

Luke 23:50 - 24:12

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[0 : 00] There's two things that you need if you're going to understand what this passage is really about. The first thing you need to know is the distinction between this gospel and the other three gospels.

! This gospel was written for an individual. This gospel was written for Theophilus. It was written for a man, for one person. Doubtless, no doubt, Luke anticipates that this gospel will be read much more widely.

But the focus of Luke is this one person. The other gospel writers wrote for communities. Luke actually tells us, right at the beginning of the gospel, that he's writing for a single individual whose name is Theophilus, which means friendly towards God.

Theophilus. Now, lots of you in this room, some of you are teachers, or you write or maybe you give talks. And every time you do that, you give a talk or you write something, and there's always a principle which governs how you do it.

And it's this, that you are always speaking or writing or thinking about the specific audience that you're addressing. So if you're doing a talk on holiday Bible time, you're thinking, how do I get these children to understand?

[1 : 19] If you're writing a letter to a friend, you're writing it, aren't you, with that friend in mind. The individual to whom you're writing to. And this passage is best understood if we remember that it's written to one particular man whose name meant God-friendly.

The second thing you need to know, if you're going to understand this passage, is that the word gospel, Luke's gospel, does not mean biography. It does not mean biography.

It is a gospel. Of course, all the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they maintain, don't they, lots of, they have lots of material in it that you would put into a biography.

But Luke is not trying to write a biography about Jesus. People write a biography to give you information about the person. But Luke is writing a gospel.

Luke is writing a good news book. And the purpose of the gospels is to change you. The purpose of the gospels are to transform you. And so Luke's purpose in these 24 chapters is because he has a deep inner longing that that individual, Theophilus, do you remember the God-friendly man, that he would have his name changed.

[2 : 38] That he would have his name changed from the God-friendly man to the Christ-following man. Not Theophilus, but Christophilus or something like that.

And he's in the final stages of this little book. And even as Luke writes, you can see that the scroll that he's writing on is coming to an end. He's got room for another chapter.

And so as it were, now probably more than any other time, every word counts. What he wants to communicate to Theophilus in this last chapter. And you may think, well, that's just incidental.

Surely he could just press delete. Or he could get another ream of paper if he wants. But that isn't the case. So, Luke's gospel, I was looking at this this week.

Luke's gospel is written on a scroll. And the materials that Luke is writing on are very, very expensive writing materials. When I was a little boy, I had a writing pad by Basil and Bond.

[3 : 36] Does Basil and Bond still do writing materials? I thought it was very, very expensive. But it's more expensive than Basil and Bond. These scrolls are very expensive. They are the equivalent of a season ticket at Chelsea or Arsenal.

They are the equivalent of a membership at a plush London club. So this chapter matters enormously to Luke. He's near the end. The gospel writer.

And he's speaking about Christ. And he's speaking to this man, the God-friendly man, in order that he would become the Christ-following man. And as you read this section that Penny wrote to us, I

think there are four big words.

Four big words that encapsulate, that summarize to you and I, what is Luke trying to do in this chapter. That he longs to see come to fruition in the heart of Theophilus.

And the first thing that we come across, these women who've gone to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body, the first thing that happens to them is that they are thrown into confusion.

[4 : 37] That's the first word. Confusion. That's the first thing. And I think that's one indication for you and I that Luke is telling the truth, isn't it?

If you and I wanted to make up a story of the resurrection, we wouldn't describe it in the first instance that it was women who were the first witnesses. Certainly if you were living in the first century, you wouldn't.

You would never dream of doing that. And yet Luke has got such a high view of women, they crop up all over the place. You would never say that it was the women that found the tomb empty.

And that they were thrown into confusion. And that confusion arose for a very simple reason. It's such a touching scene, isn't it? Jesus, who they've been following for many months, in the passage before Jesus has been condemned and he's been cruelly executed.

And they have stood by as this man. This man, Joseph Arimathea, comes out of the darkness, so to speak. He's not been one of their company.

[5 : 42] He's not been one of the travelling band. But something has happened to him. And he comes out into the public profession. And he asks for the body of Jesus. And then he has lovingly and carefully buried it.

Perhaps in his own tomb. And they've followed it. And these women have watched it. And they've marked the spot. And they've seen the body go into the tomb.

