

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

April 12-18, 2020

Sermon Series: This Changes Everything

Week Seven: "From Lord to Christ"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, You who have sent Jesus into the world to suffer, die, and rise again for our sake, help us to experience Your transforming resurrection power within our lives and ministry. We offer our prayers in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Throughout the Gospels we find that when people encountered Jesus they were changed, and for the better. That same transformation is available to you, a change for the better, when you encounter Christ in your life.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

One great preacher notes, "If someone predicts his death and resurrection, and then pulls it off, you might want to listen to him." The term Lord suggests that we are called to follow Jesus in this life. The term Christ tells us that the way of Jesus has implications for the afterlife as well. Do you follow Jesus as both Lord and Christ?

Sunday Scripture Reading: Luke 9:51; Luke 24:1-10 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What does Jesus do when He realizes the time of His death, resurrection, and ascension are nearing?
(9:51)

What day is it when the women take spices to Jesus' tomb? (24:1)

What do they find outside the tomb that is unusual? (24:2)

What do they see inside the tomb that is unusual? (24:3)

Who suddenly appears while the women are wondering about these unusual things? (24:4)

What is the women's initial response to their presence? (24:5)

What question do the men ask the women? (24:5)

What is the basic content of their proclamation? (24:6a)

What words of Jesus do the men remind the women about? (24:7-8)

What did the women do when they returned from the tomb to Jesus' disciples? (24:9)

What are the names of these women who were the first witnesses to the empty tomb? (24:10)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.

We might wonder, how did Jesus decide the time was right to head for Jerusalem?

We might also wonder why the women waited until Sunday morning to visit the tomb, if Jesus had died on Friday.

We could ask, did the women ever wonder if they were in the wrong place, at the wrong tomb, maybe a tomb that had not yet been sealed?

How are we supposed to picture the "appearance" of the two men in white? We might wonder how that really happened – did they just walk up suddenly, unnoticed, or did it happen almost like some kind of teleportation?

We might wonder how these two "men" had come by their own knowledge of what had happened to Jesus' body! And how did they know what Jesus had told His followers in Galilee?

We might wonder why these particular three women are named, but the others who are apparently there with them are not. Who is this Joanna? And is Mary the mother of James the mother of the apostle named James? Don't we learn elsewhere that Jesus had a brother named James? Is this actually Jesus' mother, Mary? If so, why wouldn't Luke say so?

Finally, we might wonder what it was about these two men in white that convinced the women to believe them. Was it their testimony about Jesus, or was it their memory of Jesus talking about His being arrested, crucified, and raised?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Mark 16:3; Matthew 28:2; Luke 24:23; Luke 9:23; Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:7; Luke 2:20; Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 8:1-3

Luke 9:51 begins the long middle section of the Gospel of Luke, which focuses on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The entire section from 9:51 through 19:28 is full of geographical markers as Jesus progresses on this physical journey. At the same time, the teachings and miracles of Jesus are occasions for His disciples to progress on their spiritual journeys of understanding exactly WHY Jesus has set out, resolutely, for Jerusalem. From 4:1 until this verse, Luke's Gospel has followed the Gospel of Mark in its structure and narrative, but now he turns to a collection of stories not found in Mark. Many of these stories and parables are shared by the Gospel of Matthew, but some, like the parable of the Good Samaritan, are found only in Luke's Gospel.

The story of Jesus' resurrection is the basis for all Christian faith. In all of the earliest Christian writings, there is an absolute conviction that Jesus was alive again, and able to be present with believers in a powerful way, a way that transcended their previous experience of the human Jesus. Furthermore, this experience of Jesus was also intimately connected to the experience of the Holy Spirit, which enabled people to proclaim "Jesus is Lord." This faith in Jesus as Lord had its roots in the traditions surrounding the very first encounters with the empty tomb, the angels at the tomb, and Jesus' appearances to His followers in His resurrected form, but it was not sustained by continued encounters through resurrection appearances. That happened through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the gatherings of Christ-followers.

Luke emphasizes in his telling of this first encounter with the empty tomb that it was the first day of the week – the day after the Sabbath. Due to the nearness of Jesus' death to the beginning of the Sabbath (sundown on Friday evening), the body of Jesus had not been anointed with spices and ointments as was the custom, but only wrapped in cloths and laid in the tomb. Contact with the body was forbidden on the Sabbath, and the emphasis Luke places on the fact that it is Sunday morning drives home the fact that the first women witnesses to the empty tomb were law-abiding Jews.

