

FEASTING ON THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

The Most Difficult Promise to Keep

Luke 23-24

INTRODUCTION: What a privilege it is to worship our risen Savior!

I am grateful for every one of you members of St. Andrew Baptist Church for gathering your family together today to spend time giving praise and thanksgiving to our wonderful Lord. And I thank each of you who invited your friends and other family members to join us online.

And to you who are new to us, we welcome you and thank you for giving us the opportunity to come into your home. You chose to bring us in through your phone, tablet, or TV, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share this worship experience with you.

During these challenging days, all of us need the encouragement and hope we can receive by remembering and thinking about the faithfulness of God. The Bible is full of His promises. Some were to certain people concerning specific things, and God kept those promises, and just knowing that lifts our spirits, because we know it means God will keep His promises to us. Years ago, a Canadian school teacher, while reading through the Bible for the 27th time, decided to count the **promises God made to man** in the Scriptures. He counted **7,487!**

You know, of all the promises our Lord made to people, I think the one that would seem the most difficult to keep would be Jesus' promise to rise from the dead. Think about it! How do you know you can keep a promise after you die? And Jesus really did die. His soul and spirit departed from His body Friday afternoon.

- Others had to take Him down from the cross.
- Others had to prepare His body for burial.
- Others had to take His body and put it in a tomb.
- But others could not make Him rise from the dead.

It was a most difficult promise to keep. But Jesus kept it! Hallelujah! He did it.

So, as we talk this morning about Jesus keeping this promise, think about the other promises He has made to you that are important, maybe some promises you have been uncertain He would keep. Let the certainty that our Lord was able and faithful to even

keep the promise that He would rise from the dead, bolster your confidence that Jesus will keep all the promises of His Word that He has made to you.

As we look at this promise kept, there are many texts in God's Word we could use. I have chosen to go to the account of Dr. Luke, who presents in his gospel a carefully researched account of this remarkable event in history.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 24. Now, some of you are going to study the first part of this chapter as a group after our worship. Don't worry. I am not even going to preach out of the first 12 verses. I just want to read them to remind us of how Jesus' resurrection from the dead was discovered.

Luke 24 NKJV 1 Now on the first *day* of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain *other women* with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. 5 Then, as they were afraid and bowed *their* faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7 saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"

8 And they remembered His words. 9 Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary *the mother* of James, and the other *women* with them, who told these things to the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.

If you are skeptical that a real, live man named Jesus actually rose from the dead, or if you have ever struggled with doubts about this, you are in good company. Jesus' closest friends and followers did not believe it either – at first.

And the reason I chose passages from Luke today is because both before and after Luke tells us about the discovery of the empty tomb, Luke shows us the reasons why Peter and many others came to believe in the resurrection. The apostles, the women who went to the tomb, and complete strangers who initially did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, becoming convinced, they came to know with a certainty in their heart that this Jesus of Nazareth, who was brutally murdered by His enemies on a Roman cross, was alive again. He had risen from the dead!

The first thing Luke shows us is that God the Father, wise as He is, provided **A Perfect Witness** for the resurrection before it even happened. His name was - **Joseph of Arimathea**. Turn back in your Bibles now to Luke, chapter 23. We will start in verse 50.

Luke 23:50-54 NKJV 50 Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. 51 He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. 54 That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

All four of the gospels tell of Joseph's involvement.

- They tell us he was a **rich man**, which means that he had a lot to lose by believing in this Jesus.
- He also was a **member of the Sanhedrin**, but he did not vote to put Jesus to death.
- He, like Nicodemus, **had become a believer** and had trusted Jesus as Lord and Master.
- So after Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea **asked Pilate for Jesus' body**
- and **buried the Savior in a tomb** he had had carved out for himself.

Now, this little known man actually becomes one of the most outstanding witnesses of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus because...

- **If Jesus had not really been dead, Joseph would have known.** He prepared Jesus' body for burial.
- **If the disciples had stolen Jesus' body out from under the noses of sleeping guards, Joseph would have known.** He was still a member of the Sanhedrin and privy to the lie they told to Pilate to try to hide the fact of Jesus' resurrection.
- **If the body of Jesus remained in his tomb, Joseph would have known.** The tomb belonged to him. He could come and go as he liked. He would have recognized the claim to the lordship of Christ was a hoax because the body was still there.
- But **Joseph remained a disciple of Jesus.** When every gospel writer sited this member of the Sanhedrin as a witness, if Joseph had not remained a follower of Christ, the unbelieving Jews would have thrust him forward to contradict the claims of resurrection. But they didn't. They couldn't!

