



Born to Win

The Resurrection Story

by Ronald L. Dart

It would have been very dark when the women began to gather, and quite dark as they made their way through the streets. They had gotten up very early on this morning to do their job. They had slept very little, in any case; no one felt much like sleeping. They had all prepared their burial spices before the Sabbath day had begun, and rested the Sabbath according to commandment. And they had all agreed that they would get up very early, and they would make their way to the tomb at daybreak. Very few people would be up and stirring, and it would all be easier for them to do it that way.

There was one major problem as they met, whispering in the dark, that they had not solved. And they didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to get the tomb open, and how they would roll that big stone back. The death of their master had left them all in a state of shock, and so it's not surprising that they wouldn't have had all their act together on this Sunday morning. Everything had happened so *fast*. Everything was going along normally. Everything was as it always had been, and the next thing they knew he was dead and buried. Now they were really kind of numb, going through the actions and emotions of caring for the dead—because it was their duty, was what women did, it was what was expected of them. And also they were doing it because they loved him *so much*. He had become such a great part of their life; they depended on him so much.

They came to the entrance of the tomb just as there was enough light in the eastern sky to see their way, and the first thing they noticed was that the guard was gone. And that was odd. The second thing they saw was that the tomb was *already open*, and that was a shock. It is really hard to overstate the emotional impact of that moment on this collection of women who were there on this morning—their first realization that Jesus was *gone*, and what that might mean, and how they could interpret it, and how they could respond to it. And it's hard today, nearly two thousand years later, to fathom the doubt, the fear, the confusion, and the joy that they would experience before that day is over, and to really understand what it meant to them to learn that Jesus was *not* dead, after all. He was alive.

In the weeks that followed, the women told their stories, the other witnesses told their stories, over and over and over again. And they became a part of the testimony of the early church to the resurrection of Jesus. And now, two thousand years later, we struggle with the details still of what happened on that morning. The stories are confused and confusing, in many ways. And we still try to figure out, “Well, who was there? What were they doing? What sequence did some of these things happen in?” We have only the least feeling of the impact of this day on the disciples—upon their emotions, their psychology, and everything else about them—but their confusion and their wonderment comes through, two thousand years later, as a testimony of what happened on that day and to the truth of it.

Now, when a modern reader picks up a book and flips it open and starts to read a story, he expects to read a story in the traditional sense. It should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. There should be a time sequence of the things that take place. If there's a flashback, it should tell us that there's a flashback, or give us a clue so we can figure out what's going on. We expect it all to be noted for us, and we expect the writer to treat as fairly as he goes into this. Now, actually, this works very well in the Bible, if you just read one gospel at a time. And, of course, if you stop to ponder for a moment that the men who wrote these gospels anticipated that that's how people would read them...in fact, I am of the

opinion that not one of the synoptic gospel writers had seen any of the other synoptic gospels when they wrote theirs. I think it's entirely likely that John had seen the other three when he wrote his account, because he does not cover a lot of the same material. He doesn't see any point in it. He has a perspective—he has a message that he feels needs to be told—that the others have not gotten straight, or hadn't gotten full and complete, or hadn't really managed to recall, and so he puts a different approach to the story from what they do.

I think that the gospel writers really expected that their gospels would be read out loud to congregations, from start to finish, like a story. And if you read the gospel accounts that way—just read one all the way through—they are coherent, they're understandable, you have very little difficulty. But when you read them all (and especially if you've got a harmony of the gospels and you try to read them together and harmonize them) you quickly run into difficulties and the modern reader is tempted to cry foul.

But the gospel accounts are not really stories so much as they are *testimony*. And when you understand the power of the idea of witnesses and testimony in the Bible, and how central this concept is to what is being written in the Bible, a lot of things begin to become clearer and take on a lot more power than they otherwise might have to a casual reader. And these stories were written down by these men, not so much just to tell...they are not biographies; they are *testimonies* to what these men knew, experienced, and touched of the life and the ministry, the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. And it's important to understand how this testimony came to be written, so you can grasp what's going on in this thing.

