

Luke 23:50-24:12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 23 verse 50 to chapter 24 verse 12. Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action, and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid.

It was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared, and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 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?

[1 : 0 8] He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise.

And they remembered his words, And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest. 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.

But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves, and he went home marvelling at what had happened.

At the end of Luke chapter 23, we are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea. He's a character we've never heard of before, but he's a member of the council, which is surprising, considering the part that the council had just played in the condemnation of Jesus to his death.

However, Joseph had not consented to the council's decision. He is described as a good and righteous man who was looking for the kingdom of God. This might recall the characterisation of figures such as Simeon at the beginning of the book of Luke.

[2 : 1 5] In chapter 2, verse 25, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Joseph requests the body of Jesus, which he takes down and wraps in linen garments and lays in the tomb. We might perhaps think about the clothes of the high priest on the day of atonement, where he wears linen garments for the ritual.

But we might also think about the very beginning of the gospel, where Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. There we also had a Joseph and a Mary. The death and resurrection of Christ is a new birth event.

There the sign given to the shepherds was that they would see the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger. Now the sign given to new shepherds will be seeing the linen garments laid to one side and the body removed.

There is also another fulfilment of Isaiah chapter 53 here, more specifically verse 9. He makes his grave with a rich man at his death. Jesus is buried in a way that shows honour to his body, not in a common criminal's grave.

[3 : 23] It's cut into the rock like stones taken from a quarry. Maybe we should think of Isaiah chapter 51 verse 1. The women were present at the cross.

They're present to see the burial, they know where the body has been placed, and they're present on the morning of resurrection. They are in many ways the heart of the faithful community at this point. While we can often focus upon the male disciples as the appointed leaders and guardians of the people of Christ, Luke gives a lot of attention to the women in the narrative, most notably Elizabeth and Mary, but even beyond that we can see the characters of the women coming to the foreground in the Gospel of Luke to a greater degree than in some of the other Gospels.

Luke will often have male-female pairings, such as Simeon and Anna in the temple. So it seems that Luke wants us to pay attention to the women as examples of faith, and perhaps one of the ways that we can learn from them is that even when faith seems to fail, there can remain the commitment of love, and that is the thing that really ties them to Christ at this point more than anything else.

The resting of the women on the Sabbath parallels Jesus' resting in the tomb on the Sabbath, while the start of the new chapter introduces the first day of a new creation. Perhaps we might see the women's bringing spices and oils to the tomb and encountering angels as something of a parallel to Zachariah's performing of the rite of incense in the temple and encountering an angel at the beginning of the Gospel.

The stone is rolled away, and Jesus' body is nowhere to be found. Two angels appear. Why do you seek the living among the dead? The angels remind the women that Jesus had told them that he would rise way back in Galilee in Luke chapter 9 verses 21 to 22, and he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, For the disciples, the period after the resurrection is going to be, in large measure, one of remembering what Jesus had taught them earlier, but which they had failed to grasp.

[5 : 40] It's like the end of a detective novel, where the mystery has been solved, and suddenly the reader looks back, and all of the clues fall into place, and they realise that it had to be this way, that the truth was there all the way along, and they just hadn't had the eyes to see it.

Had it occurred just by itself, the empty tomb would just have been a weird and random event. The resurrection is not a random miracle. The resurrection makes sense when it's read against the background of the Old Testament prophecies, when it's read against the background of Jesus' earlier statements.

It's that background that gives the resurrection its meaning. Yet the women arrive on the site of a mystery, an empty tomb and a rolled away stone. And then the two men appear and give them clues to start to figure it out.

When this is seen against the backdrop of Jesus' ministry and his foretelling of it, it will start to make sense. And importantly, understanding arises from memory. The women return to tell the eleven what has occurred.

[6 : 49] And there are other women with them. They are paralleled with the eleven apostles. It would seem that Peter was among them at this point. And the rest who were with them. The names of the women matter, not least because their personal eyewitness would support Luke's narrative.

This would be, of course, nowhere more important than in reference to the resurrection accounts. Peter alone seems to take the message of the women with more seriousness. And he goes to the tomb and stoops and looks inside.

A question to consider. What further connections can we see between the nativity and childhood accounts in the Gospel of Luke and the accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ?

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