well, suddenly, just like in the Christmas story with the angels that come to those shepherds in the field of Bethlehem, these heavenly, angelic beings, these messengers from God, they come and announce this crazy, breaking news that Jesus is living.

[8 : 13] And here's what they say in verse 5. They say, Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee, the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.

The message from God to these women is that Jesus is passed from the realm of the dead, from the realm of the dying where we all exist. And he's gone through death, out the other side, into the life of the age to come.

And there he is the living one in this new resurrected glorious body as the first fruits of God's new creation.

And some of us might read this story and say, Ah, I see what's going on. Jesus is metaphorically living. Jesus is spiritually risen. That this is a wonderful mythic symbol.

That good triumphs over evil. And that life continues in the face of death. And that as dark as things get, there's always the dawn. No matter how bad life is, we can always have hope.

[9 : 24] And so the question is, is this a spiritual metaphor? Is this a legend that never happened? And the angels there, they say, No. Jesus told you ahead of time that he would be raised from the dead, physically, bodily, in the space-time matter universe.

And some of you say, Well, wait a minute. I'm not so sure that I can believe all of this. I mean, maybe these women, they're so exhausted. They're so grieving.

They've got this unprocessed trauma from having witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. Maybe they're hallucinating. Maybe they're imagining things. And if you think that, you're actually not the first to doubt and to dismiss their story.

In fact, in verse 9, it says, When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. And then in verse 11, it says, But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

If the resurrection of Jesus seems like nonsense to you, if it seems like absolute rubbish, you are in really good company. Because it seemed that way to all the apostles as well.

[10 : 34] None of them believed it. Peter, James, John, all of Jesus' male disciples were skeptics. They said, This is absurd. This is ridiculous.

This is irrational. This is unbelievable. Well, what is it that caused them to change their minds? What convinced them to go out and leave their homes eventually and give their lives and to even die for this message that Jesus had been raised to the life of the age to come with a new body?

Why would they die for a lie? Why would they die for a legend that they made up? I mean, what is it that convinced them this was true? And if you notice in verse 12, it says that Peter, however, he got up and he ran to the tomb, bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away wondering, there's that word again, he was wondering to himself what had happened.

See, Peter was intellectually open-minded and curious enough to go and examine the evidence for himself. It was absolutely essential that Peter heard that eyewitness testimony from the women, but he was not content with their conclusions, and so he wanted to personally and directly analyze the data and test and verify their hypothesis.

And so it was essential that Peter would go to see the empty tomb and the grave clothes. And it's interesting that Luke emphasizes this. He says that Peter bent down to look inside the empty tomb, and he, quote, saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and this is what seems to be the thing that causes Peter to wonder in his mind what has just happened.

[12 : 22] His mind is wondering, it's marveling, it's amazed. Why is that? Well, on Good Friday, Jesus' dead body had been wrapped in linen cloth with about 75 pounds worth of spices.

And those liquid spices, they settled and they solidified like a cocoon around the shape of Jesus' body. And the only way, humanly speaking, that a body could be removed from such encrusted burial wrappings would be by cutting those strips of linen cloth from end to end and laying back each side so that you could pull the body out of the grave clothes.

And when Peter and these women and other disciples came and they saw these strips of linen uncut and undisturbed, just as they had been when the body of Jesus lay within them, but the grave clothes were empty in the shape of Jesus' body, well, they were wondering.

Jesus' resurrection body apparently passed through these grave clothes. And next week, we're going to talk about how, this is so totally bizarre, I get it.

We're going to talk next week about Jesus' body, right? This glorified, amazing, crazy body and all of its powers. But, you know, Peter, at this point, he's heard the eyewitness testimony.

[13 : 50] He's heard about the message that God had sent. He's seen the empty tomb. He's seen those grave clothes. But that was not enough for Peter to go out and become a martyr for this message.

Peter's skepticism could only be dispelled with the indisputable evidence of seeing the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes. And that's what verse 34 tells us, that the Lord has risen and he appeared to Simon.

He appeared to Peter. Peter, along with many, many others, we're told in the New Testament, over 500 people. They saw the resurrected Jesus with their eyes.

They heard him with their ears. They touched him with their hands. And they could not unexperience that experience. And so for those of you who are here and this message of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, it just seems like nonsense to you.

We want you to know that you are so welcome here. Your questions are so welcome here that just like those women, their minds were wondering. And just like Peter, his mind was wondering what happened.

[14 : 55] And we're so glad that you would come and wonder about these things with us. And if you, like Peter, would like to channel that wondering of your mind, I would encourage you and invite you into a process of intellectual curiosity, a process of exploration.

