

# They Were Perplexed

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I'd like to take us out to text this morning, Luke chapter 24 and verse 24.

While there were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them, in darsling, apart.

And these words, particularly, they were perplexed.

In considering our text, I think it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of Luke's purpose in writing his Gospel. Other Gospel writers were writing for communities, but Luke was writing particularly for an individual by the name of theophilus. Of course, that does not exclude other readers from being addressed by this Gospel. Quite sure that Luke anticipated that others would read his Gospel account that he so carefully presents to us. When I was in the active ministry, when I would be engaged in my sermon preparation for the congregations which I served, individuals would frequently be before my mind's eye. And I suppose it is one of the disadvantages of being retired. You do not have individuals before your mind's eye when you are engaged in sermon preparation because I don't know the congregations so well. But Luke did have someone before his mind's eye and his name was theophilus. You'll find that at the beginning of the Gospel some say the name means beloved by God. I prefer to think of theophilus at that stage as somewhat friendly towards God. And you find this written at the beginning of the Gospel in as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning where I witness and minister of the words have delivered them to us. It seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you most excellent theophilus. And Luke had a particular purpose in writing to this individual and his purpose was this that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. And that suggests to me firstly that this man theophilus had received some perhaps even considerable teaching in biblical doctrine. And secondly that there was an element of confusion or perplexity in the mind of this man regarding the good news in Christ Jesus. And there is obviously a longing on the part of Luke that this man who bears the name friendly towards God that he become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I do not know but there may be some here this morning of whom it is true that you share similarities with theophilus. You are familiar with the content of the Bible but you are prone to doubt or confused about the teaching. And I think that is why Luke wrote in his introduction that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. Of course Luke's gospel is not just as I said for this man theophilus but for anyone who needs to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior. It is for people who have never met Jesus before and for people who need to know Jesus again as if for the very first time. It is for people who are just beginning to trust in Jesus and for people who have known him for many years but who still need to become more secure in their faith. It is in short for anyone who needs or who wants to know for sure for as good Dr. Luke knew.

[ 5 : 46 ] Faith itself from the assurance of faith comes by hearing the gospel and looking to Jesus Christ. And I would suggest that this concluding chapter is of huge importance and significance in removing confusion out of minds and hearts. Why? Well perhaps the Apostle Paul best answers that question in writing to the Corinthians. His states of Christ has not been raised. There no preaching is unveiled and your faith is unveiled. We are found to be misrepresent in God if Christ is not risen because we testified about God that he raised Christ whom he did not raised. If it is true that the dead are not raised for if the dead are not raised not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. If in Christ we have opened this life only we are of all people must to be pitied. But in fact says Paul Christ has been raised from the dead. And in this chapter Luke tells us of the first visitors to the tomb of Jesus. They were women and Luke tells us they were confused. They were perplexed. In fact the chapter tells us of several who were confused and the chapter tells us how their confusion was illumined. So four

thoughts. First the perplexity of the women. Secondly a pointed question.

Thirdly the place of the word. Unfortunately the proclamation of the women. The perplexity of the women. A pointed question. The place of the word.

The proclamation of the women. The perplexity of the women. These women were some of the last to leave the cross. They had seen Jesus condemned and crucified. They also had witnessed a new addition to their number. Someone who had come out of darkness and lovingly and carefully taken down the lifeless body of Jesus from the cross for burial. Luke states that he laid him in a tomb. Cut in stone where no one had ever yet been laid. Matthew in his account tells us that his name was Joseph. That he took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb which he had cut in the rock. Luke tells us how the women took careful note of the burial place after which they returned home to prepare spices required for a full and proper burial as was the practice and custom. The reason for that was that it was that they returned home. It was so close to the Jewish Sabbath which you remember. For the Orthodox Jews on a Saturday. And the women rested that day and on the first day of the week, or Sunday, they come very early with their spices. Mark tells us in his account that one of the things they talked about on the way was their concern about the fact that none of them would be able to roll the stone away from the tomb. They were worried about that. How are we going to get the stone removed when they get there? They were saying one to another. Mark says who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? And that suggests that they hadn't heard that the tomb had been sealed and that a guard of soldiers had been placed in front of the tomb. They were just concerned about what to do with the stone when they arrived there. And when they did, it was not as they thought.

