

# The Proclamation of the Perplexed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now read from the New Testament from the Gospel according to Luke chapter 23, reading at verse 50 into chapter 24.

Gospel according to Luke chapter 23, reading at verse 50. And behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor, and he was a good man and a just.

The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them. He was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.

This man went unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in linen, laid it in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.

And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. And the women also which came with him from Galilee followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid.

[ 1 : 27 ] And they returned and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout. Behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

[ 2 : 51 ] And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, Which told these things unto the apostles.

And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, run unto the sepulcher, and stooping down, He beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, Wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Amen, and may God bless to us that reading from his truth. Let us further sing to God's praise from Psalm 119, At verse 129.

Psalm 119, verse 129. Thy statutes, Lord, are wonderful. My soul them keeps with care.

[ 4 : 10 ] The entrance of thy words gives light. Makes wise whose simple are. My mouth I have wide opened and panted earnestly, While after thy commandments I longed exceedingly.

Look on me, Lord, and merciful do thou unto me prove, As thou art wont to do, To those thy name who truly love.

Let us sing these verses. Thy statutes, Lord, are wonderful. Thy statutes are not wonderful.

My soul them keeps with care. The entrance of thy words gives light.

Makes wise whose simple are. By God's life I hope I open in, And panted earnestly, While after thy commandments, I longed exceedingly.

[ 5 : 51 ] I longed exceedingly. Look on me, Lord, and merciful do thou, And merciful do thou, And to me prove, As of all chry.

For thy love you have par there. Let us now turn to the Gospel according to Luke chapter 24.

I'm reading at the first verse. Luke chapter 24 at verse 1. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

The women came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared. So, in the beginning of this chapter, Luke writes about the first followers of the Lord, the first followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to the grave.

Tells us of their early morning visit to the tomb of Jesus. They were women, and some he names, others he just leaves unmentioned.

[ 7 : 55 ] They had a specific motive in coming early to the grave. They intended to anoint the body of the Lord.

That is highlighted for us by Luke. They brought the spices which they had prepared. And so, for a few moments, I'd like to set before you four thoughts regarding this early morning visit.

First, the perplexity of the women. Secondly, a phenomenal encounter. Thirdly, the place of the word.

And finally, the proclamation of the women. First then, the perplexity of the women.

These women, at least some of them, were among the last to leave the cross. They had seen Jesus condemned and crucified.

[ 9 : 04 ] They also witnessed a new addition to their number. One who came out of the darkness that prevailed at that time, and lovingly and carefully took down the lifeless body of Jesus from the cross for burial.

Luke states that he laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn and stolen, wherein never man before was laid. Matthew, in his account, tells us that Joseph, for that is the identity of this new addition to the group of followers, took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

And Luke tells us, in the end of chapter 23, how the women took careful note of the burial place, after which they returned home, to prepare spices required, as they sought, for a full and proper burial.

It was close to the Jewish Sabbath, which you may remember, is our Saturday. So they rested that day. And on the first day of the week, our Lord's Day, they came very early in the morning with their spices.

Mark tells us in his account that one of the topics of conversation that they spoke of on the way was their concern about the fact that none of them would be able to roll the stone away from the tomb.

[ 11 : 07 ] They were worried about that. How are we going to roll it away when we get there? They were saying to one another, who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?

It was cause for real concern. And you know, have there not been times in your own experience when you have been concerned about what might lie before you, what may be in front of you?

Perhaps you have prayed for the Lord to open up the way. Perhaps you have prayed that he might go before you as the breaker of your way.

Well, apparently, these women had not heard that the tomb had been sealed and a guard placed in front of the tomb. They were just concerned how they might roll or have the stone moved from the entrance to the tomb.

But when they arrived there, it was not as they thought. The great obstacle was removed. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

[ 12 : 32 ] And when they entered, there was no body. When they went in to the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And Luke tells us they were perplexed.

