# Easter, Lesson #1

## Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking [www.joshhunt.com](http://www.joshhunt.com)

### Luke 24.1 - 12

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name and what time do you normally get up?

### DIG

1. How long was Jesus in the grave? How many hours was it?

In the Jewish reckoning of time, a “day” included any part of a day; thus, Friday was the first day, Saturday was the second day, and Sunday was the third day. When the women arrived at daybreak, Jesus had already risen. Jesus had died on Friday; Joseph had taken his body and had prepared it for burial just before the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday. The Sabbath had ended at sunset on Saturday; so the women ventured out very early on Sunday morning. They brought spices to the tomb, just as people today would bring flowers—as a sign of love and respect. When they arrived, they found that the stone covering the entrance had been rolled aside (see Matthew 28:2). The stone was not rolled away so that Jesus could get out, for he was already gone. It was rolled aside so others could get in and see for themselves that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, just as he had said he would. — Bruce Barton et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 359.

1. What do you imagine Jesus’ disciples did on Saturday?

This isn’t Sunday. This isn’t Friday. This is Saturday. The day after this but the day before that. The day after a prayer gets prayed but there is no answer on the way. The day after a soul gets crushed way down but there’s no promise of ever getting up off the mat. It’s a strange day, this in-between day. In between despair and joy. In between confusion and clarity. In between bad news and good news. In between darkness and light.

Even in the Bible — outside of one detail about guards being posted to watch the tomb — we’re told nothing about Saturday. Saturday is the day with no name, the day when nothing happened.

Now only a handful of followers remain. Friday was a nightmare day; Friday was the kind of day that is pure terror, the kind when you run on adrenaline. On Saturday when Jesus’ followers wake up, the terror is past, at least for the moment; the adrenaline is gone. Saturday is the day they realize they have to go on.

Those who believe in Jesus gather, quietly maybe. They remember. It’s what people do. Things he said. What he taught. Things he did. People he touched or healed. They remember what it felt like when this Jesus wanted them. They remember their hopes and dreams. They were going to change the world.

Now it’s Saturday.

Maybe they talk about what went wrong. What in God’s name happened? None of them wants to say this, but in their hearts, they’re trying to come to grips with this unfathomable thought: Jesus failed. Jesus ended up a failure. Noble attempt, but he couldn’t get enough followers. He couldn’t convince the chief priests. He couldn’t win over Rome to make peace. He couldn’t get enough ordinary people to understand his message. He couldn’t even train his disciples to be courageous at the moment of great crisis.

Everybody knows Saturday.

Saturday is the day your dream died. You wake up and you’re still alive. You have to go on, but you don’t know how. Worse, you don’t know why. — John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

1. Why do you suppose Jesus waited until Sunday morning to be resurrected? Why didn’t God raise Him to life sooner?

This odd day raises a question: Why is there a Saturday? It doesn’t seem to further the story line at all. We might expect that if Jesus was going to be crucified then resurrected, God would just get on with it. It seems strange for God to spread two events over three days.

In its own way, perhaps Saturday should mark the world as much as Friday and Sunday.

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday lie at the heart of the ancient calendar. They attributed great significance to the notion that this event was a three-day story.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day [Paul adds again] according to the Scriptures.” The Old Testament Scriptures are filled with what might be called “third-day stories.” When Abraham is afraid he’s going to have to sacrifice Isaac, he sees the sacrifice that will save his son’s life on the third day. Joseph’s brothers get put in prison, and they’re released on the third day. Israelite spies are told by Rahab to hide from their enemies, and then they’ll be safe on the third day. When Esther hears that her people are going to be slaughtered, she goes away to fast and pray. On the third day, the king receives her favorably.

It’s such a recurring pattern that the prophet Hosea says, “Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces…. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.” All three-day stories share a structure. On the first day there is trouble, and on the third day there is deliverance. On the second day, there is nothing—just the continuation of trouble.

The problem with third-day stories is, you don’t know it’s a third-day story until the third day. When it’s Friday, when it’s Saturday, as far as you know, deliverance is never going to come. It may just be a one-day story, and that one day of trouble may last the rest of your life. — John Ortberg, *Who Is This Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

1. Why were these women going to the tomb? What were they expecting?

The stone had been rolled back, and the women went in expecting to accomplish their task with the spices. Many tombs were large enough to walk into, so these women went into the tomb, but they couldn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. Of course, the body was not there because Jesus had been raised, just as he said. But Jesus’ followers did not expect this. They had been told at least three times, but they had not come to truly believe (9:21–27, 44–45; 18:31–34). — Bruce Barton et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 359.