The object or the obstacle of their concern had been removed. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered there was no body. When they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And Luke says they were perplexed. They were thrown into confusion. And you know, you know, skeptics will tell us that it's just a mere fabrication, the narrative of the resurrection. But that's not the kind of thing you would write if you were trying to fabricate an account of the resurrection. And you might say well surely the women remember what Jesus had taught. Had he not predicted that this would happen, that he would rise on the third day? Well in their confusion they apparently do not remember. They're remembering to whom he writes initially. [12:32] Why does Luke include this information? Remember he's writing to a man, does not seem sure about the Gospel message. A man who maybe thinks of himself as God friendly. But seems to me that Luke is suggesting that this man's thinking of religion, about religion, is thinking about the Gospel, that it needs to be thrown into confusion. That his way of thinking about God and about Jesus of Nazareth needs to be turned upside down so that he comes to appreciate that there is something truly unique about Jesus. Jesus is different. He's not just a great teacher, he's not just a mere man. Theophilus needed to realize that something huge has taken place here. And for a moment the women are beside themselves and they are confused. Sometimes that's just how we are. And that brings me to my second thought, a pointed question. Luke tells us how the women came face to face as he describes it with two men in dazzling apparel. The women were frightened, they were awestruck. It is accepted that these two were angels.

And by way of mild rebuke, the angels ask these women who are confused. A pointed, pertinent question. Why do you seek the living among the dead? It's a very important question. They at that time thought of Jesus as dead. They were filled with sadness. They were confused. Now I don't want in any way to diminish the love or the affection and devotion of these women for Jesus. But it seems to me that it is obvious from the information given that they were there to anoint a dead body. The angels were telling them that they are in the wrong place. The person whom they consider dead is not there. Hence the question, why are you looking for the living among the dead? The way they thought of Jesus was not the way Jesus was. They expected to find the dead body of Jesus. They assumed that death the end of his earthly existence. Is it possible that you are present today and you too are thinking of Jesus in a way in which he isn't? You wouldn't be the first to think of Jesus in that way. Let me ask you a question. Would it make a great difference to your life if Jesus were still dead? That would make any difference to you. Do you think of him merely as a great teacher? A great example? Some people seek to follow his example. Are you one of those of whom it could be said that you look for the living among the dead? Reading the Bible trying to follow the example of Jesus. Do you remember what Jesus said to the Jews on one occasion? You know they were not negligent of the scriptures. They were diligent students of the Bible. And Jesus

acknowledges this. You search the scriptures he says to them and you might say what can be wrong with that? Is it not a good practice? And I would say yes it's an excellent practice. But you see the motivation that they had for doing so was that they finally be accepted by God. And so Jesus says to them because you think that in them that is in the scriptures you have eternal life. Jesus is drawing attention to the fact that there is nothing intrinsically life-giving about studying the Bible. If one fails to discern their true content and purpose it is they that bear witness about me. The Old Testament by predictive prophecy by type and revelation point to Christ. To his ministry his teaching his death and resurrection. In other places you find him teaching. Do not think I have come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. And rightly understood the the scriptures point away from themselves to Jesus as the living Savior. But it is as if for these Jews they're searching of the Bible makes them deaf to the word of Jesus. And so you find this indictment pronounced by Jesus yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. That was the big mistake on the part of these Jews. And maybe you are present this morning and you hear or have heard. And you know that they speak of Jesus as a living Savior. Perhaps you've seen others and they've never had the privileges you had in your background. And they've come to faith in Christ and you ask yourself how can that be? Reminds me of when I was a student in university days seeing and hearing fellow students coming to speak about Jesus Christ as their Savior. And in some ways I'll admit to my shame I thought myself superior to them. I had been under the ministry of the Gospel since my earliest childhood. I won prizes in Sunday school at local and national level. But I did not know Jesus nor had I come to trust in Jesus nor did I love Jesus nor had I come to delight in Jesus. Are you like that?