Because **Joseph of Arimathea was present for the whole event, and he was an eyewitness of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead!**

The second thing Luke shows us, and this one proves crucial for the apostles, Luke tells us in chapter 24, after he explains what happened on the morning of the resurrection. Look beginning in verse 13.

The Appearance on the Road

Luke 24:13-35 NKJV 13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" 18 Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.

21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. 22 Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23 When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

25 Then (Jesus) said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.

30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those *who were* with them gathered together, 34 (and the disciples were) saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 And (the men from Emmaus) told about the things *that had happened* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

- These two men from Emmaus recognized that all the things that had happened concerning Jesus were most remarkable.
- Then Jesus appeared to them and explained that these events had been predicted by the prophets in the Scriptures hundreds, even thousands of years in advance, and then fulfilled before their eyes. This was miraculous.
- Then at dinner, their eyes were opened and they recognized that they were looking at Jesus who had risen from the dead. Then He vanished.
- This proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God!
- They got up from the table, and that very night traveled back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles, only to find that Jesus had also appeared alive and well to Simon Peter.

But then Luke tells us the third thing that happened. Let's pick the story back up in verse 35.

The Changed Lives of the Apostles

Luke 24:35-48 NKJV 35 And they told about the things *that had happened* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. 36 Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you."

37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

40 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" 42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. 43 And He took *it* and ate in their presence.

44 Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things."

Folks, listen. When Jesus was crucified, the apostles scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Although Jesus had told them of His impending death and resurrection, they either did not understand or they did not believe.

Every indication that we have is that **if Jesus' body had remained in the grave, the apostles would have gone back to what they did before Jesus called them.** Fishing, collecting taxes, whatever.

The disciples did not come to faith easily. Even when Jesus appeared to them suddenly in the room, Luke says,

Luke 24:41 NKJV But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?"

For them to believe required two things:

They had to see Him eat. This proved He was a real, living man to them, not just an apparition or a vision.

He had to explain to the apostles also that God had declared beforehand in the Scriptures all the things Jesus did in both His life and His death. Jesus had to go back into the Pentateuch and Psalms and Prophets and explain what God had been saying long ago. For instance, He might have said,

- Remember how the Israelites were dying because they had been bitten by the serpents because of their sin and rebellion, and God told Moses to hang a bronze serpent on a pole, and whoever would look upon it and believe in God's provision, he would be saved?
- And remember how I told Nicodemus,

John 3:14 NKJV And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

Jesus said,

- That's what I did on the cross. I was the provision of the Father to take away the sin of the world.
- But the Father said He would raise Me up. Remember, I told you I would rise the third day, and I did. Here I am.

But then they believed; and with faith came a new level of understanding and remembrance.

The apostles we see and hear at Pentecost are very different from the fearful men we saw after Jesus' betrayal and arrest. Fifty days after the resurrection, the apostles are bold men of God, preaching Jesus as the crucified and resurrected

Messiah of God who would give forgiveness and eternal life to all who would trust in Him.

And this transformation in their lives lasted their entire lifetime. Each of them suffered greatly because of their faith. Each of them gave the rest of their life to the proclaiming of the gospel and the service of Christ.

What made the difference? Jesus kept His promise! He rose from the dead! For forty days, Jesus appeared alive to men and women all over Judea and Galilee. The apostles saw Him, talked with Him, touched Him, and ate with Him. **They knew Jesus had risen from the dead, and it changed everything!**

CONCLUSION: My friend, knowing that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead does change everything! It has changed everything in my own life.

He changed me from a lost sinner into a man forgiven by the grace of God.

He changed me from a skeptic into a man who is wholly confident of Jesus and of His written Word.

He changed me from a near-sighted pastor to a pastor who delights to travel to remote parts of the world, not to see exotic sights, but to share the gospel and teach God's Word to people who do not know.

My friend, Jesus can change your life if you will trust Him as your Lord and Savior. If you will believe that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, and believe He rose from the dead; and believing that you will trust Him to be the Lord and Master of your life, Jesus Christ will save you, forgive your sins, and give you eternal life as a gift.

If you want to trust Him, pray this prayer with me. PRAYER

If you prayed this prayer, our church wants to give you a free gift **MY NEW LIFE**. If you have made a commitment to follow Christ, we want you to have this helpful guide for new believers. Just email or text our Associate Pastor Jeremy Johnson jeremyjohnson@sabc.org 850-381-0041

Jesus kept the most difficult promise there is to keep. If you trust Him, He will also keep the promise, "I will never leave you or forsake you." God bless you.