

# Where did they find Jesus?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] walking, talking. We'll pray together as we look at these words that he would do so for us. Now let's pray. Lord, how we thank you that you opened up the scriptures to these two brothers on the road that day. And we ask now that you would open up the scriptures to us and reveal yourself, we pray to us, for we ask in your name. Amen.

Well, I wonder, whatever it is that brought you today, what you would think if I said that the event that we're here to celebrate today is the thing that the whole of Christianity depends on.

Today, Christians all across the world, and we together as a church family, we celebrate the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day after he had died.

And perhaps if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian today, that sounds strange. It would be easy to think, given all that goes on at Easter, that that is just maybe one small and dispensable part of the story. You know, somewhere buried between family get-togethers and roast lambs and heaps of chocolate is a story about a man raised to life again. And who really believes that anymore today? Well, those other things that happen at Easter are nice, but listen to Paul. She's one of Jesus' earliest followers at what he has to say about the resurrection of Jesus only about 10 years after it had happened. He says this, If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. More than that, we are found then to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[ 2 : 2 2 ] How much hangs on the resurrection? Paul says, everything. If Christ is not risen, he says, forget coming to church.

Forget faith. We might as well all go home now if Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, we are giving people hope, but we are lying about God if he has not been raised.

If Christ is not risen, he says, then he has not dealt with our sins, and we have no right standing before God. If Christ is not risen, he says, then those who have died before us died in false hope, for they will not be raised if Christ has not been raised. If Paul is not saying that the whole of Christianity, the whole reason we are here does not hang on the resurrection, I don't know what he's saying, because that is everything, isn't it, that we as Christians live for and believe in, that is ruled out, he says, if Jesus stayed dead and did not return to glorious life.

But, he says, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. He is alive again, which brings, doesn't it, forgiveness, hope, life, trust in God to life again with him. We have all those things in Christ since he is raised from the dead. And so, this morning, I just want us to take some time to see, to remember, to bed down in our hearts the fact that he is risen, because it doesn't matter how good it all sounds if it's not true. This is the bedrock of our faith. And for us to see this, we need to see it all comes down to one simple question. Where did they find Jesus that first day?

If you doubt that Jesus did rise again, maybe you think this is all a bit too much. Perhaps you think it's obvious he didn't come back to life. But here's the difficulty with that doubt.

[ 4 : 32 ] No body was ever found on that day or ever since. Nobody has been able to point to a dead body of Jesus. How did you lose a body? Especially such an important body, not only to those who loved him, but to those who wanted him dead and buried. Where did he go? Where did they find the body of the Lord?

Well, first, let's see. Not in the obvious place. He was not in the tomb. At first, he was lost.

Just imagine, if you can, the shock, the distress, the confusion of coming to your dear friend's grave, the one that you had hoped would save the world, but had watched die in shame and pain. You come to the grave, but you find the grave open and empty. And it would be all the more shocking if you had actually seen that friend be buried there in that place not two days before. Now, Luke, who wrote the account that we've just read from, he was very concerned about the historical reliability, the trustworthiness of his sources. He says he set out to write an orderly account of what had taken place.

And today, we would call him an investigative journalist. And you can tell that he's not inventing myths because of the way that he says Jesus was buried. The guy who buried him, he says, was called Joseph. We're told he was a member of the very council that had had Jesus condemned and put to death. Now, how open do you think Christians would have wanted to be in saying that a member of the council that had condemned Jesus, who had put Jesus to death, one of those guys was the ones who had buried Jesus himself? Surely he shouldn't be the one to do it. Surely you would want for one of his nearest and dearest friends to have done that for him. But no, Luke records that it was this Joseph who goes to the judge to ask for Jesus' body to be taken down from the cross. And that was an incredible risk, you think. He was putting himself in line to suffer the same death, the same punishment, by openly sympathizing with a condemned criminal. It was very risky for Joseph to have done.

And so, to all the world, this would be an act of immense kindness and love to spare the body of Jesus from hanging in shame or decaying or being eaten by birds. Why would Luke have recorded that Joseph, of all people, would do that if, in fact, he hadn't done it? It's one detail among many that confirms that Luke's gospel is historically trustworthy, that he's recording what happened in history, not a mythical or an invented account of things. And so, with that in mind, just keep your eye on the body. Keep your eye on the body. Look, verse 53, then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth, and placed it in a tomb cut in rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. He personally takes the body of the Lord down from the cross to the tomb. And better still, keep your eye on this. Others saw him do this.

