

“WHAT’S GOING ON?”
Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-35, John 20:1-23
Resurrection Day, April 17, 2022

Cregg Puckett of Florence, Mississippi, tells this interesting encounter.

“A new pastor decided to visit the children's Sunday school. The teacher introduced him and said, ‘Pastor, this morning we're studying Joshua.’

“That's wonderful,’ said the new pastor. ‘Let's see what you're learning. Who tore down the walls of Jericho?’

“Little Johnny shyly raised hand and offered, ‘Pastor, I didn't do it.’

“Taken aback the pastor asked, ‘Come on, now, who tore down the walls of Jericho?’

“The teacher, interrupting, said, ‘Pastor, little Johnny's a good boy. If he says he didn't do it, I believe he didn't do it.’

“Flustered, the pastor went to the Sunday school director and related the story to him. The director, looking worried, explained, ‘Well, sir, we've had some problems with Johnny before. Let me talk to him and see what we can do.’

“Really bothered now by the answers of the teacher and the director, the new pastor approached the deacons and related the whole story, including the responses of the teacher and the director. A white-haired gentleman thoughtfully stroked his chin and said, ‘Well, Pastor, I move we just take the money from the general fund to pay for the walls and leave it at that.’”¹

Most of us would shake our heads and ask, ‘What’s going on with that?’ That pastor had a lot of work ahead of him, facing a congregation that had very little if any knowledge of the Bible. And it’s sad that there are more and more churches that may fall into that kind of category. They are failing to give their members any solid foundation in the truths of the Scriptures, so that much confusion ensues with one simple question.

But that is not unique to the situation in our day today. Confusion and questions have faced the

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 272-273)

church from very early on. We heard the account of Resurrection Day from our four Gospels, and we can see plenty of confusion and questioning going on amid the followers of Jesus. They struggled to make sense of all that was going on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus. They desperately wanted answers to their questions, but nothing seemed to make sense. How could Jesus be alive when they had all seen Him die just three days before? And yet, reports were now coming in about conversations with angels, stones being rolled away, the body of Jesus being gone, and even sightings of Jesus, Himself? What was going on?

The confusion began very early as Mary and a few others who had made their way to the tomb to finish the burial process on the body of Jesus. They said they had encountered an angel who had rolled away the stone from the tomb (Matthew 28:2), saying to them, “*Why do you seek the living among the dead? Jesus is not here. He has arisen!*” (Luke 24:5-6). Mary shared this news with Peter and John, saying “*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!*” (John 20:2). In disbelief, both of them had run to the tomb to check it out for themselves, and found the grave clothes lying in place with the head napkin folded up in a different place. Had they not learned about the Messiah from the Scriptures?

But Mary could not believe that someone had done such a thing as to desecrate the tomb of the Lord Jesus. She spoke to men in white, not realizing that they were angels, because she could not see clearly through all of her tears. And then she confronted the One she thought was the gardener, asking of Him, “*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get him.*” (John 20:15). However, He surprised her by calling her by name, “*Mary.*” Only then did she recognize Him. It Was Jesus! So surprised, all she could do was whisper, “*Rabboni!*” (*which means Teacher.*)” (John 20:16). She reported this to the 11 disciples and the others, telling them that Jesus was alive, only to be counted as a crazy woman, crazy in her grief for the death of her Master (Mark 16:11). Could they not give themselves to believe what God’s Word said about the Messiah? Could they not trust the teaching of Jesus, who had said, “*But on the third day He will be raised to life!*” (Matthew 19:19).

While all of this was taking place, other women had gone to the tomb and they saw angels inside the tomb, who told them, “*Don’t be alarmed... You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him...*” (Mark 16:6). They were so afraid that they didn’t tell anyone. But then Jesus, Himself, met them along the path, telling them, “*Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*” (Matthew 28:9). Yet the disciples didn’t believe them either. Would they “prefer the certainty of misery to the misery of uncertainty?”²

But that wasn’t it; two of Jesus’ followers were leaving Jerusalem, disappointed that Jesus had not fulfilled their expectation of Him being the Messiah. And as they were talking about all that had happened, a Stranger joined them in the conversation. The Stranger explained to them all about the Messiah, yet they were unable to recognize that this Stranger was Jesus, Himself. Their minds were still stuck that Jesus was dead, and never once thought that there was a possibility of any resurrection. Only when they sat down for supper did the two recognize Him when He broke the bread. The nail prints in His hands became visible to them, their eyes were opened and they suddenly realized that it was indeed, the Risen Lord. But He was gone from the presence in an instant. In their excitement, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem, seven miles, to report to the others that Jesus was alive.

