

June 14, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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EASTER IS GOOD NEWS
Luke 23:44-24:12

“What Would Jesus Do?” This may sound familiar to you as a pop culture phenomenon from the late 1990s, but it’s actually the subtitle of a book penned a century earlier by a minister named Charles Sheldon. Sheldon was part of the Social Gospel movement, which is very social but not gospel. It began as a movement to improve the economic, moral, and social conditions of the urban poor, using Jesus as an example of “good.” The rapid urbanization of the late 1800s and early 1900s had overwhelmed the infrastructure of American cities. In the shadows of glittering skyscrapers and multi-million-dollar mansions were masses of workers living in squalid poverty, paid pennies a day, and packed like sardines into shoddy tenements without running water, plumbing, or fresh air.

In that setting, Walter Rauschenbusch, a New York City pastor and theologian, dedicated himself to trying to change the attitude of religious people in America. It was his opinion that churches in America had gone awry and were not representing Jesus very well. He determined to push Jesus’ agenda which he called the Kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch taught that the duty of Christians is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven.

Yes, even as it sounds, Rauschenbusch’s goal was to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. Theologically, the Social Gospelers sought to put into practice the quest in the Lord’s Prayer (*Matthew 6:10*): “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” They believed that Christ’s return would not happen until humankind rid itself of social evils by human effort. The Social Gospel did not see Jesus as the sinner’s only hope of salvation from sin’s penalty.

They simply presented Jesus as an example. That view fits well with the statement that was so popular a few years ago, “What would Jesus do?”

Again, the whole movement was social, but it wasn’t gospel. The gospel simply stated is the Good News. But, a lot of people seem to ask. “What’s so good about it?” To a lot of people the gospel is a bothersome kind of archaic tradition once held by our Pilgrim-like forefathers. It is a relic of religionists who are not in touch with modern social issues, modern science, or the real needs of the real world. In other words, the gospel is not good news at all and is irrelevant in the modern world.

The conclusions of the Social Gospel movement and of modern rejection of the gospel are sadly and eternally in error. The gospel really is quite simple. It really is quite good because it answers this very important question: “How can we who are sinners by birth and who sin by practice be made right with our Creator, Whom we have offended by our sins?” Of course, if a person never acknowledges the Creator, or their own sins that have offended Him, there is no need for the good news.

But for us who have been inundated by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel is good news indeed. The death, burial, and resurrection of God the Son is the only means for me to be made right with my Creator. In light of eternity, there could never be any better news. Let’s be reminded of the simplicity and yet unfathomable nature of God’s plan.

Death (23:44-49).

The death of God’s Son was not a tragic accident. It was the completion of the task He came to earth to do (vv.44-46). In the process of completing His earthly ministry, God did various miracles to accompany our Savior’s work on the cross (vv.44-45). *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two (vv.44-45).*

Many years ago an advertisement used to come on the television that said, “It’s 10:00. Do you know where your kids are?” Our text makes me think about that. It was the sixth hour and did anyone

wonder where God was? The ordeal at the place called the “Skull,” the tortuous crucifixion, began at 9:00 a.m. At about 12:00 noon nature testified to the power of God its Creator.

At noon, darkness fell over the whole land for three hours. Was it natural darkness? No, because there was no record of a nearby volcanic eruption or blazing fire that would have produced sufficient smoke or ash to cause the darkness. It wasn't a solar eclipse because that would not have lasted three hours. Furthermore, a solar eclipse occurs with a “new” moon (moon is between earth and sun) and Passover is always during a “full” moon (earth is between moon and sun).

Maybe this darkness was an actual, physical manifestation of the power of darkness Jesus spoke about? Jesus had told the men who arrested Him, *“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”* (Luke 22:53b). The power of darkness is the power of Satan who is *“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience –”* (Ephesians 2:2). No doubt, the Satanic spiritual powers were obviously very busily engaged at this moment in history. But Satan can't control the weather, and Satan would have no reason to rip the curtain in the temple.

Intense darkness fell over the land because God the Father was present and busy doing His will. He allowed the powers of spiritual darkness to hang His beloved Son on the cross to die. The death of God's Son was the greatest of all human travesties. But, it was God Himself who laid the sin of the world on His Son at that moment. God the Father Himself stepped up at the cross and laid all our sins on His Son and then turned away from Him. And God, who does control the weather, brought miraculous darkness over the land to speak to the wretched condition of sinners who live their whole lives in spiritual darkness that is worse. God also caused the earth to quake and various people to rise from the dead (Matthew 27:51-53).