[ 8 : 19 ] Verse 55, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. So, they too saw Jesus' body taken down, wrapped, buried in the tomb with their own eyes. Meaning that there are multiple witnesses to the fact that Jesus really was dead and buried.

There's his body in that tomb in that way. They all knew it. If you had asked them that day, where is Jesus? Where is the body of Jesus? They would have told you, he is buried right there.

We saw it happen. And there's no doubt that he was really dead. He was buried in that tomb. And so does that help us feel that the shock, the distress, the confusion of these women, two days later, they go back to that same place where they had stood with spices they'd prepared, ready to anoint Jesus' body, to give him a proper burial, only to find what? They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. You see the shock? Same place, same tomb, but nobody. They have lost Jesus. And they are at a loss. They wondered about this. What has happened? Now, if you follow the story up to this point, there should be a part of you that wonders why they wondered. Because Jesus had told his followers again and again and again what he would do once he was dead and buried, that he would rise again from the dead. And so if you loved and trusted

Jesus, you knew what he had said, would you not immediately think he is back, he is alive again? Why did they turn up at all with spices? Why were they not waiting, camped outside the tomb that morning, waiting for him to emerge? Well, clearly they weren't. And it takes two angels to come and piece it all together for them. In their loss, their shock, their confusion, remember how he told you, the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. Then they remembered his words. Then it fell into place, didn't it? This is what he said would happen. They have understood, they run back, don't they, to the others and tell them. But verse 11, they did not believe the women. Their words seemed to them like nonsense. Only Peter got up, he ran to the tomb, he bent over, saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and went away wondering to himself what had happened. See, he's still left without the answer. He's still lost. They have lost the Lord.

They don't know where he is. Keep your eyes on the body. But where is it? It's gone. There is no body. And so his followers are at a loss for what has happened.

[ 11 : 40 ] See, despite Jesus telling them over and over what would happen, they have lost their trust in his words, haven't they? Despite them knowing just who he was, they have lost their hope in him to do what he said he would do. This is not a group of people preparing to pull the world's biggest hoax, is it?

These are a group of people in free fall, in shock, confusion, despair. They are lost. There was a body. Now there is no body. And they don't know what to do. Can they believe what they've heard? Is he risen?

And if, as we've seen, Luke's record can be trusted as historically sound, we have no reason to think that there's anything dubious or deceitful going on behind the scenes. There are named witnesses to tell us that everything is as it seems. Whatever you believe, again, this is the fact that you come up against, isn't it? Where was the body? Where is the body? There was no body that morning. The people who had buried him could not find one. So where is he? Well, instead of a body, they come back, don't they, with a question. A question, why are you looking for the living among the dead? Could it be true?

Is he risen? Is that where he is? Again, perhaps you're not sure, but again, keep your eyes on the body. Where is it? Where is he? Where do they find the body of the Lord? Well, it was lost. But Luke wants us to know that it is found. He is found. On the very same day, we read, two disciples, who were there when the women came back, telling them that he was risen, were walking on the road. As they talked, verse 15, Luke, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. But they were kept from recognizing him.

Where is he? He is there, walking, talking. There he is. There's his body, no longer dead, alive again, resurrected. But we're kept in suspense because the people who were there didn't recognize him.

[ 13 : 58 ] And they are still lost. Luke, they stood still, their faces downcast. They still don't see, they don't know Jesus has risen. And so their hopes and their hearts are dashed. Look how much they were hoping for, verses 20 and 21. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death.

They crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. That we had hoped, past tense, no longer. We had hoped he was the redeemer. We had hoped he was the one sent to save us. But now they have lost that hope because then they say we have lost faith in his words. They know what has been said, don't they? Some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. And then they came and told us they'd seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. So they have the data all there, don't they? They know there is no body.

What's missing? They don't believe what the women said had happened. They don't believe what Jesus himself had said had to happen, that there was no body because he was risen. That is why they're downcast, isn't it? Why they're confused. Why their hope has gone. If they believed the witness of those words, he is risen, would they not have still had hope and joy? Would they not have seen clearly?