There are a number of things that can affect a person's testimony. The place you were standing when the events took place can change everything. For a person standing over *there* might see one set of things. A man standing over *here* might be screened from some of those things and not see them at all. And if these events are taking place in more than one place, one man may have been here when *this* event took place; another man was over there and didn't see it at all. So you have to keep that in mind. Later events can happen that suddenly give meaning to things or facts that you did not consider important at the time you saw them. And so, consequently, they come rolling back in on you as the story develops and then they find their way into your testimony. And they otherwise might not have been there. If you're in court, the rules of evidence can have an effect on testimony—what is allowed and what is not allowed in evidence might be brought into play along the way. For example, we get quite a bit of hearsay in the New Testament—in these gospel accounts about the resurrection of Christ—along with eyewitness accounts. But we are allowed, in this case, to consider this evidence and to weigh it alongside of everything else.

The events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus are reported to us by the witnesses, but I think it's fair to say that the facts are in something of a jumble. For one thing, the events were not written down for some 30 years after they had taken place. Now, that's not as big a problem in the 1st century as it would be today. I don't know if you're aware of this, but it's pretty well-attested that the human memory and our ability to remember things has deteriorated significantly since the invention of the printing press. That because, prior to that time, of the necessity of memorizing a lot of stuff and holding these facts in our mind, men's memories were trained better, used more effectively, and they hung on to their facts. Today, I am prone not to allow certain facts into my memory *at all*, because I know I can go get it from a book or from the internet or someplace like that. If I've got to have it, I'll go get it. I don't want to trouble, I don't want to take space in my memory banks, with that information. It's already crowded in there anyway.

But, of course, that's fallacious all the way. I have very little doubt that if I worked harder at putting more stuff in there, I would find that I could get more in than I thought I could—that it would open up avenues of memory. I'm afraid we have become very lazy since the inventing the printing press. Okay, but in the 1st century this was not true, and memorization and the recollection of events was *extremely* important in that society, and people's memories were trained. And I think you would really be

surprised to find how much of the Psalms, and other Old Testament books, a Jewish youth of that generation—even a teenager—would have been able to recite back to you verbatim and not drop a word. You know, times have changed.

So that 30-year-elapsd period from the time of the events until the testimony was written down is nowhere near the handicap that it would be in our world today—not at all. And, in fact, the story was told again and again and again and again in church, every week throughout the church. I mean, we come to church today; Matthew is here. “Tell us again. Tell us again what happened.” And they recounted it, and questions were asked, and penetrating challenges were offered to them. And they had to rack their memories and pull up things they might have forgotten and pull them together again. And as time went by, and as they grew personally, they begin to *understand* certain things Jesus said they *didn't understand at all* when he made the statement originally. But they remembered it. Perhaps the Holy Spirit brought it back to their recollection through the events that took place. So we have to understand that all of these things were very important. The 30 years that passed does not diminish in any way the *truth* that the witnesses tell, but it drastically reduces *detail*. And that's where you and I have our problems with it. They always say, “the devil is in the details”, and *we really want the details*. I don't know, maybe it's 20th-century man, but we really like details and we want to know what they were.

The story as reported in the gospel is compiled in blocks of information that come from different sources, different vantage points, different experiences of the same events. And the witnesses, by the time it was all written down, had told their stories over and over again. So they were well-known to the church, even memorized, while the witnesses were still there to clarify and to correct—especially to correct somebody who tried to throw some curve into the testimony of the early church. And I think it's important to remember this: that the testimony that you read in the four gospels is not merely the testimony of the four men involved; it is the testimony of the 1st-century church to the events that took place. Because *they* were there; *they* experienced it too; and they were there to challenge, to argue with, to put right mistakes that were made in the telling of the story. Because...the interesting thing about the events that took place on this morning—the early events: *Not one* of the New Testament gospel writers was there. They had to get the testimony from the women who were there. And so all those women were still around. And, trust me, you were not going to run a bad story of that morning by those women without them standing up and saying, “No, no, no! That wasn't the way it was.”

Okay, so two thousand years later we struggle with these blocks of information, trying to piece together the story. We know it is the truth, but a lot of the details still elude us. Let's take a look, on this wave-sheaf Sunday, at the events of *that* wave-sheaf Sunday nearly two thousand years ago. Because this is an important day. It really is. We'll start with Matthew's testimony, but this particular day is a watershed day for the worship of God throughout all time. Matthew chapter 28 is where we're going to begin. And we're going to begin with verse one.