It was almost overwhelming, the number of reports coming in attesting to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And yet they were all like Thomas, who claimed, “*Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it*” (John 20:25). They would not let their hopes get too high. They had to see Jesus up close and in person for themselves. They would not trust the word of anyone else.

But the most amazing thing happened then. Right in that room, “*on the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked [and the windows barred] for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them...*” (John 20:19). “*...He rebuked them for their lack of faith*

² (Virginia Satir in PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 66)

and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.” (Mark 16:14). But then *“He showed them His hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement”* (Luke 24:40-41), Jesus proved to them that it was indeed Him, alive once again, having beaten the sting of death, by eating a piece of broiled fish. Something marvelous was indeed going on? This was not a ghostly apparition; JESUS WAS ALIVE!

Then they believed because they saw Jesus, they touched Him, and they experienced His presence with them. It was all unreal to them, but there He was, pierced body and all, alive as any one of them was. But it was so hard to believe!

Yet, hadn't Jesus raised several people from the dead? Well I guess it's one thing to have Jesus bring others back from the dead, but it is quiet another thing for Jesus to bring Himself back from the dead!

Oh, *“the chief priests and the teachers of the law [had] mocked Him among themselves. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but He can’t save Himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe”* (Mark 15:31-32). But Jesus had not yet completed His work of forgiving the sins of the people of the earth. He couldn't save others if He saved Himself. So He decided to give up His life so that everyone else could be saved through Him. He endured death on the cross so that everyone could rejoice in the life that He gives to them. It just took three days for the whole process to become fully completed.

You see, He had to die upon that cross, pay the price for all of the sins of the world, in order to bring redemption to all those who would believe in Him. That was His role as our Messiah. The disciples did not yet understand that only through Jesus' death on the cross could He bring freedom to all those oppressed and burdened by sin. But His rising from the dead, the first fruits from the dead, gives everyone else hope. He had done just what He had told them He would do. But it took His physical presence there in that room with all of them, to convince them that He had finally accomplished the Salvation of the world. It was only by God's great love, the sacrifice of Jesus, Himself, and the

grace of God given to all those who would believe in Him, that Salvation is possible. Only those who would receive this greatest gift of Salvation find eternal life.

But there are so many yet who will not believe it. It is so hard to believe that anyone could come back from the dead. In this world we are convinced that once you're dead, You're Dead! Nothing beyond that - no hope beyond the grave. It was like that before Jesus died, and sadly many believe it yet today.

But Jesus conquered death so that we might have hope IN HIM for life beyond this life. The Gospels all record Jesus' resurrection so that we might put our faith and trust in Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. As He said to His disciples, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). No one else in all of human history died for the sins of the world in order that we might have life beyond this physical existence. Only Jesus did that so that we may be with Him in the Father's house (John 14:3).

For those who still argue the resurrection of Jesus, for those who are stuck on the things of this world, let me offer you this truth. "Science says if there is any such thing as infallible proof, it is the repetition of the same experiment. Jesus rose from the dead, and Mary Magdalene encountered Him--experiment one. The other women encountered Him--experiment two. The disciples encountered Him in the countryside--experiment three. The apostles encountered Him--experiment four. Five hundred people saw Him after the Resurrection--experiment five. Each one of these is the repetition of the same experiment. They all encountered the same phenomenon. What was it? Jesus was alive! That's what changed the history of the world."³

But many today have the Missouri mindset - they have to see it to believe it. If they haven't seen it, then it ain't true. Even if it is recorded in the Bible and in the journals of so many others who have experienced the risen Christ Jesus for themselves, they will not believe it until they, like Thomas, see Him for their own. They have become convinced by the lie of the Pharisees and chief priests, who

³ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, pg. 240)

“gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, ‘You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep’” (Matthew 28:12-13). These men had experienced the resurrection of Jesus first hand when the angel rolled the stone away from the mouth of the tomb, yet they propagated the lie of Jesus’ body being stolen to all the people because they feared man more than they feared God. “The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this [lie] has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day” (28:15).