We also read from Luke's account that God miraculously ripped the curtain in the temple. It was a symbolic gesture, just like the darkness was. According to God's design for the tabernacle and temple alike, the curtain separated the ark with the mercy seat where atonement for sin was made from the rest of life – even religious life. In this miracle, God the Father, figuratively, walked away from the cross where He had just laid the sin of world on His Son and walked

over to the temple and ripped the separating curtain because it was no longer necessary. It was all symbolic because there was no ark or mercy seat behind the curtain. From that point on the cross was where the debt of sin was paid for.

In our text, we learn that Christ's death came with affirmation and the conclusion. Having finished the task, Jesus went home for a rest. *Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”* And having said this he breathed his last (v.46). At the end of the ordeal, God the Son acknowledged He had completed the eternal task. *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit”* (John 19:28-30). He understood the requirements of Scripture. He knew He had paid the price so that God can dismiss confessed sin.

Having finished the task, He was thirsty and finally took physical relief. He pronounced the incomprehensible task complete. He publicly acknowledged what He had done all along: *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly* (1 Peter 2:23). And now that He had completed the task, God the Son laid down His earthly body, and, in His spirit, He went to paradise to be with the Heavenly Father. And to wait for the criminal He had just forgiven to show up. And even now He waits there for me when this earthly body succumbs to Adam's curse.

It is very interesting to notice in Luke's recounting of this most glorious event in history the three characteristics of conviction. This is what coming to grips with the work of Christ may look like in your life.

First, the person who is coming under God the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin will be convinced about the truth. *Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!”* (v.47). A tough soldier, as well as some soldiers with him, really softened up and admitted the truth.

This centurion would have been the leader of the soldiers who tortured Jesus, nailed Him to the cross, gambled for His garments, and mocked Him.

More than coming to the assured conviction that Jesus was innocent, the centurion concluded that Jesus was who He said He was, God's Son. *When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54).* In the same way, the sinner who comes to Christ for forgiveness of sins must be fully convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh. That is not to conclude that the Centurion and the soldiers were born again. But they were convinced about who Jesus was.

Second, the person who is sensing the work of God the Holy Spirit will experience conviction because of sinfulness. *And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts (v.48).* The crowds demonstrated guilt because of what they had just witnessed. It had indeed been a spectacle (though the Greek word here simply means, "what had transpired"). Beating of the breasts was a common way of expressing intense grief, often because of guilt.

How many people in that crowd understood that they had witnessed not only the torturous execution of an innocent man but the murder of God the Son their promised Messiah? The sinner who comes to Christ for forgiveness will sense this intense guilt that their sin was responsible for His death. That is not to conclude that everyone who beat their breasts was born again. Not everyone who senses guilt for sin is saved. But no one is saved who does not sense guilt for sin.

Third, when we sinners begin to think about Christ's work, there may well be a bit of confusion about what happened. *And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things (v.49).* Jesus' friends and acquaintances had to be confused as they watched this spectacle. The Messiah-thing wasn't supposed to end like this. And God the Son should not be killed for my sins. But that was God's plan. So, too, when we come into conviction about sin, we might wonder why we feel poorly about ourselves, or why would God care for us, or would

He send people to hell, or how could God let His Son die. But He did die. He died for us sinners.

Burial (23:50-56).

When Christ the Lord laid down His life, a couple of important men displayed a sacrificial kindness (vv.50-53). One man, a righteous man, took quite a risk. *Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (vv.50-52).*

Joe was a member of the council that had unjustifiably condemned God the Son. Our text identifies Him as a good and righteous man. Generally that meant that the person feared God and trusted Scriptures. He was trusting God's promises and looking for the kingdom of God – which words also describe salvation. There is no definitive statement at this point that Joe was actually born again, but the wording does make it likely. It seems most obvious that Joseph like the other people Luke calls "righteous" (John, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Simeon and Anna) were all regenerated by faith in God's promise (like Abraham had been).

Because he was righteous, the religious leader from Arimathea resisted the majority of the council members. Then Joseph proved his faith in God's promise by making a sacrificial choice. The political authority could have arrested him for being associated with an indicted and executed criminal. The religious authorities would have most certainly thrown Joe out of the "club" because he was unworthy of being a leader if he associated with Jesus.

Furthermore, as proof of his loyalty to Jesus, this righteous man gave up his possession. *Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid (v.53).* When I look at pictures of Rosso Fiorentino's sculpture, *Descent from the Cross*, I think about how much work it was and how much danger not only from falling off the ladder but from antagonists showing up to cause trouble – if the sculpture is actually an accurate portrayal of events. There was some risk in simply removing the Lord's body from the cross.