If it were possible for us to build a time machine and to somehow go back and experience these things, this unique event for ourselves, if we could do that, I would be a very rich man if I could build such a time machine.

But since that's not possible to do for any period of historical inquiry, we can do this. A couple things for you.

If you're wondering in your mind, here's some things you can do. First of all, you can, if you've never read the primary sources, if you've never just sat down and read the eyewitness accounts of the people who saw Jesus, I would just say, what are you waiting for?

Go and listen to it. Go and examine the evidence for yourself. Go and see what it is that they claim to see and hear and touch.

[16 : 13] And ask yourself, why would they be making this up? Why would they die for this? The second thing you can do is exercise the tools of abductive reasoning.

This is what historians do. They use the tools of abductive reasoning and inference to the best explanation. And you can ask yourself the question, what hypothesis best explains all the historical data with the least amount of strain?

Right? What best explains this empty tomb and the eyewitness sightings of Jesus, the transformed lives and the martyrdoms of the disciples, the eyewitnesses? What best explains the sudden birth of the church?

What best explains this new and utterly distinct worldview that came into being overnight? What best explains the explosion of the Christian movement throughout the Roman Empire over the next three centuries in the face of intense persecution?

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, what alternative explanation that's plausibly historical can we give for these strange events?

[17 : 21] I want to just encourage you that if you engage all the various hypotheses that this was a fraud, this was a hallucination, this was a legend, this is a metaphor, I think you'll conclude, you can conclude with your wandering mind that the bodily resurrection of Jesus makes the best sense of all the data.

And the final thing I want to encourage you to do as you apply your wandering mind to examine all this evidence, I want you to consider the possibility that if Jesus died for you and if he's alive, then you can meet him.

You can actually discover him for yourself. You can discover the reality that we're talking about. You might find that as you examine the evidence, that actually someone is there examining you.

That someone is there eager to show himself to you. Someone is there who's wanting to enter into a loving relationship with you. And so that's my first point about wandering minds, okay?

But then I want to talk not just about wandering minds, I want to talk about burning hearts, burning hearts. Luke turns our attention to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

[18 : 39] It's about a seven-mile walk, two and a half miles to walk from Jerusalem back to their home in Emmaus. And in verse 17, he tells us that their faces are downcast, which means that their hearts are heavy and downcast.

And then when you look at the end of the story in verse 33, it says this. Verse 32, They asked each other, Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?

What caused this change? It says that they had downcast hearts, And then at the end, it says they had burning hearts. Jesus, as we know, he was crucified on Friday.

These Jews are there for the Passover, which lasted through the weekend. And now they're walking home, and this stranger walks up alongside them and says, What's up?

What's the latest? And they're amazed at his cluelessness, and so they begin to tell him about Jesus. And they say in verse 19, Remember when God redeemed Israel?

[20 : 08] Remember the Exodus? Remember when he brought about a great redemption for his people? We thought and we hoped that Jesus was going to be that person for us, that he was going to bring about deliverance for us.

But we're sad. We're downcast because we're living in a world without redemption. We're living in a world where no one's going to be delivered.

We're living in a world where death apparently has the last word, and there is no hope. They say our friends, they came and told us some strange things earlier today.

They went and visited the tomb of Jesus, and they said that it was empty, his body wasn't there, that he's alive. But that is absolutely nonsense. It's because crucified people stay dead.

Can you imagine this conversation? Can you imagine telling the resurrected Jesus everything he needs to know about Jesus? And Jesus begins to turn their downcast hearts into burning hearts.

[21 : 09] And here's what it says in verse 25. He said to them, How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. He tells these defeated friends that you are, in the Greek he says, You are a neity.

You are without mind. You are without understanding. He says, Because you're dull in your heads, and you're kind of slow and sad in your hearts, you're not grasping the truth.

You're not trusting the truth that God has given through his prophets. And how does Jesus change their downcast hearts into burning hearts? Well, he says in verse 26, He says, Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things, and then enter his glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. You know, it's amazing to me that the first thing that Jesus does after defeating death, the first thing he does after his resurrection, is he gives a fresh reading, a fresh exposition, a fresh interpretation of the Bible.

Can you imagine sitting in this master class with Jesus? Jesus. These downcast disciples, they'd been reading their Bible, but they'd been reading it through an interpretive grid that was causing them to miss its meaning.

[22 : 31] And so Jesus comes to them and he says, I have the golden key that can unlock the deepest meaning of God's word. He says to them, I have fresh new lenses for you that when you put them on, you will be able to see as you were meant to see with fresh eyes in a way that will turn your sad and downcast hearts into burning hearts.