And the great irony for us, of course, is that we know that they could have all those things right there if they had only looked? Because who were they telling this story to? They're telling the story to Jesus himself, but they still haven't recognized him. And so here's the question relevant to us.

There is his body, it's right there, but how do they see him? How do they know and recognize him? Well, firstly, Jesus tells them, doesn't he, a bigger story. How foolish you are, he said. How slow to believe. What? All that the prophets had spoken.

[ 16 : 19 ] Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And opening, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. How does Jesus show himself to these followers? He opens the Bible and begins to show them page by page how the whole thing was leading up to his own death and resurrection.

And secondly, he shows them, doesn't he, a visible sign. He stops to eat with them, and when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

And then their eyes were opened and recognized him, and he disappeared from their sights. How do they see him then? Because the breaking of the bread did what for them?

It reminded them, as he had told them it would, the breaking of the bread, remember me. As he did that, they remembered him. They saw him and recognized him, the risen Christ.

And so these guys find and recognize, don't they, the body of the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, when Jesus himself came to them and opened up the Bible to them and revealed himself to them.

[ 17 : 44 ] Then they asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened up the scriptures to us. They went straight back to Jerusalem, don't they? Now convinced, now what? Full of hope, full of joy. Now they see clearly to tell the brothers and sisters, he is risen. They had lost him, hadn't they? And with him they had lost hope. But now they have found him again and found that hope once more. Where is he now? He is risen. And friends, we can know Jesus risen, recognize him today in those same ways. We've said, haven't we, his body is not here, but he is risen, he is ascended, he is in heaven. But how do we know him and recognize him? How do we know that he is alive? Well, we know through the witness of those women who were there on that day to see him buried, who heard the news, and who were to see him with their own eyes. We have that witness that he is risen. We have the promise of God's word. That's sure for us, isn't it? The Messiah had to suffer these things. And then enter his glory. That is the pattern, the story that we have in this book. We have also Jesus' own words. He said, not once, twice, but three times, that he had to be handed over, had to suffer, had to die. So if all those things had to happen, then why not the final thing? That he had to be raised? And we have the testimony of those who saw him alive again.

And it all adds up, doesn't it, to tell one great big story with the resurrection of Jesus at its heart. You might think, well, just show me a body. Just point to him. Can't you do that?

There's a gap, isn't there? But without the resurrection, none of this makes any sense. The evidence does not piece together without it. Take the resurrection out of the picture, and you are left with a gap, an empty tomb, and an empty grave that we have to fill with our own speculation and confusion. No one has ever found a body apart from those who were there and saw him alive again and tell us that he is risen. Now, you might think that that story is a bit thin.

If you don't trust the Bible or the words of Jesus, is there not more to this than a story? It would have sounded like, in the apostles' words, nonsense. But, but, surely if he had not told us, if we did not have this story, the resurrection would be unbelievable. If the first time we had heard about our resurrection was on the day it happened, would that make more sense to us? Surely it wouldn't have. It would have made it sound like a made-up story, a filler to fill a gap that we had to fill.

But given that the whole backstory of the Bible prepares us for a crucified and risen Savior and King who had to rise again, doesn't the resurrection fit? Given that when he came, that same Savior and King said he would suffer, die, and rise again, doesn't it follow that there would be a resurrection?

[ 21 : 27 ] And given that the women who saw him buried went back to find him gone and then run home saying that he'd been raised to life, isn't the resurrection compelling? This is how the story goes, friends. This is where the whole story leads. This is why if the resurrection did not happen, then the whole rest of the story falls apart, doesn't it? Because it is the resurrection that is the climax of God's plan and work in the world.