Matthew 28

KJ2000

¹ At the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

Now, this poses no problem if you just read Matthew. But when you read the other accounts and it slowly dawns on you that Matthew was *not there*, you will also find that these two Marys were not the only women who were there on this occasion—which brings to mind the fact that Matthew is giving us hearsay evidence. We will admit it, because we find from other testimony that the testimony is *true* even though it may not be entirely accurate. Now, I wouldn't doubt for a moment that it would really disturb somebody to learn that Ron Dart had said that Matthew's account was “not entirely accurate”, but the fact is that if Matthew had been entirely accurate he would have told us that Salome was there—which he didn't bother to mention to us. There is a little small distinction between truth and

accuracy. It bothers people, but it shouldn't. It's normal in receiving testimony. The question is not so much whether it's accurate in all of its details; the question is if it's *the truth* that is being told to us here. And Matthew tells us the truth, even though he omits some details that we would like very much to have had. This little distinction has to be borne in mind. Matthew manages, though, to paint in a part of the picture which confirms what we learn elsewhere and gives us some background.

Now, he says this, and then he says in verse two...and I want to point out to you that verses two, three, and four are parenthetical—they are put in here just simply to add one other item of background as to how it was that when these two women showed up at the tomb, it was open (which was a problem). They were worried about this problem, as how they were going to get that stone rolled back. And they didn't have any idea. They were going to get those soldiers to help them do it. Okay, so here this is parenthetical:

Matthew 28

AKJV

² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it.

³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

And I don't doubt that for a moment. With a huge earthquake; all of a sudden the stone goes rolling back; and this incredible, great, shining-face-like-lightning being is there...they probably passed out on the spot, immediately as that took place. Now, again, they are parenthetical. These are put in here and inserted to explain why the tomb was open so the women could go in. They are not inserted to show the *time* of the earthquake. That's not why they are here. I said that there were no witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, so we have no testimony as to the time of his resurrection. Someone disputed that to me in a letter not long ago, saying that the *soldiers* were witnesses because they were there when the earthquake happened, they were there when the angel came and the stone was rolled back. However, there is no suggestion that they saw Jesus in the process. (And nobody would be particularly interested in the testimony of those soldiers one way or the other because we know they turned out to be liars for money.) They could only testify as to the time of the earthquake and to seeing the angel, and that *may or may not* have been the moment of the resurrection. There's nothing here to tell us that. All we can say with certainty is that, some time before the first witnesses arrived at the tomb, Jesus was raised from the dead and the tomb was opened. We know *nothing* from testimony of the timing of these events. We can *infer* from surrounding events that the earthquake took place not long before the women got there. We can *infer* the time of resurrection from other scriptures—like “three days and three nights”. But otherwise we're speculating. We draw our inferences (which are quite legitimate to draw as inferences), but beyond that we cannot say for sure because there are no witnesses to this. But the opening of the tomb was not to let Jesus out; it was to let the witnesses in. So that event does not time the resurrection. So, passing over the parenthetical section, let's continue with the testimony as it was given.

Matthew 28

AKJV

¹ [After] the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. [...]

⁵ And the angel answered and said to the women, Fear not you: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified.

⁶ He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. [...]

“I know he told you this, and I know you didn’t get it, but nevertheless it happened like he said.”

Matthew 28

AKJV

⁶ [...] Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

⁷ And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there shall you see him: see, I have told you.

So the majority of the disciples never saw Jesus until they saw him in Galilee. And Paul lets us in on the secret that some 500 people saw him at *one time* [1 Corinthians 15:6]. We have no idea how many people saw him altogether. We only know that one occasion was 500 of them at once. So, after all this is done, the angel said, “Go on up there and tell them this.” Now, the angel may have been fairly matter-of-fact about this: “Okay, come on. He’s not here. Now go tell these people.” But I will promise you these women were not matter-of-fact about it. By the time they understood what had gone on, they were *beside themselves*.

Matthew 28

AKJV

⁸ And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

⁹ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

¹⁰ Then said Jesus to them, Be not afraid: go tell my brothers that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

¹¹ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed to the chief priests all the things that were done.

Now, if our translation is all correct, and the way it’s presented comes across, it sounds like the men may have recovered and left that area just moments before the women arrived. And so the women arrived, they were on their way, the women then took off running to be the disciples. And while this was going on, these men went in and showed the chief priest all the things that were done.

Now, let’s pull in the blocks from Mark’s testimony about this section, and see how they fit. It will be Mark 16, and verse one. Remember, each one of them has pieces of this story which they are filling in.