And he says, let me unpack for you the truest truths of the universe from God himself. And Jesus says, look, when you read Moses, when you read the prophets, when you read the Psalms, when you read what we call the Old Testament, he says, I want you to look at what God is revealing about his Messiah, and I want you to look at what he's revealing about me.

And in verse 26, he says, did not the Messiah have to suffer, that is to be crucified, and did not the Messiah then have to enter into his glory, that is to be resurrected?

How does this question from Jesus put fire into the downcast hearts of his disciples and make them burn with zeal? Jesus begins to go through all the historical precedents, all of the prophetic promises, all the psalmist's prayers, and he shows his disciples a pattern that they just cannot see.

And I imagine he began at the beginning. He goes back to Genesis, right? And he takes them through Genesis 3.15. That great mother promise, that first announcement of the gospel that says that the offspring of the woman is going to come and be terribly wounded, but is going to crush the head of the serpent.

[24 : 11] That that great representative of the human race is going to come and he's going to suffer horribly, but he will trample on evil and he will triumph in glory.

And I imagine Jesus just begins there and he works them through the book of Genesis, and when he's done with that, he goes on into Exodus, and he says, you remember how Israel's sufferings increased in Egypt until it got to the screaming point?

And then redemption came, and then glory came, and he takes them through Exodus and on into Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, and he goes out into Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and he says, don't you remember that when Israel cried to the Lord and her sufferings, then God would raise up judges and kings to deliver his people?

And he goes on into the Psalms, I'm sure, and he talked about how God's king suffers terribly, how God's king is rejected by the nations, he's rejected by even his own people, and yet he cries out to God and God rescues him, God vindicates him, and then I'm sure Jesus went on into the prophets, he went to Isaiah, Isaiah chapters 40 to 66, and he said, look, look at the servant of Yahweh who suffers because he's taking on to himself all the sin and the punishment of other people, but then notice how he's glorified and he carries all of his beloved people to glory as their savior.

If we had all day today, it wouldn't be enough to explore this amazing question that Jesus asked in verse 26, was it not necessary, was it not a divine necessity that the Messiah must suffer these things and then enter his glory?

[26 : 01] Jesus is telling us that the scriptures come to their climax in the suffering and glory of God's Messiah. Now how might this Easter Sunday Bible study with the resurrected Jesus transform our downcast hearts into burning hearts?

How might this put fire in us and cause them to burn with zeal? I want to suggest three points of application. Number one, that we need to apply the Messiah scriptures to our lives.

The experience of the burning heart comes from the scriptures freshly read and properly interpreted. If one of the first things that the glorified and resurrected Messiah did when he stepped out of the tomb to begin his new creation was to open up the scriptures to teach us what should be one of the first things that we do when we step out of the bed to begin a new day.

The more we read, the more we understand the story and the scriptures about the Messiah, the more the resurrected Jesus will cause our downcast hearts to catch fire and begin to burn.

And if you don't have a scripture reading plan, I've printed a bunch of these for you. It's called the Essential 100 Plan. It takes you through 50 readings of the Old Testament, 50 readings of the New Testament.

[27 : 25] It's back there on the back table. It's also with the welcome gifts in our community hall. And I'd encourage you to begin a new day tomorrow reading the Messiah scriptures. The second application I would like to make is that we need to apply the Messiah's sufferings to our lives.

These downcast disciples, they thought that the suffering and crucified Messiah was the devastation of all hope for being redeemed and delivered by God. But Jesus says to them, no.

The suffering and crucifixion of the Messiah was a divine necessity. There was no other way for God to redeem you from your sin, for God to deliver you from death.

And you see, when God transformed that dead body of the Messiah, and He brought Him into the glory of a new and resurrected body, God was vindicating, God was validating all the claims that Jesus made for Himself about being the Messiah.

That on that Easter day, in that resurrection, God was giving His verdict on the Messiah's suffering. And the resurrection is God's way of saying to us that what the Messiah accomplished in His suffering on the cross was effective for you.

[28 : 48] That His atoning sacrifice for your sins in your place was utterly satisfactory to God. And that there's nothing more that needs to be done for you to be redeemed.

Right? The new glory of the resurrected Messiah shows us the sufficiency and the finality of Jesus' sufferings in our place. It shows us that the resurrection is actually not the reversal of a defeat.

The resurrection is the manifestation of a victory. And that vicarious and victorious suffering of the Messiah for you and in your place, that is what will change your downcast heart into a burning heart.

The third thing I think we need to do is to apply not just the Messiah's scriptures and not just the Messiah's sufferings, we need to apply the Messiah's glory to our lives.

