

# Easter: Early Morning

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name. Amen.

Grab a seat, team. That was nice hearing the dramatic reading, eh? Isn't that cool?

That's so cool. The verse that immediately precedes what was read tonight says this. This is the end of chapter 23. It says, It was the Sabbath and they rested.

I'm talking about the disciples, right? From Genesis to Revelation, there's this pattern of the week. Work is completed on the sixth day, which is like a Friday. And then there's this day of rest, the Saturday, before the new week begins on the Sunday.

I say all this because timing seems to be a significant factor in this passage. It seems to be trying to tell us something. From the cross, Jesus said, It is finished.

[ 1 : 11 ] That was the end of the work week. He said that. It is finished. He had completed his work. The next day, the disciples rested.

And our story begins the following day. The first day of the week, the text says in verse 1. The first day. The first day. And it's not any old first day, is it?

It's the first day of something very new, of a new era, a new creation. And Luke wants us to understand this vividly, this first day.

And so he splits his first day up into three episodes. There's the empty tomb. There is the road to Emmaus.

And then there's the disciples hanging out and feeding Jesus the fish. Three episodes. We're going to be looking at those three episodes over the next three weeks.

[ 2 : 12 ] So our first one today. Verses 1 to 12. The empty tomb. So the first episode of this new era, this first day, begins very early in the morning with woman.

Woman heading to the tomb. You've got to love these women, eh? I love these women. Of all the followers of Jesus. It was the woman that stuck around.

You know, they were there at the crucifixion. They stuck around to see him buried. While the men cowered and denied and hid.

And there is no general principle here about, you know, women are good and men are terrible or anything. You know, don't hear me saying that. I think, but these women.

These women. I was wondering why it was these women that stuck around. And I wonder perhaps if it was because they experienced grace in a way which the men didn't.

[ 3 : 16 ] You know, the Israelites were a subjugated people. And within that subjugated people, there was a subjugated gender. And so they experienced the love of Christ in a way perhaps the men didn't.

And their commitment was obviously rewarded. They were the most fortunate of all women in history ever. Because they were the first of all people to hear the words that are at the heart of the Christian faith.

They were the first people ever to hear the words, He has risen. Isn't that awesome? Okay, let's get into it. Verse 1.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb taking the spices they had prepared. In John's Gospel, it says that it was still dark when the woman left to go to the tomb. And John is trying to convey a mood.

The mood was dark. They were looking for a body. Everything for them had gone sideways on Friday, eh? This man they loved was brutally murdered.

[ 4 : 21 ] The dream was over. It just must have been awful. So Sunday morning, a slow march to the tomb, driven by what I can only assume is a loyal grief, some sense of devotion to this man they loved but who's dead now.

And they brought two things with them, two. Two things with them to this tomb. Firstly, they brought spices to embalm the body. And secondly, they brought a narrative.

They brought a story. They brought a belief about what had happened and what they were doing. Jesus is dead.

We'll look after him. It's the right thing to do. He was kind to us. And we'll shortly see how this belief was rebuked and how they were reoriented.

Now remember I said we'll be looking at three episodes? Each of those episodes has that cycle of people that have a story, they have an understanding, they have a belief. That belief is challenged and they're reoriented and they leave with a new story.

[ 5 : 31 ] So watch for that every week. Okay. So they're on the way to the tomb. In Mark's Gospel, in chapter 16, it says the woman on the way to the tomb talked about how they were going to roll away the stone. It presents them as people numb with grief, not really thinking ahead, just one step at a time.

Let's just get to the tomb. Let's just get there. And then we'll work something out. Well, you know what happened? Verse 2, they found the stone had been rolled away. They didn't have to worry about the stone after all.

Verse 3, they went in. They did not find a body. Verse 4, they were perplexed by this. Angels appeared and said to them some amazing, just this amazing line, a reorienting line.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why do you seek the living among the dead? That's a great question. Why were they doing that?

Why? Why were they expecting to find a dead Jesus? I mean, Jesus had talked about dying and rising a lot.

[ 6 : 39 ] Well, there's two reasons. Two reasons, I think. Firstly, they didn't think the resurrection was possible. And secondly, they probably didn't think it was necessary either.

That's the story they brought to the tomb. Impossible and unnecessary, really. I think when, you know, us sophisticated Westerners think about Easter, if we're not Christians, we could probably line up between, behind either one of those two lines, I think, eh?

You know, like the crucifixion's cool. Like, yeah, we're cool with that. Yep. You know. You know, every year, like, popular culture kind of presents Jesus somehow.

Time magazine does a thing on Jesus, or the real Jesus, or whatever, you know. And it's always the, it's always Jesus crucified, because the resurrection, well, I mean, it's just, it's just weird, right?

Like, it's, it's implausible. So we won't talk about that, you know. And it's not necessary. You know, Christians just muddled the, they ruined a good story by adding the magic stuff on the end.

[ 7 : 46 ] They didn't have to do that. And we can understand how it started, you know, because folks back in those days, they were stupid, right? They're simple. They believed that kind of stuff.

So we'll, we'll get a bit more support for our faith if we kind of chuck in a cool resurrection story. And everyone will believe us, of course, you know. Why wouldn't they? They're primitives. Well, let's look at these two ideas, okay?

The resurrection is impossible. Anyway, it isn't even necessary for the story. Okay, firstly, the resurrection is impossible. We, we, we are modern people. But we fall into the trap sometimes of looking back at the people that wrote the Bible and witnessed these things and we go, well, they're primitives.

It's easy for them to believe in magic and resurrection and all that kind of stuff. Team, team, team. It is true, these guys didn't have antibiotics and iPhones and, you know, chicken nuggets or whatever, you know, marker of modernity you want to come up with.