Mark 16

AKJV

¹ And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

² And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came to the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.

Now we find out that Salome was there, which Matthew may not have known. Either he didn’t know it or maybe he didn’t think it was important enough to mention it, because he mentions the two most significant players. But he did know the two of them. Salome, though, was also there; Mark knew that. Who knows, maybe Mark got his part of this story from Salome rather than the two Marys.

Mark 16

AKJV

³ And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?

⁴ And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

⁵ And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; [...]

Notice, not on the left side, on the right side. The details...some of them are there that were missing elsewhere. And you get the impression from Matthew's account that the angel was outside sitting on the stone. Apparently, by the time the women got there, he had moved inside and was waiting for them. And as far as what *they* could see, he looked like a young man. The face that was like lightning is not there at this particular moment because there's no particular reason to frighten these ladies any more than they're going to be frightened anyway.

Mark 16

AKJV

⁵ [...] and they were affrighted.

⁶ And he said to them, Be not affrighted: You seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

⁷ But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goes before you into Galilee: there shall you see him, as he said to you.

⁸ And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled [...]

I imagine they were shaking like a leaf.

Mark 16

AKJV

⁸ [...] and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

Now, here are details that Matthew does not include: By the time they got there, the angel was no longer sitting on the stone of the door scaring the guards to death. He was inside. And here we learn that the women went *inside*, which we didn't get from Matthew's account. They found a young man (who was obviously an angel).

Now, having picked those blocks up and set them into the picture, let's look at Luke's account and see how *his* testimony fits. Luke 23. Now, Luke is something of a historian. And he seems to have been more methodical than any of the synoptic gospels in his approach to the question at hand (and also as he does in the Book of Acts). He is much more in the mold of a modern historian, or somebody who would tell the story as you and I would expect the story to be told. In Luke 23 and verse 55, he says:

Luke 23

AKJV

⁵⁵ And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how his body was laid.

⁵⁶ And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

All this part of the story seems to be consistent.

Luke 23

AKJV

¹ Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

- ² And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher.
- ³ And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.
- ⁴ And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

Now, I don't really know, as I said, how they got the story and why we have this small variance in the story. On the one occasion it's a man in a long, *white* garment—and just a man. On this occasion, *two* men in *shining* garments. I don't know how to take that, but I do know that it is a simple matter to understand that the women were telling the story. And they told it again and again and again. And different women were telling the story to different people as they went along. And so it was picked up, brought into the church. It was a *true story*, but the details differed depending upon which women you were hearing it from. Not that not to say that any of it is untrue, but to say that there is a complete story here that nobody quite got together.

Luke 23

AKJV

- ⁵ And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said to them, Why seek you the living among the dead?

I'm glad somebody remembered it, because it kind of suggests a little sense of irony by these angels that are standing there. "Hi, girls. What are you doing here? You're looking for the living among the dead."

Luke 23

AKJV

- ⁶ He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spoke to you when he was yet 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,

Now, we get a rather more detailed message in Luke's account which suggests, frankly, that Mark and Matthew are giving us the *gist* of what was said. None of them were really witnesses. Luke was not a witness, either. But it appears to me that Luke was much more painstaking in getting the story than the rest of them were.

Luke 23

AKJV

- ⁹ And returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things to the eleven, and to all the rest.
- ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things to the apostles.
- ¹¹ And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. [*They didn't believe a word.*]

We know now that there were at least six (probably seven or more) women who came on this occasion. We know that it was Mary the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, Salome was named. Now we have Joanna named and also, he says, "other women" in the plural. Minimum of six. The "other women" suggests three, at the least, to me. So there were probably seven, or even maybe more, women who were there at that time, which Matthew and Mark... I don't know, maybe they were male chauvinists

and didn't think the number of women that were there was important. But we managed to glean the information from the accounts to understand it was a pretty good entourage that went out there.

Now, I gather from these accounts that they were all aflutter by the time they got to the disciples and told them what happened. And I can really imagine that. They had to run and not walk to get there. They were breathless, red in the face, and you can be sure that they were all talking at once. I can hear Peter—going over, nudging John, and saying, “Who left the door to the hen-house open?” You know, you can just imagine that kind of male chauvinist comment being made. They didn't believe the women. No one expected this to happen in spite of *everything Jesus had said*, and they felt the women had just seen some kind of a ghost or something, and they were all bonkers over what had happened.