Because they're going to come back in a couple of days. It's such a sorry, sorrowful scene, isn't it? So sympathy. Their friend Jesus, how utterly tragic.

What has happened to him. And now the body that was so vital. Is limp and lifeless. And the whole thing is so true to life, I think. Where are the men?

Where are the men? They're not there, are they? They're at home. Right experience is anything to go by. I think that's true to life.

[6 : 42] Strong men find it very hard. To go to the deathbed. Strong men very often find it very hard. To go to the graveside. There's something very real about the way this story is being told.

And they come to the empty tomb. Look at verse 4. They are perplexed. They are perplexed. They are thrown into confusion. And again, if I was writing this story. I would have these women immediately recognizing Jesus.

Jesus is risen from the dead. And they remember everything that he told them. And they run back to his disciples. And they show them as it were. Where it was in Luke's gospel.

That he promised that all this would happen. And enthusiasm would break out. All over this little community of faith in Jesus. But Luke chapter 24 is a chapter about confusion.

And it's a chapter about perplexity. Time and time again. So why, apart from the fact that it is true. Would Luke include this? He didn't need to include it in his gospel.

[7 : 41] Why would he include this as he is writing to Theophilus? For a very simple reason. But he understands that this man who has been brought up amongst the Roman gods.

Not really sure of any real religion. Perhaps been drawn by the Jewish religion. A man whose very name expressed what he seems to be.

A man who thinks of himself as God friendly. Actually if he is ever going to become a follower of Jesus Christ. He needs to be thrown into confusion. He needs to understand that his way of thinking about Jesus.

He needs to understand that his own way of thinking about religion. The way that he thinks about God. All of that needs to be thrown into confusion.

Because the only way that he can come to clarity. About the Lord Jesus. Is if all his old ideas about religion and about God. And even whatever ideas he might have about Jesus of Nazareth.

[8 : 45] Are suddenly thrown into confusion. And he begins to realise there is something unique about Jesus of Nazareth. When up to this point.

Along with other multitudes. He might have said something like this. Well the way I like to think about Jesus is. Dot dot dot. What I like to think about Jesus is.

He is a wonderful teacher. The way I like to think about Jesus is. That he is a little bit better than I am. A little bit better than me. But he is like me. And all of that needs to be thrown into utter confusion.

And that is exactly where these women are. And it is exactly brought home as we move on. From their immediate confusion. But now you will notice.

These angels appear in verse 4. That the women in their confusion are asked a question. That is a second word. The women are asked a question.

[9 : 47] In verse 4. And it is a very important question. For them and for you and for me. Why are you looking for the living? Amongst the dead.

And that is what they were doing wasn't it? The way they thought about Jesus. Is that he was as dead as dead could be. It was tragic. It was filled with sadness.

It was pitiful. They were there to anoint his body out of affection. But the angels are saying to them aren't they? You are in the wrong place. You are looking for the living among the dead.

And the dead are not to be found here. Now of course this was a word for Theophilus isn't it? But it's also a word for you and I. Those times when you feel sorry for Jesus.

Poor Jesus. The terrible things that must have happened to him. And we need to remember poor Jesus. And Jesus could be as dead as dead can be.

[10 : 50] And it made no difference to your life whatsoever. We think of those services in the city. Where they remember great benefactors. And they have memorial services.

And you go and you celebrate the light. Or Founders Day at school. Where you go and remember those people who donated masses of money. To the school. And you remember their moral example.

And you remember their generosity. Or you remember their influence that has come down to us through the ages. But this is not Memorial Day. This is not the Founders Day.

This is the Lord's Day. Because he is risen. And we see how much these women have been thrown so much into confusion. Because they realise now.

That the way they thought about Jesus. Wasn't really the way that Jesus was. And actually I think it's a great question to ask myself. And to ask you.

[11 : 52] Would it actually make any difference whatsoever to your life. If Jesus was still dead. You could still think of him as a great teacher. Can you? You could still follow his great example.

You could still come to church and come to communion and feel sorry for him. You could still feel an obligation to remember Jesus. Because he's made such a difference in our world. But actually he would be as dead as that can be.

You can read the Bible. You can say your prayers. You can try to follow Jesus as an example. Day by day. And you can still be looking.