They were thrown into confusion. And you know, that's not the kind of thing that you would write if you were trying to fabricate an account of the resurrection.

Many people would have us believe that the resurrection never took place, that it's just a fabrication. You know, they didn't even remember what Jesus had taught them, that this would happen, that he would rise.

Their confusion leaves them perplexed. And when you remember to whom Luke initially writes this gospel narrative, then perhaps you will appreciate why he includes this piece of information.

Remember, Luke is writing initially to a man a man by the name of Theophilus who is not sure about the gospel message.

[ 14 : 00 ] A man whose name means God-friendly. But he is still unsure about the identity of Christ.

Still unsure about this person who has crossed the stage of life during these days. And Luke wants this man to have certainty with regard to the events that surround this person, Jesus Christ.

You remember what he says at the very outset of the gospel. seemed good to me also, having a perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order most excellent Theophilus, that you might know the certainty of those things wherein you have been instructed.

Here is a man obviously who had been taught the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, but who still hadn't grasped the identity and the importance and the place and the significance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Luke wants to reinforce the message so that this friend that he has comes to a better knowledge and understanding of who Jesus is.

[ 15 : 42 ] and in some ways this man needs to be thrown into confusion. His way of thinking about God and about Jesus of Nazareth needs to be turned upside down so that he comes to appreciate that there is something unique about Jesus, that Jesus is different.

He's not just a great teacher or he's not just a mere man. Theophilus needs to realize that something huge is happening here.

And for a moment these women are thrown into confusion. They are perplexed. That's the first point, the perplexity of the women.

And then secondly, a phenomenal encounter. Luke tells us how the women came face to face with two men in dazzling apparel.

They were frightened. It is accepted that these two men were angels. It's not every day that people come face to face with angels.

[ 16 : 59 ] and the women, they were awestruck. And you can understand how that came about. And by way of mild rebuke, the angels ask these women who are confused, who are perplexed, the angels ask them a very pointed, pertinent question.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? It's a very important question. At that time, these women thought of Jesus as dead.

They were filled with sadness. They were confused. Now, I don't want in any way to diminish the love, the affection and devotion of these women for Jesus.

It is very evident that they loved him deeply, that they had great affection and devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is also obvious from the information that is given to us that they had come to this place to anoint a dead body.

And the angels are telling them by way of this question that they are in the wrong place. The person whom they consider dead is not there. Hence the question, why look for the living among the dead?

[ 18 : 24 ] The way they thought of Jesus was not the way Jesus was. They expected to find the dead body of Jesus.

They assumed that death was the end of his earthly existence. And so I want to ask, is it possible that you are present this evening and you too are thinking of Jesus in a way in which he isn't?

You wouldn't be the first to think of Jesus in a way in which he is not. Let me ask another question.

Would it make a great difference to your life if Jesus were still dead? Think about that. Do you think of him merely as a great teacher?

Do you seek to follow his example? Are you one of those of whom it could be said that you look for the living among the dead?

[ 19 : 32 ] Reading the Bible, trying to follow Jesus' example. Do you remember what Jesus said to the Jews on one occasion? You know, these Jews, they weren't negligent of the scriptures.

They were diligent students of the scriptures. And Jesus acknowledges this. You search the scriptures. And you might say, well, what can be wrong with that?

Is it not a good practice? Of course, it was an excellent practice. But you see, the motivation for doing this was that they might be finally accepted by God.

And so Jesus says, because you think that in them you have eternal life. Jesus is drawing attention to this fact that there is nothing intrinsically life-giving about studying the scriptures if one fails to discern their true content and purpose.

It is they, he says, that bear witness about me. The Old Testament by predictive prophecy, by type and revelation point to Christ, his ministry, his teaching, his death and resurrection.

[ 20 : 53 ] And in other places you find him teaching, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

So, rightly understood, the scriptures point away from themselves to Jesus. And it's as if the searching of these Jews of old made them deaf to Jesus' word.