Now let's bring John into the picture. Because you have a markedly different perspective with John, as always. John is writing *much, much later* and has had a lot more time to digest the stories that have been told—a lot more time to think about the significance of events. And, because he thinks about the significance, maybe remember things that other people had thought were not that important to include. John chapter 20, verse one:

John 20

AKJV

¹ The first day of the week comes Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, to the sepulcher, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher.

No other women are there. He doesn't *say* they're not there but, the fact is, you might assume in reading this account that Mary Magdalene came out there *all by herself* at this point in time. And yet we *know* from the other accounts that this was not true— that a whole gaggle of ladies had come out there on this morning, to do this job, or to be present. And this doesn't surprise me, and it shouldn't surprise *anyone* considering all that had happened. I mean, people *want to go visit the grave* after someone has died and been buried. And this is as natural as anything could possibly be. But with John there is a singularly important story here that must be told, and the focus must be placed where it belongs for John's story. And the focus, in John's mind, is not just the women. It is Mary Magdalene in particular. And we'll see why.

John 20

AKJV

¹ The first day of the week comes Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, to the sepulcher, and sees the stone taken away from the sepulcher.

² Then she runs, and comes to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, [...]

Notice, not to the 11, but to two of them.

John 20

AKJV

² [...] and said to them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.

John seems to only have talked to Mary, you'd almost think, about what happened. I don't know if he had or not. You'd never know the other women were there. But, as I said, because of the singular story John has to tell, the other women don't seem to be that important, because Mary Magdalene experienced something on this morning that nobody else saw. No one else was there. It happened entirely to her and her alone.

In reading through this account—putting the blocks, laying them out, and maybe trying to get a timeline together—it sounds to me like Mary did not go straight into the sepulcher with the other women, but she bolted when she saw the tomb was open. What I visualize having happened is: The women arrive there. The thing is open. Their mouths are hanging open about what’s taken place here. Women go inside and Mary Magdalene takes off and does not go in with the other women. She goes to get Peter and the others. Meanwhile, the women go looking for the disciples. Peter and the other disciple come running up to the tomb to see what’s there. Mary Magdalene seems *utterly unaware* of the angel’s message when she first goes to Peter and the others. And at this point, only two of the disciples *actually* go to see the tomb.

John 20

AKJV

³ Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher.

⁴ So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher.

⁵ And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

Peter, right behind him, running and huffing and puffing—a little slower, probably a little bigger, man—he followed him. And when he got there, Peter didn’t even hesitate, he just barged right inside—as his character would lead him to do.

John 20

AKJV

⁶ Then comes Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and sees the linen clothes lie,

⁷ And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

⁸ Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed.

⁹ For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Neither one of them. Think about that. Peter, and the other disciple here, wander in there and they *still* haven’t got it in their minds that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

John 20

AKJV

¹⁰ Then the disciples went away again to their own home.

¹¹ But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher,

¹² And sees two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

¹³ And they say to her, Woman, why weep you? She said to them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him.

She still has not heard the announcement that he was risen, apparently. She thinks his body was carried off somewhere. Mary thinks she’s talking to a couple of workers, you know, who probably came and opened the tomb.

John 20

AKJV

¹⁴ And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ Jesus said to her, Woman, why weep you? whom seek you? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.

“I’ll take him off your hands. Just, just tell me where the body is.” Because she still believes that Jesus is graveyard dead.

John 20

AKJV

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned herself, and said to him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brothers, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

It’s a completely different message from what the other women were given by the angels. The other women were told, “Go tell them he’s risen. Meet him in Galilee.” Jesus said, “Mary, you go tell them,”:

John 20

AKJV

¹⁷ [...] I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things to her.

Now, why is this so important? It’s extremely important in John’s mind, because it is clear to him (as it became clear to the early church) that Jesus was raised toward the end of the Sabbath (probably it’s right at sunset the night before). That early that morning he told her not to touch him because he had not ascended to his Father that he was going to. Later on that day, he allows himself to be touched and handled. And to anyone who understands the scriptures—as far as what was going on that particular morning, who understands the concept of the Feast of Firstfruits, and how they grasped as time went by that Jesus was the first of the firstfruits—they would have made the immediate connection that Jesus ascended to the Father as a symbol of the firstfruits at the same time and in the same way at the first omer of barley was taken into the Temple and waved before God by the priest, as a symbol of the firstfruits from the ground, which opened the harvest so that anybody could eat anything that had been harvested in that year. Prior to that time, they couldn’t eat *anything* that had been harvested of that year’s harvest.