For the living. Among the dead. If he had stayed dead. Your life. Would it have been exactly the same?

Would it be exactly the same? Would it have made no difference to your life whatsoever? But he is a living saviour. He is alive.

[12 : 57] And then confusion comes. Doesn't it? You may think. You might wonder. How can people who haven't read their Bible as much as me.

And they don't say their prayers as much as me. And they're not as committed as I am. How can they speak of Jesus. As a living saviour.

Who they know. And they trust. And they love. And they have this living relationship. And in whom they find joy. Instead of burden.

And delight. Not simply just a sense of duty. And you can read the Bible. And you can think that in your prayers. And in your actions.

And in all that you try to do. To follow Jesus' example. That is what it means to be a Christian. But you're not a Christian at all. And you don't know him.

[13 : 55] And you don't trust him. And you don't love him. And you don't delight in him. And what you need to do this morning. Is you need to come to the risen Christ.

And find life. Now has it made any difference to your life. That Jesus is alive. Or would it be exactly the same in your life.

If Jesus was as dead as dead could be. What's the difference isn't it. Between moralism. And real Christian faith. Isn't it.

So we see first of all their confusion. And then this question. This question that turns them round. You see it's a shaft of light. It's a question.

What are you doing. Looking for the living. Though you are still dead. And thirdly there comes a moment of illumination. Illumination. The lights are switched on. Remember verse 6.

[14 : 54] Remember verse 6. How he told you. Remember what he said. We know what he said don't we. He said I'm going to Jerusalem. I'm going to be crucified. But on the third day I'm going to rise. Again.

And they heard him say it. And according to Luke's gospel. They heard him say it again. And again. And again. And again. And they've never taken it in. But now amazingly.

Illumination happens. The light comes on. And that is what happens. When somebody comes to faith. Amazingly. It brings this illumination.

Of course. He said. This is what would happen. Of course. He is. Who he said he is. And all kinds of things.

He had said. Must have come flooding back to their minds. As they begin to realise. That he was not a dead figure. But a living. Glorious saviour. And they've been looking at him.

[15 : 50] Through the wrong lens of the telescope. You know that moment. They suddenly realised. It's actually interesting isn't it. That one of the questions. That has just surfaced.

In Luke's gospel. In Jesus' trial. Is Jesus. Who are you? It comes later I think. In Luke's gospel. Than the others. And they're discovering the answer to that.

Here aren't they? And it's interesting. It's scarcely. You might scarcely have noticed it. When Penny was reading it. But it's a mark of Luke's genius. As well as the work of the spirit in him.

That he's slipped. Two very important titles. Of the Lord Jesus. To tell you who he is. In Luke's verse 7. He speaks of Jesus. As the son of man.

The son of man. Is this great. Old testament figure. Prophesied in Daniel 7. About the way. In which when the Messiah came.

[16 : 46] He would bring in God's kingdom. And what God's kingdom would do. Would be restore life. For those who trusted in him. Into something like. The way life should be. And isn't that what Jesus.

Done all the way through his ministry. Restored life. To what. To life as it should be. And Luke has recorded it. He's got a special interest in it.

He's a doctor. He's seen Jesus restore the sick. He's seen Jesus transform life. He's the son of man. Brings in the kingdom.

And then do you notice. This other little title. But Luke slides into the story. In verse 3. When he speaks of Jesus. He speaks of Jesus as Lord. Lord Jesus.

Verse 3. When Noah is beginning to read. Children of that age. Beginning to read. They don't read in their heads. Do they? And they read out loud.

[17 : 47] Speak out loud. And your mother would have said to you. Like my mother used to say to me. At times. Read in your head. Read in your head. As he read out loud. Well in the first century.

And in Jesus' time. They didn't read in their heads. They didn't read. They didn't read quietly. They read out loud. The gospels. Were meant.

To be read out loud. The bible is meant to be read out loud. You're meant to hear it. And so Luke. Is doing something here. Isn't he? Imagine Theophilus. Theophilus. As he comes to verse 3. As he reads those words.

Out loud. When they went into the tomb. They did not find. The body of. Kyrios. Lord. Jesus.

[18 : 44] What do you think he did at that point? Did he stumble over those words? This is a man. Who is probably part of that. Whole governmental system. In Rome. In which.

