

Podcast Episode 12: Resurrection Morning

QUESTION: What happened on resurrection morning? What follows is Denver's eyewitness account of the events that transpired on Easter morning, as well as some thoughts on what those events mean for all of us.

DENVER: A little over 2,000 years ago something happened that changed the course of history. Christ was resurrected. We have in one generation of people a series of testimonies about Christ and His life, death, and resurrection.

Christ was taken captive in the Garden, and many of those who followed Him fled immediately. Peter took a little time to knock off a servant's ear, which Christ healed and rebuked Peter and told him to put away his sword. By the time He gets to being tried there are only two who hung around for the trial, and on the cross the only ones who followed Him, who remained, were women. And they stood at the feet of the cross until He passed. Upon His death there is no mention of a disciple being involved in His burial. They were cowering. They were hiding. And these were they who spent their time with Him as His chosen disciples.

Everything changed on the first day of the week when something turned cowards into men who would be willing to die for the testimony that they had that He is risen! That testimony changed the world; it changed their lives. They no longer lived as though their Master had been defeated in death. They lived as though their Master had triumphed over death, because He had. Multiple witnesses telling the same story: abject defeat, fear, and cowardice, followed by triumphant, confident, defiant belief in a risen Lord-- many of whom would go to their own deaths rather than to deny their testimony that Christ lives. You have every reason to have confidence in the fact of the resurrection of the Lord. The lives of those disciples are abundant testimony of the fact of His resurrection.

Following Christ's death He was buried and rose on the third day. I know He lives for I have seen Him. He showed me the morning of His resurrection. I testify as a witness that He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the Gospels declare. Like those who wrote the New Testament, I am also a living witness the Lord rose from the dead:

When I saw His resurrection, I was surprised to see it was still dark. I had always thought it occurred at sunup, as the return of daylight symbolized the return of life. But it was dark. The Gospel of John is the only one that mentions the darkness of that morning.

*Even so, it never registered to me that Christ rose in the darkness of that early morning.... He did rise from the dead. We rejoice because it is true. As so many others have done before, I can add my own witness that He rose from the dead. I was shown it. It happened. He who died on the cross rose from the dead, and He lives still (Snuffer Jr., Denver C. 2010-12-24, *Come, Let Us Adore Him*, pp. 249, 257).*

All four Gospels give accounts of Christ's resurrection:

Matthew tells of two women, both named Mary, who were first to come to the grave, where an angel informed them of the resurrection and told them to go tell others.

Mark states it was also two women, both named Mary, who arrived first to the grave where an angel informed them Christ was resurrected. Other disciples did not believe their testimony.

Luke tells of several women who saw the empty grave, were told He had risen by two angels, and then went to testify to the apostles. But the apostles thought the testimony "seemed as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11).

John wrote that Mary Magdalene saw, even embraced the risen Lord and related to the others her testimony of having seen Him returned to life, resurrected from the dead.

These accounts differ in details. They have similarities and differences. They are universal in the fact that Christ was seen by the women (or a woman) first, and not by His Apostles.

John's account records that Christ told Mary: 'Touch me not.' In the Joseph Smith Translation the words are changed to read: 'Hold me not' (JST-John 20:17). Joseph's change of the text was warranted. I tell you that when Mary realized it was Jesus, she embraced Him joyfully. She did not timidly reach out her hand, but she readily greeted Him with open arms, and He, in turn, embraced her.

It's difficult to describe what I saw of the incident, apart from saying that the Lord was triumphant, exultant, overjoyed at His return from the grave! She shared His joy.

I was shown the scene and do not have words to adequately communicate how complete the feelings of joy and gratitude were which were felt by our Lord that morning. As dark and terrible as were the sufferings through which He passed, the magnitude of which is impossible for man to put into words, these feelings of triumph were, on the other hand, of equal magnitude in their joy and gratitude. He had attained to the resurrection of the

dead! Just as He had seen His Father do, He likewise held the keys of death and hell! I do not think it possible for a mortal to feel a fullness of either. And having felt some of what He shares with His witnesses, I know words are inadequate to capture His feelings on the morning of His resurrection.

He had the deep satisfaction of having accomplished the most difficult assignment to be given by the Father, knowing it was a benefit to all of His Father's children, and it had been done perfectly.

Mary and Christ embraced. There was nothing timid about the warm encounters she had with Him. Then He said to her, 'Hold me not' because He had to ascend, return and report to His Father. Joseph Smith was correct when he changed the language.