So the connection... just like that [*snap*]. The wavesheaf: Christ. Presentation of the wavesheaf omer: the presentation of Christ to the Father in heaven. So that this day—and I mean *this day, today, right now*—was the watershed day in the history of the faith of God on this earth, because it was the day after Christ’s resurrection, when Christ was presented to the Father as the firstfruits from the dead (as the Book of Revelation puts it later). So it’s an important day. Mary didn’t grasp *any* of this at this time. *Peter* didn’t get it at this time. Chances are John, who later will tell us about it, didn’t really get it at this time. But when he gets around to writing this account, he focuses on Mary, because that to him is the crucial and important event. If utterly significant, I think, and fascinating—it *has* to be significant—that Jesus appeared first not to Peter, not to John, not to any one of the other of the apostles. He appeared to Mary Magdalene.

And that's not all. *No angel* spoke to any of these men—not a one. They were there when women got there. When the man got there, there was no angel in sight. At least, the men didn't see them. So there was no angel there. The angels didn't talk to them, only to the women. You know what I think? My guess is that the *profound love* of this collection of women for Jesus had to be rewarded. They loved him more than the apostles loved him, in their own special way. And Jesus' affection for them, I think, is revealed on this morning, as it was only to the women that the angels appeared and made the announcement, and it was only to one woman that Jesus appeared first—of all the people he might have shown himself to. And you think about this: If Jesus had shown himself first to Peter, he really probably would have established Peter as the one, true apostle that everybody had to obey from now on. And he had no intention of doing that.

So he appears to Mary Magdalene—a woman out of whom he cast seven devils. And tradition tells us that Mary Magdalene was actually a prostitute. I don't know if that's true or not, but it's widely believed in Christian circles. That he goes out to a woman who was originally possessed of seven devils...she was a total, complete wreck—a woman whom he had rescued. That's the woman he reveals himself to *first* and makes the announcement. I really, frankly, believe that this is an *extremely* important and significant event, and that the message it sent was not to be missed. John is very careful to see to it that we don't miss it, but it was not, apparently, clear early on in history. The women, by the way...I realize that is was "women's duty", but they were the *only ones* who cared enough to go to the tomb on Sunday morning. They went, and they were rewarded for having gone. Now let's go back to Luke's testimony, at this point, and see where it takes us. Luke 24, verse 12:

Luke 24

AKJV

¹² Then arose Peter, and ran to the sepulcher; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

"What on earth has happened here?" He *still* does not have it.

Luke 24

AKJV

¹³ And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs.

¹⁴ And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

¹⁵ And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

¹⁶ But their eyes were held that they should not know him.

And Mary didn't recognize him, either. Some change had taken place.

Luke 24

AKJV

¹⁷ And he said to them, What manner of communications are these that you have one to another, as you walk, and are sad?

"Why are you so sad?" You could walk up to these guys and tell by the long faces they were really *down* about this. Now, this is strange too, in a way, about their sadness, because listen to how this plays out.

Luke 24

AKJV

¹⁸ And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said to him, Are you only a stranger in Jerusalem, and have not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

¹⁹ And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which 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 have crucified him.

²¹ But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

Now, that particular last phrase is a very curious thing that they should say that here. Why did they even make mention of the third day concept? Why was it even relevant? It's not clear. Were they just giving an idle time reference: "It's been three days." And it's also not clear what they mean by "these things". You really can't draw much in the way of firm conclusions from what these guys said. But they went on, though, and they said:

Luke 24

AKJV

²² Yes, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher;

²³ And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

And they didn't believe a word of it, folks. They didn't believe it.

Luke 24

AKJV

²⁴ And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

Now, the reason I say they didn't believe it is because they were *still sad*. Jesus walks up to them and says, "Why are you so sad?" Well, they were sad because they thought he was dead. That's why. They didn't believe these women. They didn't know what had happened to them, but they didn't believe the resurrection of Christ had taken place.

Luke 24

AKJV

²⁵ Then he said to them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

²⁶ Ought not 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 And they drew near to the village, where they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

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 tarry with them.

³⁰ And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and broke, and gave to them.

³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

What are you going to say? You've been talking about it with this guy, walking down the road with this guy.