This morning. Has it made any difference in your life that Jesus is alive? Because we all need to come to the risen Christ to find life. And so the relevant pertinent pointed question here why do you seek the living among the dead? And for these women, these confused women, it was like a bright beam of light penetrating into the darkness of their confused minds and heart. The living is not here. And that brings me to my third point. A pointed question, the perplexity of the women, the place of the word. And it seems to me that is a marvelous moment of illumination. Notice the angels did not try to reason on the basis of the physical evidence. Nor did they make a case for Christ by refuting alternative explanations to indicate what had happened to the body that these women intended to anoint. Instead the angels, notice what they do, they remind these confused women of the teaching of Jesus. 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 be crucified and on the third day rise. In other words, remember the teaching of Jesus. It's as if the angels were saying to these women, not just as if, but definitely saying to them, you will not be able to make sense of any of this unless you examine and remember the teaching of Jesus. The way to understand this event, the way for you to understand the resurrection is to return to the teaching of Jesus and remember what he had taught. What had they heard? Had they not heard? Had they not heard Jesus say, I'm going to Jerusalem, I'm going to be crucified and rise on the third day, of course they had heard the message, but they hadn't absorbed the message, they hadn't taken it in. And then Luke just in case we missed it tells us in verse 8 that the women remembered his words, they remembered his words. It was just a few words on the part of the angels, but sufficient to prompt the women to remember and reflect on the teaching that they had been given by the Lord. Of course he said this, he is who he said he is, and so they began to realize that he wasn't dead, but that he was a glorious living triumphant Savior. They were in the wrong place and they needed to alter that way of thinking about Jesus. They are discovering who Jesus really is. And did you notice that the angels rather cleverly insert a very important title in their directive to the women? Remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be delivered, the Son of Man. It's an important title, it's taken from the book of Daniel in chapter 7, and if you read that chapter for yourselves you'll realize that the Son of Man is spoken of as an exalted figure, not just a human figure, but an exalted figure. And it was [ 24 : 29 ] Jesus' favorite self-designation. It combines in itself the strange ideas of mere humanity with the unparalleled glory of God Himself. In fact if you do a study of the Terran, the Son of Man in the Gospels, you'll see that he didn't refer to himself most often as the Son of God, but as the Son of Man. You'll find statements like this, for even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to self, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Often that is what he calls himself. And those with ears to hear could hear echoes of Daniel chapter 7.

And so Jesus' usage of the title Son of Man meant that he was claiming a very exalted role in the history of redemption and rightly so, because it belonged to him. Now Jesus was very subtle in that he was always disclosing his identity to those with eyes to see, but he wasn't disclosing it so blatantly that everybody would come and make him king. It's as if he was steering a narrow path in disclosing his identity, not just openly saying, I am the Messiah, I am the king of the world, come and acknowledge me as king. He didn't speak like that. He was quiet and subtle, but he would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in other settings. And only when the time was right and mainly when he was on trial and they said, are you the Christ the Son of the Living God? Only then did he say, I am. And you will see the Son of Man coming with great power and glory. He confessed his deity right at the point where he knew he would be crucified for it. So Son of Man has the double meaning of a perfect human being and an exalted heavenly person. And Jesus meant to communicate that to us that this person is no longer among the dead. As the Son of Man, he is indeed the promised Messiah. And Luke wants us to understand that this is the one who would bring in God's kingdom and restore life to those who trusted in him. You know, as a doctor he is interested in restoration. He had seen and taken note of Jesus restoring the sick and transforming lives. So he inserts this piece of vital information and there's also something else that is significant in that little passage we read in verse 3. He tells how the woman entered the tomb and did you notice what he writes? They did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Now why is that significant? Well I don't know of you if you all remember when you first began to read because for some of you it may have been like myself a long time ago. And did you not read aloud as you grappled with words and tried to exercise your newfound skill? Well apparently in the first century reading aloud was the practice for those who could read. Now remember I said this was addressed initially to Theophilus and when he receives this copy of Luke's Gospel and reads aloud the words Lord Jesus did he look around to see if anyone was listening? Because in those days in Judah the only person you could call Lord was the Roman Emperor and they were under the authority and jurisdiction of the Roman Empire. And Lucas as it were said to his friend what now do you think of this person Jesus? And as he says this to Theophilus he asks of us what do you think of this person Jesus? The place of the word. How do we receive it? Do we really take it to heart? Do we like the psalmist? Store it up in our hearts and do you remember what the psalmist goes on to say? I will meditate on your precepts, I will delight in your statutes, I will not forget your word. And he does this not just to understand the word or be able to speak about it or even to be to preach about it but for the very purpose for which the word was given for holiness of life that I might not sin against you. And the psalmist says more not only does he recognize the word and the place of the word in bringing him towards holiness of life but he sees the word as a means of illumination. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. And as I said at the outset this whole chapter speaks of people who are confused the two on the road to Emmaus the disciples in the room and how was their confusion removed? How was it illumined? Was it not through the word? That's what happened to the two on the road to Emmaus. That's what happened to the disciples when Jesus stood among them. The place of the word, what place does it have in your life and mind today?