But then, how much did it cost to have a tomb cut into the stone? There was not only a social, political, religious cost involved, but Joseph made a material sacrifice also. And so did Nicodemus make a sacrifice. *Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews (John 19:39-40).* People who are righteous (right with God) will have a love for God's Son that is demonstrated in actions. People are made right with God only by trusting that Jesus paid for their sins through this sacrifice.

That is the gospel – the good news. But a stark fact remains here. The good and righteous men buried God the Son. Actually, bear in mind that they buried only the earthly body of God the Son. Jesus' friends handled the burial of His body while at the same time keeping God's law (vv.54-56). They were meticulous to observe details of the burial. *It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid (vv.54-55).*

This means that the weekly Sabbath would begin at sunset on Friday. The religious leaders had a lot of laws about not breaking the Sabbath. I would think that if it would have been me, at this point, I would have told the religious leaders to take a hike and I would do what I wanted to. But the Sabbath law was God's law. Devout people will obey God in spite of the wickedness of unsaved leaders.

This part of the story also reveals how the followers planned according to expectations. *Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment (v.56).* The devout followers showed their respect for their leader by preparing spices. It was expected that they would show honor by covering Jesus' dead body with the spices on Sunday morning. In the meantime, God required them to rest. What a beautiful picture of obeying God even when we are clueless about what He is doing.

Resurrection (24:1-12).

The Lord's followers had the joy of witnessing the wonder of the resurrection (vv.1-7). And it was a wonder indeed. Just the idea of resurrection is perplexing, not to mention the details of our Lord's resurrection (vv.1-5a). *But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground (vv.1-5a).*

This is one of the most beautiful pictures in the Bible contrasting human expectation with God's incredible blessing. The Lord's followers planned to show respect and honor to His dead body by putting more spices on it. Immediately upon arrival, they realized that something was askew. When they had left the tomb on Friday night (assuming that they had been there), the stone was placed in front of the opening. Now it was moved away. More than that, it had been sealed. More than that, the authorities had placed soldiers to guard it. In the darkness of dawn, they could tell that everything had changed. Nothing was like it should have been – again.

They went into the tomb and realized the body of their Lord was gone. But two bodies were there they never expected to see. There were two angels! That would be enough to make a person quake in fear. It was impressive.

But the most impressive part of the resurrection is that it is God's promise fulfilled (vv.5b-7). *The men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise" (vv.5b-7).*

The resurrection is the greatest possible affirmation of God's faithfulness. Yes, it is an astonishing miracle. But God raised people from the dead through Elijah and Elisha. Jesus raised people from the dead. Just a couple days earlier, the earthquake had shaken dead people awake and they got out of their graves. But the death, burial, and resurrection of God the Son had been God's promise repeatedly

since the introduction of sin into the world. Hadn't Jesus taught this over and over? The angels told the Lord's followers, ***Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise***" (vv.6-7).

As the moments flew by, the followers began to remember more and more. It is important to see how God brought individual after individual and group after group to affirm the resurrection of our Lord (vv.8-12). *And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them* (vv.8-11).

The women went away from that shocking scene remembering what Jesus had told them so many times. Nothing calms our fears and quiets our troubled souls like remembering the promises of God. Only by embracing and resting in God's promise that by faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as the redemption price for our sins, can we enjoy peace with God, salvation for eternity. We should not be surprised that such a promise is hard to believe. When the women told the apostles what they had witnessed, *these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them* (v.11).

One of those special, affirming individuals was Peter who marveled at what he saw (v.12). *But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened* (v.12). Peter had to see for himself. Seeing the evidence, he marveled at what had happened.

The good news of salvation is the most marvelous news. The gospel is such a simple story—such an effective story. It is impossible for human wisdom to fully comprehend the love and grace of God to take the initiative to provide the price necessary to pay for our sins. It is beyond our comprehension that God the Father would turn His Son over to a pack of ravening beasts and allow them to kill Him. It eclipses our wisdom to explain how God the Son rose from the grave with a glorified body. But what is most astonishing is that God's intent in all this miraculous work was not to make the world

a better place to live in. Rather, in the gospel God reveals to us that this world is fully infected by sin and passing away. The astonishing news is that God has provided the only means for us to escape the dead end of the passing world (hell) and live with Him forever in perfect, eternal bliss.