1. Where is the sun? How light is it?

The last ones at the Cross are now the first ones at the tomb. When Joseph of Arimathea placed the body of Jesus in his tomb, there would not have been time for a complete embalming because Passover would begin at sunset. Consequently, these women were now coming to complete the task. All of the gospel writers tell us that they came early—always a good time to come to the Lord.

“They that seek Me early shall find Me,” the Lord declares (Proverbs 8:17). Truly, those who seek the Lord early—early in life, early in a situation, early every day—will uniquely find Him. These precious women would prove to be no exception.

After a grandfather lost his treasured watch during a family gathering, he called his grandchildren together and told them he’d pay twenty-five dollars to the one who found it. This sent the kids on a mad scramble—running and screaming and turning over every rock. But the youngest grandson just sat and watched his brothers, sisters, and cousins all come back empty-handed. The next morning at breakfast he handed his grandfather the watch.

“How did you find it?” asked the puzzled old man.

“I just got up real early and listened for the ticking,” replied his clever grandson.

There’s some timely advice in that little story. Oftentimes, there’s so much noise and commotion going on all around us that it’s hard to hear the Lord in the middle of the day. The time to hear Him is early in the morning—just as these women did. — Jon Courson*, Jon Courson’s Application Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 420.

1. “Very early in the morning.” What does this tell you about these women? Do you think they slept the night before?

“At early dawn” is a striking expression. When these women set out on their errand of mercy, it was not simply dawn, but early dawn—what one scholar translates as “deep earliness,” or what people in the military call BMNT (“Before Morning Nautical Twilight”). This indicates how eager these women were to finish their task. In the providence of God, there had not been time to complete the burial process on the day Jesus was crucified. This was an important part of God’s plan because it drew the women back to his tomb. All during the long Sabbath between Good Friday and Easter Sunday they waited to finish their task, and when the time came, they left the house at the earliest possible instant. — Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 632.

1. It is always a good idea to read the Bible with an ear for emotion. What were these women feeling as they walked along?

As we consider the state of the Galilean women, we must not let our knowledge of the glorious revelation that awaited them dull us to the dark sackcloth covering these women’s souls. They were depressed, exhausted, mourning, with no hope whatsoever—and according to Mark, fretting over how they would get into the tomb (16:3). They did not expect anything except more sorrow. If you take flowers to the cemetery, do you expect to see an empty grave? And if you did see one, would it occur to you that the deceased had risen from the dead? Of course not!” On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 1–3). Now they were definitely confused and bewildered! They apparently assumed Jesus’ body had been stolen—that is what John tells us Mary Magdalene thought (cf. 20:13). The empty tomb intensified their distress. — R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 399.

1. Verse 4. How are they feeling now?

Luke tells us that “they were perplexed about this” (Luke 24:4). They were at a total loss. It simply did not make any sense to them; they could not explain it. Why did Jesus die the way that he died, suffering the dark reproach of the cross? How could someone so alive end up dead? Where was the body they had seen buried?

Although the women did not know the answers to these questions, there were hints all around them. Miraculously, the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, leaving the house of death door-less. Even more remarkably, the body was not in the tomb. These were the first intimations of the resurrection, that Jesus has been raised from the dead. For us there is a further hint in the title Luke gives to Jesus in verse 3, where he calls him “Lord.” This is one of the specific titles of the risen Christ, for it is by his resurrection that Jesus is declared to be the Lord (see Acts 2:36). Even though Luke has not yet shown us that Jesus is alive, already he is expressing the joy of the resurrection and cannot help but confess that Jesus is Lord. — Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 632–633.

1. Why was the stone rolled away? Couldn’t the God who raised Jesus from the dead have transported Him through the solid rock?

We do not know at what time Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week, but it must have been very early. The earthquake and the angel (Matt. 28:2–4) opened the tomb, not to let Jesus out but to let the witnesses in. “Come and see, go and tell!” is the Easter mandate for the church. — Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 278.

1. What did this stone look like? Some have theorized that the disciples rolled back the stone and stole the body. Is this credible?

The stone was rolled from the tomb. Yes, the large stone that resembled a millstone that donkeys might pull did not have to be moved. They could enter the tomb immediately. As they did, they saw that the tomb was empty. — Trent C. Butler, *Luke, vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 414.

1. Who were these women who were heading to the tomb?

Mary Magdalene had been especially helped by Jesus and was devoted to Him (Luke 8:2). She had lingered at the cross (Mark 15:47), and then she was first at the tomb. With her were Mary the mother of James; Joanna; and other devout women (Luke 24:10), hoping to finish preparing their Lord’s body for burial. It was a sad labor of love that was transformed into gladness when they discovered that Jesus was alive. — Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 278.