And so you find this indictment pronounced by Jesus, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. they were diligent in their perusal of the scriptures.

They were diligent in the reflection of the scriptures. But they weren't coming to Jesus as the source of life. That was the big mistake on their part.

And maybe you are present this evening and you hear or have heard others speak of Jesus as a living saviour. Perhaps who never had the privileges that you had with regard to your upbringing and your background.

[ 22 : 10 ] How can that be? It reminds me of when I was a student at university a long time ago seeing and hearing fellow students coming to speak about Jesus as their saviour.

And in some ways I'll admit to my shame. I thought myself superior to them. I had been under the ministry of the gospel since childhood.

I had won prizes in Sunday school at local and national level. But I did not know Jesus as my Lord and saviour. I hadn't come to trust in him.

Nor did I love him. Nor did I delight in him. Is it possible that you are here this evening and you too are like that?

Has it made any difference in your life that Jesus is alive? You need to come to the risen Christ to find life.

[ 23 : 16 ] And so the question here that is asked of these women, why do you seek the living among the dead in this phenomenal encounter? It's like a bright beam of light.

penetrating into the darkness of confused and perplexed minds and hearts. The living is no longer here.

He is not here. A phenomenal encounter. The perplexity of the women. Thirdly, the place of the word.

God, there is a marvelous moment of illumination. Notice, the angels, they didn't try to reason on the basis of the physical evidence, nor did they make a case for Christ by refuting alternative explanations to indicate what had happened to the body that these women had come to anoint.

Instead, the angels remind them of the teaching of Jesus. Remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified on the third day, rise again.

[ 24 : 48 ] So this is the message with which they confront these women. Remember Jesus' words. In other words, they are demonstrating the significance and the importance of the word of God.

they are saying to these women, you will not be able to make any sense of any of this unless you remember Jesus' teaching. The way for you to understand this event, the way for you to understand the empty grave, the resurrection, is to go back to Jesus' words and reflect upon them and remember them.

What had they heard? Had they not heard Jesus say, I am going to Jerusalem, to be crucified and rise on the third day? Of course they had heard the message.

Of course they had. But they hadn't taken it in. They hadn't absorbed it. They hadn't understood it. And then Luke, just in case we missed it, tells us in verse 8, the women remembered his words.

They remembered his words. There was only a few words. words. But it was sufficient to prompt the women to remember and reflect on the teaching.

[ 26 : 15 ] And sometimes just a few words can penetrate into our minds and into our hearts. Just a few words can make us reflect on the content of the word of God.

And that is what happened here. They reflected on his teaching and they came to the conclusion, of course Jesus said this. And so they came to another conclusion.

He is who he said he is. And they begin to realize that he is not dead but a glorious, living, triumphant saviour. They were in the wrong place and they needed to alter their way of thinking about Jesus.

They are discovering who Jesus really is. And did you notice that the angels rather cleverly insert a very important title in their directive to the women?

remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee. Say, the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men.

[ 27 : 49 ] The Son of Man. That's the important title. that is slipped into the context. The Son of Man.

Why is that important? Because it is taken from the Old Testament scriptures, probably from the book of Daniel, chapter 7, and if you read that chapter, you'll see that the Son of Man is a very exalted figure.

Not just a human figure, but an exalted figure. And you will see in the New Testament that it was Jesus' favorite self-designation of himself.

It combines in itself the strange ideas of mere humanity with the unparalleled glory of God himself. In fact, if you do a study of the term, the Son of Man in the Gospels, you'll see that Jesus didn't refer to himself often as the Son of God, but as the Son of Man.

He said things like this, for even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Often, he calls himself the Son of Man.

[ 29 : 14 ] Son of Man. And those with ears to hear could hear echoes of the book of Daniel. And so Jesus' usage of the title Son of Man meant that he was claiming a very exalted role in the history of redemption, and rightly so, because it belonged to him.