Unlike Mark's Gospel, which has a discussion among the women regarding their concern about getting someone to roll away the stone which sealed the tomb (Mark 16:3), in Luke's telling, the women simply arrive to find the stone has been moved. Matthew's description is even more dramatic – an angel of the Lord, accompanied by an earthquake, is responsible for moving the stone (Matthew 28:2)! What is fascinating, but perhaps easily overlooked, is the fact that Luke is the only Gospel to specifically include the most important detail – Jesus' body is missing! John's Gospel reports that after Mary Magdalene went to tell Peter and John, they returned to find only the burial cloths – but only Luke includes the detail that the women saw no body in the tomb!

According to Luke, the fact of the empty tomb simply leads to "puzzlement" – it does not lead them to faith in and of itself. It is the witness of the "men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" that does that. Even though these witnesses are called "men" in the narrative, they are clearly meant to be understood as angels (if for no other reason than the fact that they are called angels later in the narrative, in Luke 24:23)! Another interesting connection is that in Luke, the only other time the Greek word for the appearance of the clothing of these angels is used is in his telling of the story of the Transfiguration, when referring to the appearance of Moses and Elijah – two more heavenly figures who are being seen on earth (see Luke 9:29).

In speaking with the women, these angels utter the essential Easter proclamation: “He has risen!” But just as importantly, the angels remind the women of Jesus’ own earlier words to them, showing how what they are seeing is the fulfillment of Jesus’ own prophecy concerning His destiny. They call upon the women to interpret the present events in light of what Jesus had already taught them. Unlike Matthew 28:7 and Mark 16:7, the women here in Luke are NOT directed to go tell Peter and the other disciples what they have seen – in fact, no command is given for them, at all, to go and tell others! But Luke is also the only writer to make the explicit point that the women DO remember Jesus’ teaching – and this is apparently, for Luke, all the motivation they need to go speak to the other disciples. The language Luke uses here is actually reminiscent of another time in Luke’s gospel where witnesses to the proclamation of angels hurry back to tell others, without being commanded to do so – the shepherds in the fields at the proclamation of Jesus’ birth (see Luke 2:20)!

Much is often made of comparing the lists of women at the tomb in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, and Luke 24:10. Mary Magdalene is explicitly named in all three, and Luke and Mark both name “Mary the mother of James,” whom Matthew simply calls “the other Mary.” Mark adds a woman named Salome, whereas Luke adds a woman named Joanna. Joanna had been listed among those women ministering to Jesus in Luke 8:1-3, but that list also included a woman named Susanna who is not listed explicitly here at the tomb! The point Luke makes by also speaking of “the others with them” seems to be that the names are not what is important – what is important is that it was the same women from Galilee who had seen Jesus die, and be buried, who are the first witnesses, and who are now reporting on their experience.

It cannot be overemphasized that the witness of these women begins to bring the Christian community into existence. By remembering Jesus’ own words and teachings, they begin to understand the meaning of these amazing events. It will take others, Paul among them, to study the Jewish Scriptures in order to fully understand how these events are their fulfillment. For the women themselves, the events are the fulfillment of Jesus’ own words. They begin to worship Jesus as not only Lord, but as truly the Christ, because they remember that Jesus has foreseen all that has come to pass. He is risen, just as He said!

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Which would be more impactful for you if you had been there – the empty tomb, or the witness of the gleaming white angels? What does this suggest to you about the impact of your own witness?

How do you think the memory of Jesus’ prophetic words concerning His destiny would have impacted the faith of the women? Do you believe the accuracy of that prophecy gives a valid foundation for faith?

What do you think would change in moving from following Jesus as “Lord” – that is, a human master whose life you wish to emulate – and following Jesus as “Christ” – that is, the divine Son of God who has been raised to life? Where do you think most Christians are on that spectrum? Where are you?

How does the Resurrection impact the practice of your faith? Is it the basis of everything you do in your spiritual life, or is it a hard-to-see-the-relevance-of matter that doesn't necessarily change how we follow Jesus?

Do you think Christianity would have spread the way it did without the proclamation, "Jesus is risen!"? Why is that proclamation the foundation of our faith?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

God of life, help us to be Easter people! Renew in us a Spirit of praise and worship, that we might become willing and effective proclaimers of the Resurrection, and new life in Christ. We pray in the holy name of Jesus, the risen Christ! Amen.