I read a story this past week about an Old Testament scholar in Australia. His name was Frank Anderson and he died in 2020. And in his later years as he was getting physically run down and there was just not a lot of strength left in him, you would go and you would ask him, you'd say, Frank, how's it going?

[30 : 09] And Frank would respond and he would say, oh, I'm not suffering from anything a good resurrection can't fix. Don't you love that?

This Old Testament scholar Frank, he understood the pattern of the Messiah's scriptures scriptures and therefore he understood the pattern of the Messiah himself and therefore he understood the pattern of all who belong to the Messiah.

Friends, that pattern is first suffering then glory and we are living our lives between the completed resurrection of Jesus in the past and the coming resurrection of our bodies in the future and that means that we can have burning hearts now in the present because our God is planning to do for us what he did to our Messiah.

That is, our suffering will turn into glory. And let me just read to you a few words about this coming glory from the apostle Paul. He says in Philippians chapter 3, he says, we eagerly await a savior from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 14, he says, we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

[31 : 55] And then Paul says in Romans 8, he says, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you.

And so the question today is, friends, what kind of heart do you have? Do you have a downcast heart? Do you want a burning heart? Do you want a heart that's filled with the very spirit of the one who raised Christ from the dead?

Do you want a heart that's able to say, even in the midst of the most horrific suffering, oh, I'm not suffering from anything a good resurrection cannot fix.

You see, if our suffering Messiah has been glorified, if he's been raised from the dead, then this guarantees for us a hopeful and a joyful future in which God will raise all who belong to Jesus and he will, in fact, resurrect the whole material world.

And if this is our future, friends, everything is going to be okay. Everything that is sad is going to become untrue.

[33 : 11] All that is broken is going to be mended. All that is causing our hearts to be heavy and downcast, it's going to be put to rest.

Your life, like the Messiah's life, is not going to end in suffering. It's going to end in glory. And that is what turns a downcast heart into a burning heart.

So, wandering minds, burning hearts, and the last thing is opening eyes. And again, don't worry because this third point is much, much shorter than the first two points, okay?

Opening eyes. Jesus has just given the most mind-blowing Bible study in the history of the world. The downcast hearts of these disciples are changing from, into burning hearts and they say, Jesus, we don't want this to end.

We want this to keep going on and so they strongly urge him to stay. They say, stay with us. Please come. And eat with us. And how does Jesus respond when people plead to him and request of him, please, please give us more?

[34 : 25] It says that Jesus shared the table with these two travelers and in the same way that he shared that last supper with his disciples, right, when he took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread, it says that he took, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to them.

And when he shared this meal with them, what happens to their eyes? It says that their eyes are opened. It says that they, they begin to recognize the resurrected Jesus.

They're given a new understanding. And you see, this is a clue as to why we break the bread at this table every Sunday. because it's an opportunity for the resurrected Jesus to reveal himself to us in a fresh and deep way.

And it's an opportunity for us to experience the very presence and the power of the living one as the bread is broken. This table, I think, goes a long way to explain what it is about Christianity that grasps us and that holds us in the face of so much that is wrong with the world, so much that's wrong with the church, so much that's wrong with our very selves.

And I want you to think about this as we prepare to come to this table in just a moment. I want you to remember that first meal that's recorded for us in the Bible. You remember that first meal in the Bible? It says there in Genesis chapter 3 verse 6, the woman took some of the fruit and ate it.

[35 : 56] She gave it to her husband and he ate it and then the eyes of both of them were opened. And they knew that they were naked. This is the beginning of all of our woes.

This is the beginning of all the cursedness, all the heaviness that came upon our human race. Death itself can be traced all the way back to that meal and that moment of rebellion where the whole creation became subject to decay and futility and absolute sorrow and misery.

But now, here in this story is an echo of that story but in this story it's the meal, the first meal of the new creation where Jesus says in verse 30, it says he took the bread, he blessed it, he broke it, he gave it to them and the eyes of them were both, what?

Opened. But this time what did they see? This time they recognized Jesus. It says their eyes were opened and they knew Jesus.

You see, at this table and in this meal disciples for over 2,000 years, disciples around the world and every culture today have discovered that the long curse on the human race has in fact been broken and that death itself has been defeated and that bursting in upon this world of decay and absolute sorrow is God's new creation that's brimming with life, it's brimming with joy, it's brimming with power, it's brimming with new possibilities because Christ is risen from the dead.

[37 : 44] And so the question for us is as we come to this table are you hungry for all that? and do you want your eyes to be open to Jesus?

And even more than that are you ready to sit down and to eat and share this feast with the resurrected Jesus himself? I hope that you are.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.