

Looking for Jesus

Luke 23:55-24:12

The passage just read describes how several women were looking for Jesus on the first Easter morning. They were looking for his lifeless body at the tomb where he had been laid two days earlier. Their experience is instructive for all of us who are looking for Jesus. This account emphasizes is that ***if you're looking for Jesus you need to make sure you're looking in the right place.***

I'm not assuming that all of us here today are looking for Jesus in the sense of wanting to know him and experience him and follow him. But if you understand who Jesus is and what he offers, you ***will*** look for him; you will have a burning passion to find Jesus and the experience him in the depths of your soul. As we'll see today, Jesus offers you something that you cannot find anywhere else. He alone offers you freedom from the shame and guilt of your sin and a relationship with God that will sustain you through this life and into the next.

When you ***are*** ready to look for Jesus, you need to make sure you're looking in the right place. If you look in the wrong place you will never find him.

Where to look for Jesus. (Luke 23:55–24:12, 24:44-49)

The gospel of Luke tells us that in addition to the twelve apostles, Jesus had a devoted group of disciples who were women. We're told in Luke 8:1-3 that these women had been healed of various physical and spiritual infirmities and that some of these women supported the ministry of Jesus financially. And significantly, these women were faithful to Jesus to the very end. They had seen him crucified, and they wanted to ensure that he had a proper burial.

Beginning in Luke 23:55 we read this:

55 The women who had come with [Jesus] from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. 1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.

They were looking for Jesus' body in the tomb so that they could apply the spices and ointments they had prepared. But look what they found:

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Notice what happened next:

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

In the Bible, angels are spiritual beings (as opposed to humans which are physical beings, having a body). But sometimes in Scripture, angels take human form in their role as messengers; that's what's happening here (see 24:23). Their dazzling apparel made clear that they weren't mere mortals. And their message to these women was that they were looking for Jesus in the wrong place.

5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

If they had been given the chance to answer, they would have said something like, "We're not seeking the living. We're looking for Jesus who was crucified and laid in this tomb." [As one commentator put it, "Because they lack understanding, they are looking in the wrong place" (Green, *NICNT Luke*, p. 837).] The angels continued:

6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man **must** be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

Isn't it interesting that after the angels announce, "He has risen," that they then tell the women to **remember what he had told them**? They wanted the women to remember that Jesus had been raised just as he said. They wanted them to make a connection between Jesus' resurrection and Jesus' words. Why? Because Jesus' death and resurrection were the focal point of all of human history; this was God's once-for-all, decisive action to deal with humanity's sin problem. By remembering that Jesus had **told** them that he must suffer, die, and rise on the third day they would have absolute confidence in him and in **everything he had told them**.

One of the times Jesus told them that he **must** die and be raised again is recorded in Luke 9:21-22 (the other two are found in 9:45 and 18:31-34).

21 And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Given his mission of "giving his life as a ransom for many," being killed wasn't optional; he **must** suffer and die. And since he was the sinless/innocent Son of God, he **must** be raised from the dead as a vindication of everything he said and did. Humanity had declared Jesus guilty, but God declared him innocent by raising him from the dead!

And so the angels were telling them, "**If you want to find Jesus, remember what he said about himself.**"

8 And they remembered his words,

When they "remembered his words," they wouldn't have thought, "Well THAT was a lucky guess!" No, Jesus had told them that something far beyond their experience and

expectations would come to pass. The only conclusion they could draw was that Jesus knew exactly what would happen to him: being crucified and raised from the dead was the plan all along.

These women did what you and I do when we experience something amazing and wonderful: they told others.

9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

Luke draws a contrast between the growing faith of these women disciple and the unbelief of the apostles. Their unbelief was probably due to at least two factors. First, the testimony of women in that culture was generally dismissed as unreliable; in a court of law they avoided having women testify at all if possible. Second, they were giving testimony to something miraculous that went beyond everybody's experience and expectation. And so "these words seemed to them as an idle tale" (NASB "nonsense"), "and they did not believe them." So Jesus' original eleven apostles did not believe the gospel at that point (like Zechariah in Luke 1:20).

Interestingly, Luke highlights Peter's reaction to this news. Last week we saw that after Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, the rooster crowed, Jesus looked at him, and then **he remembered that Jesus had told him** that would happen. And he went out and wept bitterly. Now these women reported, "**Remember what Jesus told us?** He has risen just as he said!" I love Peter's reaction:

12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

Peter's unbelief turned into "amazement/marveling."

The principle here is that **if you are looking for Jesus, pay attention to his words.** Pay attention to what he told his original disciples. The only sure guide to finding Jesus is to go back to his words and the Scriptures more broadly. Let's look briefly at one more example of this.

That very evening, Jesus appeared to the eleven remaining disciples. When they saw him they thought he was a spirit (see also Acts 12:15). Again, even though he had told them what would happen, they didn't expect him to be raised bodily from the dead. Jesus invited them to see and touch the scars in his hands and feet where he had been crucified. As further proof he wasn't merely a spirit, he ate a piece of broiled fish because (as we all know) a spirit can't eat real food.

Having convinced them that he had been raised bodily from the dead, he said this:

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

He is telling them, “Remember what I told you. . .” For three years Jesus had been telling them that he would fulfill everything written about the Messiah in the Old Testament. But as Luke tells us throughout his gospel, **before** the resurrection the disciples did not and could not understand what Jesus was saying about dying and rising again. They didn’t have a category for a crucified Messiah. (See Luke 18:34.)

But on that first Easter evening after they’d been convinced that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead, they were ready to understand.