1. Compare verse 4 with the other resurrection stories. Was it one man or two? Were they men or angels?

Not unnaturally the women were ‘utterly at a loss’ (NEB). The two men who now stood there in dazzling apparel (cf. Acts 1:10) are evidently to be understood as angels. Matthew speaks of one angel who rolled the stone away and also spoke to the women. Mark refers to a young man in a white robe whom they saw after they entered the tomb. John mentions two angels in white who spoke to Mary Magdalene. It is clear that all these refer to angels. The fact that sometimes we hear of one and sometimes of two need not concern us. As many commentators point out, a spokesman is more prominent than his associates and may be referred to without mention of others. Neither should we be greatly concerned that the angels may be sitting (in John) or standing (here), nor that their words are not identical in the various accounts. It is hypercriticism that does not allow angels to change their position, and there is no reason for thinking that they spoke once only. Moreover John speaks of them in connection with a different incident. Problems there undoubtedly are, but the chief thing these minor differences tell us is that the accounts are independent. Further, with angels spiritual perception is presumably required and all may not have seen the same thing. — Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 352–353.

1. What other differences are there in the resurrection accounts?

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| **Event** | Mt 28:1–8 | Mk 16:1–8 | Lu 24:1–10 | Jn 20:1–8 |
| **When?** | at dawn | just after sunrise | very early in the morning | while it was still dark |
| **Who comes first?** | Mary Magdelene and the other Mary | Mary Magdelene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome | Mary Magdelene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others | Mary Magdelene |
| **What do they find?** | earthquake with angel who rolls back the stone | stone rolled away | stone rolled away | stone removed from the entrance |
| **Whom do they see?** | angel sitting on the stone | young man in white robe, sitting on the right | two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening | no one |
| **What do they do?** | ran to tell his disciples | fled from the tomb, afraid to say anything | told what had happened to the Eleven and others | ran to tell Peter and the disciple, the one Jesus loved |
| **What happens next?** | Jesus met them |  | Peter goes to the tomb to investigate | Peter and the other disciple investigate |
| **What is the third scene?** | guards report to chief priests and are bribed |  | story of two disciples on Emmaus road | Mary sees two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been |

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 507.

1. How do you explain these differences?

What can we conclude from this data? First, it is possible to make this data into a coherent story. If we assume that the pre- or postdawn timing depends on whether one gives the time of the women starting their trip or their arrival at the tomb, if we assume that the earthquake and angelic descent happened before the women arrived at the tomb, if we merge what the angels say into one account, if we assume that the angels moved around, and if we assume that Mary Magdalene remained behind at the tomb while the others went and reported (and thus had a separate meeting with Jesus), one can make a single coherent account out of the various stories. Obviously, if there were two angels, one writer could report only one. Not every writer has to report all of the details another mentions. In other words, these are different stories but not necessarily conflicting stories. All could be true at the same time.

Second, while it is possible to make the data fit into a coherent story, we cannot be sure that we have the right coherent story. We have a jigsaw puzzle of information and cannot be sure that we have all of the pieces. Thus, since the Scripture has not given us a single unified story, we must be careful or else we will end up believing that our reconstruction is the truth. A reconstruction may be the truth or it may distort the truth. Perhaps if we had some other critical pieces of information we would make quite a different reconstruction.

Third, these stories are exactly what one would expect to discover after a significant event like the resurrection. The chancellor of this author’s university died at the end of an address to the student body. Within an hour of the event a sociology professor had his thirty students each write down their own account of what had happened. Each was instructed to write as honest and detailed account as they could, given the limited time of the class period. When the accounts were later compared, there were numerous differences in detail, although all agreed that the chancellor had died at the end of his address. Presumably each Gospel writer had a series of stories about the resurrection to sort through. For example, we know that Matthew knows and values Mark’s account, but in the resurrection story he obviously has some independent information as well. The Evangelists selected and combined data to get the accounts that they give us. But even the beloved disciple in John is not an eyewitness of most of the events, so we are not surprised to find a lot of differences in their reporting what happened.