But I have to tell you that Jesus is still appearing to people around the world today in order to convince them that He is indeed alive. Islamic Imams have had visits from Jesus and they have heard the truth and seen Him, and they are turning to Jesus as their Messiah. Terrorists who are radically against the Christians in their area are seeing visions of Jesus Christ, and they are turning from their violent ways and finding hope and life in Jesus Christ. They believe because they have seen Him! And those around them are asking “What’s going on with you?” Lives are being changed and whole communities are being given the hope of eternal life because others believe without having seen Jesus physically. They trust the reports of those who have seen Him and they also put their trust and faith in Jesus.

But let me put this all into perspective, because we have to see the difference that it makes to believe that Jesus is alive. Harry Pritchett, Jr. wrote an article for *Leadership* magazine in the summer of 1985 that brings us the hope that we need. He writes, “Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. He was a pleasant child - happy, it seemed - but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday school at the Methodist church. His teacher, also a friend of mine, taught the third-grade class with Philip and nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.

“You know eight-year-olds. And Philip, because of his differences, was not readily accepted. But my teacher friend was creative, and he helped the group of eight-year-olds. They learned, they laughed, they played together. And they really cared about one another, even though eight-year-olds

don't say they care about each other out loud. My teacher friend could see it. He knew it. He also knew that Philip was not really a part of that group. Philip did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.

“My friend had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter last year (1984). You know those things that pantyhose come in - the containers that look like great big eggs - my friend had collected ten of them. The children loved it when he brought them into the room. Each child was to get one. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.

“It was glorious. It was confusing. It was wild. They ran all around the church grounds, gathering their symbols, and returned to the classroom. They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them. All the children stood around the table.

“He opened one, and there was a flower, and they oohed and aahed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. ‘Beautiful,’ the girls all said, since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say ‘beautiful.’ He opened another, and there was a rock. And as third graders will, some laughed, and some said, ‘That’s crazy! How’s a rock supposed to be like new life?’ But the smart little boy who’d found it spoke up; ‘That’s mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that’s new life.’ They all laughed.

“My teacher friend said something to himself about the profundity of eight-year-olds, and opened the next one. There was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, ‘That’s not fair - That’s stupid! - Somebody didn’t do it right.’

“Then my teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. ‘It’s mine,’ Philip said. ‘It’s mine.’

And the children said, ‘You don’t ever do things right, Philip. There’s nothing there!’

“I did so do it,’ Philip said. ‘I did do it. It’s empty. *The tomb was empty!*’

“There was silence, a very full silence. And for you people who don’t believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day last spring (1984). From that time on it was different. Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.

Harry Pritchett then explained, “Philip died last summer. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn’t live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. And so, late last July (1984), with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died. The mystery simply enveloped him.

“At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg - an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.”⁴

While many are asking “What’s going on,” others are understanding Jesus’ resurrection, and it is changing their lives. That’s what it is meant to do for all of us. Jesus didn’t die a horrible death, and then rise again just so that we could be the same ole people day after day, dead in our own sins. Jesus endured death and rose from the grave so that we might have eternal life as we put our faith and trust in Him, and then follow His ways the rest of our lives.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the Name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

Let’s pray.

Father, open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to believe in the resurrection of Jesus today. Let the fog that has enveloped us be cleared away by the Truth of the Gospel so that we might clearly see the wonder that You have done for us, so that all who believe will have eternal life. Thank You for Jesus, who died and rose again, so that we might have life in Him. Help us to live in our world today so that we boldly proclaim Jesus as Lord in all that we say and do. This we pray in the great and powerful Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

⁴ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998] pg. 490-492)