I then saw Him ascend to heaven. I saw the golden heavenly light glowing down upon Mary as she watched His ascent. All this happened while it was yet dark on the morning He rose from the dead. He has shown this to me and I can testify to it as a witness" (See Come, Let Us Adore Him, pp. 256-7).

The Lord's public execution was designed to humiliate Him. Onlookers were expected to have contempt for anyone executed that way. He foretold "the world shall rejoice" at His disciples' sorrow (John 16:20). In contrast, His triumphant resurrection was private. He appeared only to a few and initially only to women. He endured public shaming, reserving His greatest triumph to quiet privacy between confidants. Our Lord is meek, and although greater and more intelligent than us all, yet He condescends to speak with us in plain humility.

He is the only means for salvation. "*There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent*" (Mosiah 3:17). Anyone who claims otherwise is deceived or dishonest. I testify of Him in a day when most people do not believe it possible for my testimony to be true. But I do testify truthfully.

As a result of celebrating Easter, I wanted to take some comments from the account of that very first day when the Lord came out of the grave. The fact that Easter is in the springtime I don't think is any accident. I think it's intended to align with the testimony of nature about the promise of eternal life, the promise of the renewal that comes every spring, and I think the Lord intended that His death and His resurrection should associate with spring. And I think it's appropriate that that be the subject that we look at today.

The incident appears in Luke chapter 24, and it begins in chapter 24: "*Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared...*" (Luke 24:1). He doesn't tell us this, but there's a detail you can find over in John chapter 20: "*The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark*" (John 20:1). All that Luke says is it was very early in the morning. John lets us know that this was not only very early in the morning, it was still dark out.

There's multiple versions of what went on on the very first day of the Lord having risen from the dead. In one account we know that the Lord Himself appeared and that, among other things, He told Mary not to "hold" Him. The King James version says, "don't touch me," but Joseph changes that in the inspired version to "don't hold me" because I think implicit in the Joseph Smith change is that she did touch Him. She was not just a witness, but she was someone who felt free to embrace Him. And He said, "don't hold me, I have to go appear to my Father and your Father."

The first witnesses of the resurrection were women. This is another confirmation that the Second Comforter is not inhibited by priestly office or limited in His ministry to the brethren. The first witnesses were women, and that should tell us something. In verse 24: "*And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not*" (Luke 24:24). Sure enough, the tomb was empty. He wasn't there any more, but they didn't see anything. So far you see the men have only the witness of an empty tomb and the testimony of the women. Perhaps faith needed to grow in the brethren before they could get what the sisters had already themselves witnessed.

We have the brilliant, the ingenious capacity for looking out over people and filtering out all the females. It's a gift. I don't know how we manage that, but we do. We do manage that. And the scriptures plainly tell a different story. And it's that different story that's our problem-- not the personal identity of the woman involved or her relation to the Lord or her obvious reaction to Him, and Joseph altering the text to say "don't hold me" as opposed to "don't touch me," which means that he removed "don't touch me" from the text. She was touching him, and it tells you something else potentially about their relationship. Because if she was embracing and attempting to hold Him, and He was saying "I've got another appointment to keep. I'll be back, but don't hold me," it suggests something else about what was going on there. I mean, why was she there at that point in the morning? Why was it still dark? And why did He elect that moment to come and rejoin her?

Christ could not, *could not* have done what He did if He had not had a woman who fulfilled a role in relation to Him. *She* anointed *Him* preliminary to His death and His burial. *She* was the first one to encounter Him in the resurrection. You do not get Him through what He needed to go

through, without the presence of the woman taking care of some needful things in connection with that.

I would rather understate than overstate the case. But let me end by telling you Christ lives. He died, and He was resurrected. I know this to be true because, like Paul, I have seen Him. I don't tell you that to make this seem sensational. I tell you that to give you cause to believe in Him. He is real. Encountering Him as a resurrected being changed the course of history. It turned cowards into courageous, willing, and enthusiastic witnesses who faced down the Roman empire to their death. They died willingly. They died as evidence of the truth that they were testifying to. That kind of faith needs to return again to the earth. That kind of faith is possible again in our day.

The foregoing are excerpts from:

- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #1 given in Cerritos, CA on September 21st, 2017,
- His conference talk entitled "The Doctrine of Christ," given in Boise, ID on September 11th, 2016,
- His talk entitled "Christ's Discourse on the Road to Emmaus," given in Fairview, Utah on April 14, 2007, and
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #7 entitled "Christ, Prototype of the Saved Man" given in Ephraim, UT on June 28, 2014.