They didn't have that stuff but they weren't stupid. They weren't dumb. They didn't all have IQs of 50, you know.

[ 9 : 02 ] These women went looking for a body because they didn't think resurrection was possible. They were just like us. They were skeptics. More significantly, the woman went to the tomb looking for a body because they didn't think the resurrection was necessary.

For some reason, they didn't get that this was a really important part of the story of God's plan. Most people, I'd say, in the Western world believe that Christ did exist.

I'm sure most people believe he died, that he did die. I just don't think people often realise that he had to die. That Christ had to die.

And it's here we find the most common misconception about Christianity. And this is a misconception.

That Jesus' life, Christ's life, the way he lived, is a phenomenal example to us on how to live courageously. That his death is just his greatest example of what it looks like to be a really good man.

[ 10 : 17 ] A man whose memory we should honour by living a really good life. Folks, if we view Christianity like this, we make it no different to any other faith in the world.

If we view Christianity like this, the whole resurrection thing becomes this unnecessary appendage to the whole story. You see, all the great faiths are based on this idea that a founder establishes a way of life which we adhere to.

And that's what salvation looks like. This is not Christianity. Christianity. All our serving of God, all our trying to live like God cannot make up for our sinfulness.

There is a great chasm that exists between us and God. One that can only be breached through radical sacrifice. And I hope you understand this, that Jesus did not die just as an example.

He died as a substitute. Christianity is not trying to live a good life so God would love you. Christianity is believing someone lived a good life for you because he loved you.

[ 11 : 42 ] I'm not saying don't be inspired by the death of Christ, by his courage. Folks, you'll never be good enough. You'll never be encouraged enough.

Here is another difference between Christianity and one of the great faiths and all the other great faiths that comes out in the story we're looking at here today. All the other founders of all the other great faiths are dead.

You can visit their graves. These women tried to visit Christ's grave and the angel said he is not here, he has risen. And here is the really big difference.

Christianity is not personal reformation through adhering to a way of life.

I'll say that again. Christianity is not personal reformation by adhering to a way of life. It is transformation by relating to a God who is alive.

[ 12 : 47 ] He is alive. He has risen. And this is what transformation looks like. This is what this transformation looks like. Look at the passage.

These people leave with a message. It says in verse 9, and returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Most of the guys thought they were crazy, right?

But we'll talk more about that in a couple of weeks. But the message got one heart racing. Peter, who ran to the tomb, saw it empty. The grave closed. folded up and went back, marvelling.

At the start, I talked about the overall arc of this story, one that we'll see in all these three episodes over these next few weeks. You know, like this woman, they came with a story.

They were reoriented. Peter came to the tomb with a story, a narrative, one likely dominated by a great sense of shame. at denying Christ earlier that week.

[ 13 : 52 ] He came with a story, Christ is dead. His story was corrected and he was changed. He went from shame to marvelling. Let me finish up here.

I love the that whole story arc there. I love the spiritual reality that this story lays out for us at Easter.

And this is the reality. When you're dealing with Jesus, you are not standing at the gravesite of an old friend who you really like, who you really admired. And you know what that is like if you've done that.

You stand there. You are sad. You think about them. You maybe say some words. Maybe do something physically meaningful. You know, lay flowers down.

It's respectful. It's right. It's absolutely right. It's the right thing to do. Right? We must hold fast to the gospel that says Christ has risen.

[ 15 : 01 ] When we don't, when we are embarrassed by that theology when we become like, you know, tons of churches around who have cut that out of the gospel because it, well, it just seems impossible, doesn't it?

It seems unnecessary. When you do that, you're standing at the grave of Jesus, you know, looking for Christ among the dead, aren't you?

But the spiritual reality of Christianity, mainstream Christianity as it's been understood historically through the ages, is that, this is really important, you are not dealing with a memory when you pray, when you interact with Jesus, you're not dealing with a memory.

You're dealing with a resurrected, living, loving Jesus, through whom you, any one of you, all of you, can experience this transformation that we've seen here.

The same one that these followers of Christ experienced. This is the message of Easter. This is it.

[ 16 : 29 ] Easter tells us, it reminds us that we are dealing with a living Saviour, and that it is possible for you to be a new creation, that it is possible to experience joy, to clothe yourself in love, all of that coming through the knowledge that he is risen.

He's risen indeed. This evening when we take communion, we're going to do something different. We're going to do something which is actually very Anglican. If you've never been to a church that does it before, when I say Anglican, I mean that's an embodied act that represents what we believe.

After I've laid out the table here, we're going to bring the cross to the front. It's a beautiful cross that David made for us and these amazing flowers that Peter Kruger brought for us here.

As we go to take communion, you're going to come up here and you're going to take a flower, anyone you like, and you're going to put it in the cross. There's chicken wire around it so it'll stay there. At the end of the communion, this whole cross will be decorated with flowers.

It'll be this picture of life from death. A Christ who is dead has risen again.

[ 17 : 57 ] This wonderful picture of that and the beauty of that. And perhaps as you grab a flower and you put it in, as you're placing this flower, you could say, I want to experience that transformation.

I want to go from shame to marveling at what Christ has done. Perhaps you could think about the words that we say at the end of the communion service, you know, all the works of the devil, all my difficulties, all my burdens, all my sins, all my shame, a risen Christ.

If you are tall, can you do up here? Otherwise it's going to be just like a tea. A risen tea, right? So cool.

Isn't that cool? Folks, can I pray? Let me just pray now. Father, Father, thank you.

Thank you, Lord. All of our problems, we send to the cross of Christ, all our difficulties, we send to the cross of Christ, all the devil's works we send to the cross of Christ, all our hopes we set on the risen Christ.

[ 19 : 43 ] Amen. Amen. Would you remain kneeling or seated in John 1. Come and pray for us, mate. All we bring in on Thank you.