And so if it is not a resurrection, then the burden of proof surely lies on those who claim that his body is still a corpse, that his body is still lying somewhere under the earth, that it is hidden, that it is lost. But given that there is no proof whatsoever that it is, and given that the testimony all leads to the fact that he is risen, surely that is most credible, surely that is most compelling, that is where the story leads. So where do we find Jesus today? Well, yeah, in the kind of forensic sense, in this investigative way, we can go back through all the evidence and back through the history and come to this conclusion, can't we? But here's the thing, plenty of people have done that and have seen the evidence and have been a detective and done the investigating and had it all up and yet not recognized that Jesus is alive. The one thing that these guys on the road help us to see is that Jesus is not alive theoretically or logically or even just in a kind of spiritual sense.

they meet Jesus, don't they, physically, actually, personally, really, because they could not have grasped, could they, where this all pointed, what the women had said, what Jesus had said, what God had said in his word, unless he had been with them, unless he had come alongside of them, walked with them and talked with them, they still would have been at a total loss, wouldn't they? They didn't work it out for themselves in a classroom. They didn't hear it in a sermon. It was revealed to them personally by a living and risen Jesus. They didn't have it, a kind of eureka moment as they spoke, did they?

It wasn't the kind of slow dawning of realization. It was a burning in their hearts. It was a spiritual eye-opening moment. Were our hearts not burning within us, they say, while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us. Dear friends, the evidence is there for us to see, but this is the most compelling reason to believe that this is true. The fact that Jesus still does this, that he personally still comes near and sets our hearts burning as he speaks to us from God's word and opens our eyes to reveal that he is living. The evidence surely is in this room and every Christian that believes. We have lots at home of lift the flap books. We have a one-year-old at home.

They're great fun. You go through looking for what is hidden. A little boy lifts the flap to reveal it to us. Well, this story is a bit like a lift the flap story, where Jesus himself sits down with us.

[ 25 : 06 ] And as we open the flaps, is he in the tomb? No. But was he on the road? Yeah. Is he with us now?

Yes. He is the one who himself lifts the flaps, so to speak, reveals himself to us, his living presence. Where do we find him today? Where do we find him today? We find him when we open his word, and he himself lifts the pages up to reveal himself to us in it and sets our hearts burning as he speaks to us. You have heard Christians say before, if only we could have been there on the road that day. Wouldn't that have been amazing to be in that Bible study with Jesus? Wouldn't it have been amazing to hear Jesus himself talk through the Old Testament and where he is in it? Brothers and sisters, we have missed the point. If we don't think that Jesus does that for us every single week, as his word is open before us. Do our hearts not burn as he opens the scriptures to us, as he shows us himself in it? If only we could have been there at the last supper where Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine. If you were here last Sunday night, did he not do that? Did he not meet with us to remind us of himself, his body, his blood? Was he not recognized to us in the breaking of the bread?

Friends, it is when Jesus reveals himself personally to us that he stops being lost to us, lost in the past or in myth or in death. It is then when we meet him alive again that we who were lost are found, are found. It is then our confusion gives way to understanding, our despair gives way to hope, our sorrow gives way to joy, our doubt gives way to trust. It is only then when we meet with the risen Lord that we can be sure of peace with God, forgiveness of sins, of life beyond the grave.

It is when he comes to us to reveal himself to us in the witness, in the word. It is then that we have a life with God and faith in him becomes everything to us. And that is what he holds out to us today in his risen life on this resurrection morning. The risen Christ comes to us, to you and to me as his word is open. And he holds out to you everything. Forgiveness of sins, hope in a life beyond the grave, peace with God, real joy that lasts beyond our circumstances, the promise of his coming again. He holds it all out to us.

He says this can be your story. If you see me, recognize me, risen from the dead. It all comes together. Would you have that? If that is not your story, if this is not your Christ, would he be today?

[ 28 : 30 ] Would you know him, trust him, love him, risen from the dead, and come and meet with us? Meet him in his word. Meet with his people and know that he is living and saving still because he died for our sins sins. And because he raised again from the dead on the third day, just as he said he would.

Let's pray that we would know him together now. Lord Jesus, how we praise you and how we thank you that you live forever to save sinners like us.

Lord, we thank you that you are so gentle and patient. Lord, even with your people back then who had the promise of your word, who had seen you and walked with you and talked with you and yet were not anticipating the reality of your resurrection. Lord, how gentle, how patient and kind you were. How gentle, gracious and patient you still are with us. Lord, how we pray that you would take away our doubts. Lord, we pray that we would know you not only in the pages of history, but as our living Lord today. We thank you that you live, that you meet with us, that you condescend to be with us, that you hold out your death and your risen life to us now as our salvation. We thank you that we still have hope of redemption through you, through your blood, through your resurrection. Let us never lose that hope, we pray in your name. Amen.