The one that you. Did call Lord. Was not Jesus. But you called. Emperor Caesar. Lord. And here. Out of his lips. Can you imagine Luke.

Writing this. As he loved this man. He slips it in. And he imagines Theophilus. Reading it out loud. They did not find the body. Of the Lord.

Jesus. Luke. Praying as he did so. Lord. May Theophilus. As he reads these words. I pray. That Theophilus. Would ask himself.

Dare I read these words. Dare I call Jesus. Lord. So do you see. What is happening? This is a true account. Of that first. Eastern.

[19 : 39] Eastern morning. But it's been told. In such a way. But Luke. Is saying to Theophilus. Where are you man? Where are you at spiritually?

What are you going to do with Jesus? Thrown into confusion. By just trying to take in. Who Jesus really is. Faced with this question. Would it make any difference.

To your life. If Jesus were not risen from the dead. Given this illumination. Of the whole story. Of Jesus in the gospel. And then we see this last word. That describes these women.

As they move from confusion. To question. To illumination. To proclamation. That's the last word. Proclamation of Jesus. They run back to the men.

The men are still at their breakfast. They look up from the table. They say. What is happening? Why are you so excited? Speak women. And they say.

[20 : 37] The Lord Jesus has risen from the grave. He is alive. And he's done exactly what he promised to do. And they look down into their plates again. And they say. Nonsense. It's never never land you're living in.

It's once upon a time. It's old wives tales. That's what they say. If you made this story up. You would have omitted that. Wouldn't you? But you see. Since it's true.

You can afford to put it down there. Can't you? In black and white. The resurrection was not some hoped for event. That brought some kind of hallucination. To these people.

It is the very last thing. That they expect in their lives. And an amazing thing happens. I wonder if you notice that in the reading. As the women go back.

With this proclamation of the gospel. There's at least one of the men. Sitting in the corner. And he thinks I'm going to check it out. And he runs to the tomb. And he sees the grave clothes lying there.

[21 : 33] Why is that significant? Well I hope nobody in this room. Believes the nonsense. About people stealing the body of Jesus. If you want to be a grave robber.

You don't unwrap the body. And tidily put the shroud to the side. Do you want to ledge? But do you notice what Luke tells us about Peter? He says that when Peter went into the tomb. He went. Marvelling. Stunt. You can translate that as disconcerted. Puzzled. Confused. And when you go to the end of the chapter.

Again and again. Jesus Christ appears. And you meet people who are confused. So everyone in this chapter. As they discover the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They are confused.

And I wonder whether you see the message. The message is this. It is the confused. Who are illumined. And they want to tell others. Who become confused.

[22 : 28] And are illumined. And want to tell others. Who become confused. And illumined. And want to tell others. And that is how the gospel came here this morning.

Because it is. As people hear of the reality of the risen Lord Jesus. They are confused. And then they are illumined. And then they want to tell others. And that is what happens.

When people see the truth. And the power of the message of the gospel. People say. Well this doesn't seem to fit. With the way that I think about Jesus. I have always thought about Jesus really. Being kind of smaller version of me. And him fitting into my life.

And I have thought about him as dead. And to be pitied. But now the gospel is saying to me. He has risen from the grave. And that he has broken the neck. Of death. And for all those who belong to him.

And are brought. Into this world. A shaft of glorious light. That brings hope. And the prospect of a future. And the challenge of a life.

[23 : 33] Live for him. Which yes. May involve carrying a cross. May involve difficulty. But it will be a life of joy. And resurrection power. And so as he begins to close his gospel.

You can see Luke at his little table. Can't you? With the oil lamp burning low. With a candle burning low. And he hurries to finish the gospel. And he's praying. Father. Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus. Please look upon this. God friendly man. Theophilus. To whom I'm writing. And even if it means.

Lord. Throwing him into confusion. Bring him illumination. About who my saviour is. Bring Theophilus. To come and trust in him.

And be willing. Whatever it costs him. As a Roman citizen. That Christ is risen from the grave. And he restores us to the true humanity. As a son of man.

[24 : 32] And he masters our lives. As Lord and saviour. And that is the message for Theophilus. And that is the message for me.

And that is the message for you. Let's pray.