

PARANORMAL

RECALL

Icebreaker:

Have you ever experienced something spooky that you couldn't explain? Describe to the group what happened and how you felt.

Discuss Your Experience:

This week's message began by looking at what Scripture teaches about spirits. Is there evidence of spirits like we see on television? Will these spirits harm or help the Christ-follower? Was Jesus a ghost when he was resurrected? Was he even really resurrected? All of these questions are relevant in today's culture. The Christ-follower should be confident in how to address these questions.

Question:

How would you respond if a coworker/neighbor/friend asked you one or all of these questions?

Introduction:

Jesus was raised from the dead. This claim Scripture makes is powerful, especially in today's culture where science and faith often appear to mix worse than oil and water. There are those in society who would steadfastly argue that is simply impossible for someone who is dead to come back to life. However, there are others who believe wholeheartedly that despite what science has discovered about the human body, anything is possible with God. We are faced with two different views that have far-reaching implications.

REVEAL

Pray For Guidance:

Take a few moments and ask God to help you discern, understand and apply the spiritual truth(s) of this week's lesson.

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground.

"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" asked the men. "He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?" And they remembered His words.

Returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the Eleven and to all the rest. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women with them were telling the apostles these things. But these words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. When he stooped to look in, he saw only the linen cloths. So he went home amazed at what had happened.

REFLECT

Understand the Context:

As a group, use your study Bibles or online resources to answer as many of the following questions about the selected passage as you can. Remember, these questions are to help guide your discussion. If you do not have time to address each one or feel they do not apply to your group, feel free to come up with some questions of your own.

- 1) Luke is widely believed to be the author of this passage and scholars have learned a great deal about his approach to writing this Gospel. What are some details that you have found regarding Luke's approach to writing this Gospel?

Read the Introduction to the Gospel of Luke in your HCSB Study Bible. What was Luke's occupation? In your view, would his occupation make it more or less difficult to believe in the events of Jesus' resurrection?

RECOGNIZE

Know the Truth(s):

Keeping in mind the context of the selected passage, read the Scripture as a group and carefully take note of the truth(s) and/or promises God provides. What did it mean? What does it mean? Are any meanings unclear?

- 1) Since the days of the early church there have been people who have argued against the account of Jesus' resurrection. Celsus, a pagan critic in the 2nd Century, wrote:

But who witnessed this? A hysterical woman-as you state-and someone else who was caught up in the same pattern of delusion! This person either dreamed it, owing to a peculiar state of mind, or he was under the influence of an overactive imagination and so concocted an appearance of Jesus according to his own wishes. This kind of wishful thinking has been verified in countless cases. Or perhaps what is more probable, this person desired to impress others with this sign, and by such a lie wanted to create an opportunity for imposters like himself...if Jesus desired to show that his power was really divine, he ought to have appeared to those who had ill-treated him, and to the one who had condemned him, and to all men universally.¹

Living in the 21st century provides the benefit of reading the resurrection account of Luke, something that wasn't widely available in the early church.

- As you read through the passage and consider the argument of Celsus, what questions come to mind?
- The story of the resurrection has many supernatural events that occur and very few characters involved. Does this make it easier or more difficult for you to believe it to be true? How does your view of Scripture aid or hinder you?

While many different theories and explanations have been lodged against the Gospel accounts, those theories were not unchallenged. One widely spread theory was that Jesus' disciples stole his body from the tomb to make it look like Jesus rose from the dead. Consequently, there were several who defended the validity of Jesus' resurrection. For example, John Chrysostom, an early church father, wrote regarding the stolen-body theory:

What does it mean that the grave linens were stuck on with the myrrh? For Peter saw these lying [in the tomb]. For if the disciples were interested in stealing, they would not have stolen the body naked, not only because of dishonoring it, but also in order not to delay and lose time in stripping it, and not to give them who were interested an opportunity to awake and seize them. Especially when it was myrrh, a drug that adheres

¹ Origen, Against Celsus, 2.55, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 4:453

tightly to the body and cleaves to the clothes; thus, it was not easy to take the clothes off the body and would require much time. From this again, the tale of theft is improbable.²

- Does knowing that Jesus' resurrection has always been questioned bring you closer or farther to God?
 - How does knowing people have always defended the resurrection of Jesus affect your relationship with God?
- 2) Verse 12 says that Peter ran to the tomb as soon as he heard that Jesus had been resurrected. After he arrived and found the linen clothes, Scripture says he left amazed at what had happened.
- If Jesus had already told his disciples that he would have to suffer and die and then rise on the third day (see v.7), why do you think Peter had to go see for himself?
 - Why not simply believe and rejoice?
 - What does it say about Peter?
 - What are some ways you relate to Peter through this event?
- 3) What's your own conclusion concerning whether Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter morning? What evidence do you find convincing?
- 4) Everyone in the ancient world admitted the tomb was empty; the issue was how it got that way.
- Can you think of any logical explanation for the vacant tomb other than the resurrection of Jesus?
- 5) The disciples were in the unique position of knowing for certain whether Jesus had returned from the dead, and they were willing to die for their conviction that he did.
- Can you think of anyone in history who has knowingly and willingly died for a lie? What degree of certainty would you need before you would be willing to lay down your life for a belief?
 - How thoroughly would you investigate a matter if you were going to base your life on it?

RESPOND

Take Action:

You've now prayed asking God to **Reveal** Himself and help you understand the selected passage; you've **Reflected** on the context in which the passage was written; you've **Recognized** God's timeless truths. Now you have a choice: do nothing with what you've learned or **Respond**. To help determine your response, as a group, discuss the following questions:

- 1) Verses 7-8 state that the women remembered Jesus' words only after the angels reminded them. Why do you think they didn't remember them when they saw the empty tomb?
- 2) Verse 12 says Peter got up and went to the tomb. However, the other disciples did not. How would you respond? Would you have been like Peter or like the other disciples?
- 3) Many church fathers defended the resurrection of Jesus, just like John Chrysostom did during his time. How will you respond? In today's culture where science is highly esteemed, what are some ways you can be a witness for the death and resurrection for Jesus? How could you share the good news of Jesus with others?

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, homily 90 on Matthew 28:11-14, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 10:530-31. The text has been rendered clearer.