A pointed question the perplexity of the women and finally the proclamation of the women. These women came from a place of confusion or perplexity to where they engage in excited proclamation. And remember they had not yet seen the resurrected Jesus. Luke shows us the empty tomb and only later does he show the risen Christ. What made the difference to these women? Was it not the teaching of Jesus? As soon as they remembered his words, as soon as they grasped the implication and understood the teaching of Christ they were no longer perplexed or confused. They understood why the tomb was empty.

[ 32 : 24 ] Jesus was not among the dead but among the living. He had risen from the grave and such news was too good to keep to themselves. You know when you receive some tremendous news you want to share it don't you? You don't want to, it's as if it were bubbling up inside you and you want others to share in the news. That's just how these women were. Returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest and you might say they became the first preachers of the resurrection. And Luke discloses that identity. Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James and the other woman, the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

And if this were a fabricated account the response of the disciples was not what you might expect but you see Luke tells it as it was. These words seemed to the disciples when the women reported their news as an idle tale and they did not believe them. It all sounded like unintelligible nonsense just like gibberish.

Is there anyone here today who thinks like that about the message of the Gospel? You know the Greek term translated idle tale it's used in in medical language to describe the kind of talk of people who are delirious through illness.

That's how the disciples viewed the excited report of these first missionaries of the cross. That was their initial response that somehow these women their powers of reason is overcome by their emotional response to the death of Jesus and so they did not believe. And you know in many ways it's no different to the present hour. People still refuse to believe the good news and you know rather than be discouraged by that we ought to be encouraged. Why? Because these same people who refused to believe came to believe and they continued to witness even when they were faced by persecution on the very prospect of death.

Luke however draws attention to one person in the group who went to see the empty tomb for himself and ran there. We know from John's Gospel that he had a companion who ran quicker than he did. One who was described as the disciple whom Jesus laughed. And there was a reason that he ran quicker than Peter.

[ 35 : 51 ] It wasn't just that he was younger than Peter but Peter had a stone in his shoe. Do you know when you have a stone in your shoe it's difficult to walk let our own run.

What was the stone in Peter's shoe? He had denied the Lord three times. It was a big stone in his shoe. But Luke tells us that Peter's stooping and looking in saw the linen cloths by themselves when Tom marveling what had happened. And the word that is used here marveling expresses astonishment and amazement. He was stunned, disconcerted, puzzled and confused and the implication being here that there was not yet understanding. In other words the element of confusion comes up again and again in the chapter. But what Luke is emphasizing is that the confused are illuminated and when they are they run to tell others. Others too confused and illumined. And that's what the Gospel message does.

Now remember that the event of which Luke speaks here is the most important event in human history. And if you have not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ if you have not believed will you not examine the evidence as presented by the Gospel writer Luke. He is challenging us to reach our decision as to whether Jesus is among the living or the dead. Remember what Jesus said about himself he would be crucified, dead, buried and on the third day rise again. Do you believe his words? How do you believe his words? Because you see according to the Gospel message Jesus is not among the dead, but among the living. He was crucified in the place of sinners in order that sinners like you and me might receive forgiveness of all those sins. His sacrifice of himself was accepted by God and so he has risen from the grave he is at the right hand of God the Father shining in glory and ruling the universe. As the prophesied one who fulfilled what the Father gave him to do he will come again in power and majesty in might and in glory. How do you intend to meet him? Still confused or enlightened?

Welcoming and trusting or re-chilling and disbelieving? Will you meet him as your Lord and Savior? Or will you be among those who seek to be hidden from his face because you rejected the message of good news? The perplexity of the women a pointed question the place of the word the proclamation of the women or may we all share in their excitement about the good news that Jesus is not among the dead let us pray eternal God we thank thee for the message of thy truth and for what it's face to us this day and you all help us not only to share in the good news but to be proclaimers of it and the glory shall be thine in Jesus name we muy all skip Amen