Finally, when we try to put the stories together, we miss the point of the authors. The church accepted into its canon four separate Gospels, viewing each as inspired by God. It did not put into the canon a harmony of these Gospels (although such existed). The fact is that each writer is trying to bring out his unique perspective and theological insights by the details he includes or leaves out (although, unless Matthew and Luke are differing from Mark, which we know that they knew, we often cannot be sure that the author actually knows a detail and so purposely leaves it out). Matthew wants to underline the miraculous and also explain a rumor that the body of Jesus was stolen. Luke stresses the fulfillment of the words of Jesus and yet the disbelief of the apostles. John, by focusing on a single character and her intimate discussion with Jesus, points out that in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus the promises of John 13–16 are fulfilled. Jesus cannot be held, for it is better for him to go to the one who is not only his Father but is now also our Father. It is when we look at the resurrection through such eyes, informed by the perspective of each Gospel writer, that we see not simply a miracle, nor even the fact of the resurrection, but the message the church has believed that God wanted to communicate in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. — Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 507–508.

1. Verse 5. Why did they bow their faces to the ground?

The reaction of the women was fear. Bowing their faces to the ground was a mark of respect in the presence of such great ones. The angels first asked, Why do you seek the living among the dead? This startling question gets to the root of the matter immediately. Jesus is not to be thought of as dead: therefore he is not to be sought among the dead. — Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 353.

1. Anyone have a study Bible with a note on verse 6? Can you recall a time Jesus predicted His resurrection?

More than once, Jesus had told His followers that He would suffer and die and be raised from the dead (Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31–34). How sad it is when God’s people forget His Word and live defeated lives. Today, the Spirit of God assists us to remember His Word (John 14:26). — Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 278.

1. Verse 12. Would you describe Peter as full of faith in this verse? What is he feeling?

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Although the women did not know the answers to these questions, there were hints all around them. Miraculously, the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, leaving the house of death door-less. Even more remarkably, the body was not in the tomb. These were the first intimations of the resurrection, that Jesus has been raised from the dead. For us there is a further hint in the title Luke gives to Jesus in verse 3, where he calls him “Lord.” This is one of the specific titles of the risen Christ, for it is by his resurrection that Jesus is declared to be the Lord (see Acts 2:36). Even though Luke has not yet shown us that Jesus is alive, already he is expressing the joy of the resurrection and cannot help but confess that Jesus is Lord. — Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 632–633.

1. What is the application of the resurrection story? What difference does it make to our day-to-day lives?

You may currently be in the midst of a horrible, out-of-control situation. You feel as if God is not there, that there’s nothing that can be done.

But here is the message of the gospel for you while you’re stuck in your helpless, hopeless Saturday life: God does his best work in hopeless situations.

We worship a God who specializes in resurrections. He specializes in hopeless situations. After all, he conquered death—the ultimate hopeless situation—so you could have life.

His followers were dejected and dismal and hopeless, and then Jesus rose from the dead. God did the impossible, and in a matter of hours, the disciples journeyed from hopeless to hope-filled. From powerless to powerful. They saw him risen, and everything changed. There was this unstoppable force of hope in them that allowed them to go on to help change the world.

And you may say, “Well, good for them.”

Nope.

Good for us. Good for me. Good for you. Good for anyone who is in desperate need of hope today.

Here is the message of the gospel for you while you’re stuck in your helpless, hopeless Saturday life: God does his best work in hopeless situations. — Pete Wilson, *Plan B: What Do You Do When God Doesn’t Show up the Way You Thought He Would?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

1. Imagine we had all of the Bible except this part. Imagine we had the whole Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus, the letters of Paul and all the rest. How would that change the Christian faith?

You see, the resurrection is more than just a historical reality. We don’t gather on Easter weekend all around the world just to celebrate a moment in history. We gather together to remind each other that what happened two thousand years ago changed this world forever. It changed my life forever. It can change yours as well, if you let it.

You see, there are two very different types of hope in this world. One is hoping for something, and the other is hoping in someone.

One day, everything we hope for will eventually disappoint us. Every circumstance, every situation, every relationship we put our hope in is going to wear out, give out, fall apart, melt down, and go away.

That’s the problem with hoping in something. That’s why the only dependable hope is hope in someone. Or rather, Someone. The entirety of Scripture points to one cross, one man, one God—not because he gives us everything we’re hoping for but because he is the One in whom we put our hope.

This is why I can have hope in the midst of my crisis. I can have hope when there is no circumstantial reason to have hope. My hope is not based on what the stock market does or what others think of me or whether my life turns out the way I want it to turn out.

My hope is based on a powerful, in-control God who can do and will do the impossible.

My hope is based on a God who has defeated death itself. — Pete Wilson, *Plan B: What Do You Do When God Doesn’t Show up the Way You Thought He Would?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

1. What do you want to recall from today’s conversation?
2. How can we support one another in prayer this week?