Luke 24

AKJV

³² And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

“Didn’t our hearts burn when we listened to him talking by the way. We didn’t know who it was.” And then, at this moment of time suddenly, “Oh!” . . . and then he’s gone. I mean, you talk about whiplash. The emotional whiplash these people went through was staggering to consider. And it also is revealing to us. First of all, we know the bodily resurrection of Jesus took place; his body was *gone*. But, secondarily, we also know he’s passing through doors, vanishing and appearing as though he were a spirit. What all that means is another matter, but it was an incredible moment. What a moment that had to be when those guys suddenly realized who he was, realized he was alive, and then suddenly to have him—just as quickly, without even getting so much as to say, “Huh?”—he’s gone.

Luke 24

AKJV

³² And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

³³ And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

³⁴ Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.

So, by that time, he had appeared to Peter.

Luke 24

AKJV

³⁵ And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

And then, while they were sitting there saying, “Now, we broke bread and he just disappeared from our sight”, and they had no more said those words then *bang*—Jesus was there. Now, those poor guys, I’m telling you, by the time this day was over they must have been fit to be wrung out and really in rough shape.

Luke 24

AKJV

³⁶ And as they thus spoke, Jesus himself stood in the middle of them, and said to them, Peace be to you.

Peace? Good grief, how in the world are you going to be at peace with people appearing and disappearing like this.

Luke 24

AKJV

³⁷ But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

³⁸ And he said to them, Why are you troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

³⁹ Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have.

John, later, in his first epistle will say:

1 John 1

AKJV

¹ [Him whom] our hands have handled, of the Word of life[.]

And I'm sure they did. I'm sure they walked up to him and touched him. They looked at his hands. They felt of his body. "Are you really here?"

Luke 24

AKJV

⁴⁰ And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet.

⁴¹ And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said to them, Have you here any meat?

He's still having a problem with them. He says, "All right, do you have some food here?"

Luke 24

AKJV

⁴² And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.

⁴³ And he took it, and did eat before them

The way it's worded...the whole idea of eating is to eat before them so they can see him eat and say, "See! I'm real. I'm not a ghost." Although, frankly, I could see why they were hard to convince on that particular issue—the way he came and went.

Luke 24

AKJV

⁴⁴ And he said to them, These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

⁴⁵ Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

⁴⁶ And said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved 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 among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

⁴⁸ And you are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹ And, behold, I send the promise of my Father on you: but tarry you in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high.

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

⁵¹ And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

We have lost, in the process of this story right here, a passage of time. And he just skips over all kinds of intervening stuff that he doesn't think is that important. There's a lot more to the story, but these are

the essential blocks of the story.

Now, why have I told you all this? Well, I've told you all that because *this* is the day—today. This year it falls earlier than it normally does for us, but this is the day—the day of the first appearances of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection of the dead—and because this day is the fulcrum upon which the entire Bible turns. What we have gone through is the testimony of the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. This honest, confused, happy, excited, testimony is so natural, so unpretentious, that it has to be *true* testimony. If we were sitting on a jury, we would have no choice but to believe these people were telling us the truth. We would not be able to go back in the jury room and concoct any kind of an explanation that would account for the stories that we have been told being lies. There would be no way we would put it together that way.

It's a far better story, a far more believable story, than it would be if we had a single, coherent, logical, one way through, written by some good author, story of what actually happened. Because we could believe that that one story was a fiction. But because of the fact that this one is written the way it is, there is no evidence of collusion on the part of the writers. There's every evidence of *non-collusion* on the part of the writers—every clear evidence that some of them didn't know what the others had said, by what they said, because of the way the accounts differ. And *far* from being discrediting, these particular things are the ones that let us know that it is *the truth* and not a fabrication. Because these witnesses, while they may not be entirely *accurate* in all the points, are *truthful* in all of the points.

We might be able to dismiss that one, single, coherent thing as a cock-and-bull story made up by some Jews, but we can't dismiss what we have got *here*. We have the natural jumble of real witnesses telling the truth about what they saw and what they experienced, and trying to make sense out of it. Jesus was dead. Now, he was alive. And the implications of that simple fact echo down to us and back in time through all Old Testament history. This is *the most important day* in the history of the world. You can ignore the story, if you can. Believe it, if you will. And if you believe it, your life has got to change.

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The Resurrection Story

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