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Jesus supernaturally gave them the capacity to understand the teachings of Scripture. What was once opaque and confusing became crystal clear.

46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,

For the first time, they understood that everything that had happened that weekend was planned by God long ago. Jesus’ death and resurrection were at the very center of the drama of Scripture (which is the drama of history). Jesus opened their minds to understand this.

But in verse 47 Jesus adds an additional element that was demanded by the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, the plan going forward:

47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The plan all along was for people from every nation on earth to have the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus’ death and resurrection. That’s why we’re here 2,000 years later on the other side of the world talking about forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus.

Again, here’s the principle: ***If you are looking for Jesus, pay attention to his words.***

Let’s think about the implications of this truth for a few minutes. There are implications both for finding Jesus initially and for following Jesus after you’ve found him.

Implications for:

Finding Jesus (John 14:1-6)

Like Jesus' first disciples, many people today look in the wrong place in trying to understand Jesus. Instead of paying attention to Jesus' words, we pay attention to popular opinions about Jesus that have been repeated so often that they're accepted as true. For example, it's very common to hear that "all religions basically teach the same thing" and that "all religions lead to the same "God." Maybe you've heard that; someone told me that in a conversation recently.

David Platt tells of the time he was talking with two other people who followed two different religions beside Christianity. And they were talking about how all three of these religions represented were basically the same with superficial differences.

After listening for a while, Platt spoke up and said something to the effect of, "It's almost like you guys picture God at the top of a mountain, and we're all at the bottom of that mountain. I may take *this* path up, and you may take *this other* path up, but in the end, we'll all be in the same place." They said, "Exactly." He said, "What if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain didn't wait for us to find our way up to him? He actually came down to where we are." They said, "Well, that would be great." "What we find in the Bible is the story of a God who has not left us alone to try to find our way to him. He has come to us, and he has made the way to himself through Jesus." <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/christianity-different-religion/>

I love that illustration because it reflects the very words of Jesus himself. In John 14:6, the night before he was crucified, Jesus told his followers:

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you pay attention to Jesus' words, you hear him saying that "no one comes to the Father" except through him; there aren't many ways/paths that lead to God the Father, only one. Jesus alone provides a remedy for our sin; he alone paid for our sin on the cross. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him and confirming that everything he said about himself was true.

If you're looking for Jesus, pay attention to his words such as, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Earlier in John's gospel (in John 11), Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies." If you believe in Jesus Christ - that he died on the cross to pay for your sin and rose again on the third day - you will have eternal life. Your sin will be blotted out, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and you will begin a journey unlike anything you've ever experienced.

I can't think of a better day on the calendar to begin that journey than on Easter morning. . . . ***If you are looking for Jesus, pay attention to his words.*** He said that if you believe in him you will have eternal life.

What are the implications of this truth for following Jesus?

Following Jesus (*John 8:31-33*) There's great continuity between finding Jesus and following Jesus. Jesus made this clear in John 8:31-32.

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Notice the condition Jesus sets out: "***If*** you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." To "abide" means to ***remain*** or ***continue*** in something. If you abide in Jesus' word, you remain in His teachings; you stay put in His teachings (and by extension, the rest of Scripture). Instead of hearing or reading the Word and then forgetting it, you think about it and put it into practice.

If we do that, we will "know the truth" (after all, he IS the truth) and the truth will set us free. If you keep reading, Jesus makes clear that he's talking about being free from the sins that keep us in bondage. A true disciple/follower of Jesus pays very close attention to his words.

Let me give one example of how this might work. In Luke 6:31 Jesus made this very familiar statement; sometimes it's called the "golden rule." Here's Luke 6:31 (NASB95):

31 "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you.

This statement is found in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. The immediate context is that of loving your enemies, turning the other cheek, giving to others without expecting anything in return. When it comes to the demanding or difficult people in our lives, we should treat them the way that we want them to treat us.

The tendency is to treat others the way they've treated us or the way we think they should be treated. Of course sometimes we don't even think about how we're treating others; we just say and do whatever is the most natural for us. But many Scriptures encourage us to listen to and understand people and treat them accordingly.

After graduating from K-State our son Riley moved back home for a few months before going to grad school. After a few weeks, I sensed some tension between the two of us; it seemed like he was often annoyed with me (hard to believe, right?). One day while he was eating breakfast, I said, "Riley, on a scale of 0 to 10 - zero being an extreme introvert and 10 being an extreme extrovert - where would you rate yourself?" I figured he'd say, "7 or 8." He said, "About a 4." I thought, "Oh my, that explains a LOT!" I'm very extroverted, since Riley is very personable and friendly I just assumed he was too. And so first thing in the morning I'd be overly friendly ("Are you excited for your day?"). I was just "too much too soon" as they say. I was trying WAY too hard. It's no wonder he was annoyed with me! So I backed way off and it did wonders for our relationship.

I started "treating him the way I'd want him to treat me." Since I'd want him to respect my God-given temperament, I started respecting his. As Jesus promised, that truth set me free in our relationship (far fewer offenses/tension).

If you are seeking to follow Jesus, abide in his word; let it stay with you and guide how you think and how you treat the people in your home, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, and in the church. Jesus will tell you hard things that are painful to hear. He will tell you nourishing things that are deeply satisfying. He will tell you awe-inspiring things that never crossed your mind. If you pay attention to his word, you will find Jesus to be a Good Shepherd who leads you through this life and into the next.

Whether you are looking to find Jesus for the first time or looking to walk with Jesus for a lifetime, pay attention to his words.