You know, in many ways, Jesus was very subtle, in that he was always disclosing his identity to those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

But he wasn't disclosing his identity blatantly, so that everybody would come and try to make him a king. He had to steer a narrow course in disclosing his identity, not just openly say, I'm the Messiah, I'm the king of the world, come and acknowledge me as king.

He didn't speak like that. He was quiet. He was subtle. Do you remember the picture that the prophet Isaiah gives of the servant of the Lord?

How he speaks of him. He speaks of him as one who shall not cry nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

[ 30 : 39 ] And then you remember there is that very precious verse, a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.

A bruised reed, something that's virtually useless. A bruised reed he won't break.

Something that is fragile. That's often how believers feel in the world. Fragile, helpless, useless. And here is the promise that this servant who doesn't lift up his voice, nor cry, he will not break.

That's the promise he gives. No matter how fragile the believer might feel in the world. And then the smoke inflax. Well, those of you who are as old as I am, you will remember the oil lamp.

And you will remember when the wig burnt low, how smelly it became. Became very smelly if you allowed it to go out.

[ 31 : 56 ] And that's the kind of imagery that is set before us here of the believer. Not just as a fragile entity, but as something that is virtually almost extinguished, not giving any light.

Flickering, almost going out, smelling powerfully. And that is often how the believer feels in the world in which they are for a time.

And so here you have it. Jesus didn't, as it were, boast about his identity. He would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in other settings.

And only when the time was right, mainly when he was on trial, and they said, are you the Christ, the Son of the living God? Only then did he say, I am. And you will see the Son of Man coming with great power love and glory.

So he confessed his deity right at the point where he knew he would be crucified for it. Son of Man has the double meaning of human being, and according to Daniel 7, exalted heavenly one.

[ 33 : 20 ] And Jesus means to communicate to us that this person is no longer among the dead. He is indeed God's promised Messiah.

And Luke wants us to understand that this is the one who would bring in God's kingdom and restore life to those who trusted in him.

You see, Luke was a doctor, and as a doctor he was interested in restoration. He had seen and taken note of Jesus restoring the sick and transforming lives.

And did you notice Luke also has put in this record another significant detail in verse 3. He tells how the women entered into the tomb, and they found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

Why is that significant? well, do you remember when you, can you go as far back in your mind when you first began to read, even though it may be a long time ago now?

[ 34 : 43 ] Did you not read aloud as you wrestled with words and try and try to exercise and try to exercise your newfound skill?

And perhaps you remember the struggle you had to grapple with words, even simple words, until you learned the art of reading.

Well, apparently in the first century, reading aloud was the practice for those who could read. And remember I said this gospel was initially addressed to Theophilus.

And when Theophilus received his copy and read aloud the words, Lord Jesus, did he look around to see if anyone was listening? because in those days in Judah, the only person that you could call Lord was the emperor.

And Luke is as it were saying to his friend, what now do you think of this person Jesus? And you know as he says that to Theophilus, he asks the same question of you and me.

[ 36 : 05 ] what do you think of this person? Does he have this exalted position in your affection and in your mind and heart?

Do you look upon him as not just a mere man, but as the glorified Son of God in our nature? The place of the word.

How do we receive the word? Do we really take it to heart? Do we like the psalmist, store it up in our hearts?

And you remember what the psalmist goes on to say in that context, I will meditate on your precepts, I will delight in your statutes, I will not forget your word. And he does this not just to understand the word or to be able to speak about it or even to preach it, but for the very purpose for which the word was given, for holiness of life, that I might not sin against you.

That's the purpose of the word. And the psalmist says, Mord, your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

[ 37 : 21 ] perhaps I should draw attention to this too under this heading. Note how the confusion and the perplexity is removed.

It is through the word. Through the word. I cannot overemphasize that, the place of the word. How it removes, how wrong thinking, how confusion, how perplexity with regard to the teachings of Christ.

