

While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” ⁸ Then they remembered his words. (NIV84)

Theme: Irony of the Passion: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Imagine that you have a meeting with the president. You decide to drive but you don't know exactly how to get to the White House. You know that it's in Washington D.C. so you once you get there you just drive around looking for something that looks like a big white building with large columns. So you drive around, but it soon becomes clear that you can't find where you are going. So you roll down your window and you ask someone, “Do you know where I can find the president? I have a meeting with him.” The guy looks at you strangely; and then looks around at all the acres and acres of white tombstones. You are in Arlington National Cemetery. There are two presidents buried at Arlington, William Taft and JFK; but you won't be meeting with them any time soon. You are looking for the living among the dead! That is what we see today—a group of women looking for Jesus at the place they last saw him: his tomb.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and perhaps some other woman were there on Calvary when Jesus died. They watched as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus' body down from the cross and wrapped it in linen and spices. They were there when his body was placed in an empty tomb and a large rock was rolled over the entrance.

The next day was the Sabbath and they could do no work. But the woman knew that the burial was done in haste, and not done properly. So they decided that when the Sabbath was over, they would go to the tomb and finish giving Jesus a proper burial. So early on Sunday

morning as they were carrying the spices that they had prepared they realized that they wouldn't be able to roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. And they were wondering how exactly they would get in. But to their amazement when they got there the stone was already rolled away.

Confused and wondering what exactly was going on, the women entered the tomb. They were looking for Jesus' body; but it wasn't there. Where could Jesus have gone? He was dead, and dead people can't go anywhere. Who rolled the stone away—perhaps it was Joseph or Nicodemus. Maybe they had to move Jesus' body to a different tomb so that his enemies wouldn't desecrate it.

But when they entered the tomb they saw two angels, in the appearance of men, waiting for the women. And the angels said to them, **Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee.** The women should have known; Jesus told them again and again that he would rise from the dead after three days. If you were here for the first service, you heard a statement by the Jewish leaders to Pilate on Saturday—they remembered what Jesus said about rising on the third day, they just didn't believe him. So Jesus' enemies remembered, but his followers did not!

But put yourself in the women's place for a little bit. They had been with Jesus for years. They had followed him down from Galilee. They believed that he was the Son of God, the long-promised Messiah, and the Savior of the world. But then he was arrested, and sentenced to death on a cross—and you were there when he breathed his last and died. You would have been overcome with sorrow. We've been there before—we feel overwhelmed, we don't think straight; we are so focused on the pain we are experiencing that we are oblivious to almost everything that is going around us.

This plays out from time to time in your life. You get sick, a loved one dies, you have issues at work or family problems; and you focus on all the issues that you are dealing with. Soon you become so overwhelmed that you don't think right. You start to look for God in all the wrong places. You think that he might answer your problems in your feelings or emotions, your reason and logic, or science and society. And in times of needs, we may turn to those things instead of God and his Word. Or when problems pop up in our lives we often

think the answer lies within ourselves and the things of this world. We think that happiness consists of going out and living a wild life, or spending more time with your family, or working harder and making more money and buying more things. So when we are overcome with sorrow we just double down on family, work, and living a fun and wild life. But then we are once again looking for the answers to life's problems in all the wrong places.

The angels were sent by God to talk to the women. They spoke not for themselves but for God. And what did they say? **Why are you looking for the living among the dead?** In other words, you are looking for Jesus in all the wrong places. Remember what Jesus said—he talked about this time and time again. You should know better; he's not here. **He is risen, just as he said.**

God doesn't send his angels to earth any longer to reveal news to his people. Everything he wants us to know he has already revealed to us in his Word. If we want to know God, if we want the answers to life's problems, we turn to God in his Word. In his Word he reminds us of his love and compassion and the forgiveness he has won for us by his death. Being reminded of God's love and his compassion that he has for us helps us overcome our sorrows and removes our fears.

The angels made it abundantly clear that Jesus was not in the tomb because he had risen from the dead. He was no longer dead; but he is alive. And when the angels reminded the women of Jesus' words, it all came flooding back to the women—they remembered what Jesus taught about his death and resurrection. And they also understood, then, why everything happened the way it did. Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross; that way he could pay for our sins and suffer through the eternal punishment that we deserve. He had to die so that he could give his perfect and holy life to us so that we would be perfect and holy in the eyes of the Lord.

Jesus also had to die so that he could rise from the dead. So that he could fulfill his prophecies about his resurrection, on the third day, just as he said!

And all of a sudden the meaning and purpose of Jesus' resurrection became obvious. Jesus isn't dead; he is arisen, he is alive! How can that be? If Jesus is alive, that means he overcame death. Death had no power over him, it couldn't hold him back. For us—for humans of all time, death has always been an end—there is no coming back from

death. But Jesus just did come back from the dead! He lives! That can only mean one thing—Jesus is God. No one else has power over death; but Jesus does. The eternal God came down from heaven, took on human flesh, and then died, only to rise again—thus proving that he truly is the eternal God!

And this is not just a case where someone does something spectacular and it has no effect on you. Rather, Jesus' resurrection from the dead means everything. Paul mentions in Romans chapter four that Jesus, **was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.** By his death on the cross he washed away our sins with his own blood, he paid the eternal price for our sins as he suffered our condemnation. So that our sins are no longer counted against us but we are considered pure and holy in the eyes of the Lord. And his resurrection is proof that God accepted his payment, the fact that God raised him from the dead shows us that Christ's sacrifice truly did pay for our sins. And as a result of his resurrection, we are justified. That word means that we are declared not guilty. Christ's resurrection proves that when God looks at us he doesn't see our sins or treat us as our sins deserve, but rather on account of Christ, he declares us not guilty! Our sins will never come back to haunt us or condemn us! As the women remembered what Jesus said about rising from the dead three days after his death, they also would have remembered what he said about the meaning of his resurrection. For instance, he told Martha shortly before he raised her brother, Lazarus from the dead, **I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** He also told the disciples shortly before his own death, **because I live, you also will live.** So what does Jesus' resurrection mean for you? It means that you will live, even though you will die—and we must all die because we are all sinners. And yet Christ removed the sting of death by covering over our sin. So even though we die, death is not something to be afraid of—death may be an end of life on earth, but it is also the beginning of eternal life. A life with our Savior, free from sin and sorrow—a perfect life that will last forever. All of this—the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is won for you by Christ. His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil is now your victory! This is a gift that he has given you for free—not something you have to earn, pay for, or otherwise please God to obtain.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? Why do we look for God or for the answers in life in all the wrong places? If you are overwhelmed with everything in your life, if you are overcome with sorrow, turn to the Lord in his Holy Word. Be reminded of his love and learn what his resurrection means for you. He lives and because he lives you are truly and fully forgiven. He lives and because he lives you too will live, even though you die. Because he lives you will have a perfect life free from sorrow in heaven forever. Amen.