So, the place of the word, the phenomenal encounter, the perplexity of the women, and finally, the proclamation of the women. These women came from a place of confusion and perplexity to where they engage in excited proclamation of the truth.

Remember, they had not yet seen the resurrected Jesus. Look, and this part shows us the empty tomb, and only later does he write about the risen Christ.

What made the difference to these women? Was it not the teaching of Jesus? As soon as they remembered his words, they were no longer perplexed and confused.

[ 38 : 51 ] They understood why the tomb was empty. Jesus was not among the dead, but among the living. He had risen from the grave. And such news was too good to keep to themselves.

Returning, we are told, and returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and all the rest.

They became the first preachers of the resurrection. And Luke discloses some of their identity, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James.

And the response of the disciples was not what you would expect, particularly if this were a fabricated account.

Luke tells it as it was, and he says, their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

[ 40 : 01 ] It all sounded to the disciples like unintelligible nonsense. I hope no one is present this evening who thinks like that, about the proclamation of the women.

You know, the Greek term that is translated idle tale is used in medical language to describe the wild talk of people who become delirious because of illness.

No, maybe everyone has seen people delirious with illness. They don't make sense. They speak gibberish.

And that was the initial reaction of the disciples to the message of the women. That somehow the women's powers of reason had been overcome by their emotional response to the death of Jesus.

They just did not believe them. And you know, it's no different to the present hour. People refuse to believe the good news.

[ 41 : 24 ] And that can be discouraging. But you know, rather than be discouraged by this, believers ought to be encouraged. Why?

Because these same people, they came to believe. The very people who thought they were speaking gibberish came to believe.

And they continued to bear witness, even when they themselves were faced by persecution and the very prospect of death itself. So that ought to encourage the church to continue witnessing in the world.

And Luke draws our attention to one person of the group who went to see the empty tomb for himself. And he ran there. How do we know? Well, John's gospel tells us that he had a companion and the two of them ran to the grave but John ran quicker than Peter did.

John is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved. And we're told by Luke that Peter arose, stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves and departed, wondering to himself at that which came to pass.

[ 42 : 47 ] And the word wondering there expresses astonishment and amazement. He was stunned, disconcerted, puzzled and confused.

And the implication is that he did not yet understand. And so you see, the element of confusion comes up again and again throughout this last chapter.



And what Luke is emphasizing is that when confused, people are illuminated. They run to tell others. Others confuse too and they were illuminated.

That's what the gospel message does. Now remember, this event that Luke sets before us is the most important event in human history.

The resurrection, the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead. And if you have not believed, will you not examine the evidence as presented by this gospel writer Luke?

[ 43 : 56 ] He is challenging us to reach our decision as to whether Jesus is among the living or the dead. Remember what he said about himself? That he would be crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day rise again.

Have you believed the teaching of Christ? Because, you see, according to the gospel message, Jesus is not among the dead, but among the living.

He was crucified in the place of sinners, in order that they might, as we saw this morning, receive the forgiveness of all their sins. His sacrifice of himself was accepted, and so he has risen from the grave.

He is at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, shining in glory and ruling the universe. As the prophesied one who fulfilled what the Father gave him to do, he will come again in power, majesty, might, and glory.

Oh, my friend, how will you meet this risen Lord? Still confused or enlightened?

[ 45 : 12 ] Welcoming and trusting in him or recoiling and disbelieving? will you meet him as your Lord and your Savior?

Or will you meet him as one seeking to be hidden from his face because you rejected the message of good news, the perplexity of the women, a phenomenal encounter.

They came face to face with angels, the place of the word, how it brought illumination into sin-darkened minds and hearts, how it helped them understand why the grave was empty and why it had to be empty, and the proclamation of the women, Jesus' wisdom.

Oh, with what gladness they proclaimed this message, the Lord is wisdom. Does it bring gladness to your own heart and mind this evening?

Let us pray.