

“He Is Not Here, But Has Risen”: Three Barrier-Breaking Effects of the Lord’s Resurrection (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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. (Luke 24:1–12)

Three Barrier-Breaking Effects

- A. Last week I took the first seven of these verses and considered them from the perspective of the new creation that’s come for us in Jesus by virtue of his death and resurrection. It’s day one at early dawn, a new week—a “new creation” week. And we looked at much of what’s new for us now in the gospel.
- B. But now I want to broaden out our scope here and take in [vv. 1-12](#) as a whole. And I see here outlined for us what I would call three barrier-breaking effects of Jesus’ resurrection.
 - 1. I’ll just give them to you right up front here, but you need to know we’ll only get to this first one this morning and we’ll wrap around next time for the other two: (1) Effect #1: The Marginalized Are Embraced; (2) Effect #2: The Skeptical Are Convinced; and (3) Effect #3: The Guilty Are Forgiven.
 - a. As I’m reading this text, I see there is a social/cultural barrier, there is a rational/intellectual barrier, and there is a moral/ethical barrier—and Jesus, in his death and consequent resurrection, is just blowing through them all!
 - i. But let’s focus in on that first one now . . .

Effect #1: The Marginalized Are Embraced

On the Outside

- A. We've all, I imagine, in one way or another, experienced something of what it's like to be marginalized, on the outside of things. You want to be in, but you're out.
 - 1. It may be something you experienced back in grade school. I have those memories, those wounds. Guys you thought were your friends, but made fun of, rejected, marginalized. They were cool. You weren't.
 - 2. It may be something in your family—you always knew your brother or your sister was daddy's favorite, and you were just a second-class citizen, even in your own home, because you didn't play sports, or you didn't get the grades, or whatever.
 - 3. It could be something in the office—they're all going to lunch, but nobody told you. So you eat alone there at your computer, left out.

Especially Women

- A. Being on the outside, it's never fun. And I think it's beyond dispute that, as far as gender is concerned, women on the whole have experienced this in a far more systemic and devastating way than men—throughout history.
 - 1. Sometimes, then, we see people are marginalized not just because of their personality, or their economic status, or things like this, but because of things even more basic—because of their gender.
- B. This is why right now women are protesting in Kabul, right? I just saw it on the news the other day.
 - 1. They're terrified that the Taliban is just going to return to their old policies where they would forcibly remove women from public life—whether we're talking about the university or the workplace or even common thoroughfares.
 - 2. And worse, of course you know, there is that fear that they will also subjugate and abuse women and girls—treating them like objects for their own selfish pleasure, selling them to fund their government, and things—doing what I don't even dare go into detail about here.
 - a. So it's happening even today, and it's happening even in the name of religion.
- C. And it's been going on since long before the days of Jesus, and certainly it was a prominent feature of the culture in his day as well. Women were second-class citizens, undervalued, underappreciated, dehumanized in many ways.
 - 1. So, a few hundred years before Christ, you have the Athenian politician Apollodorus saying famously now of the various women a man may have for himself: “We have courtesans for pleasure [these were female companions, oftentimes prostitutes], handmaidens for the day-to-day care of the body, wives to bear legitimate children and to be a trusted guardian of things in the house” (as quoted by Ferguson in *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 77).
 - a. In other words, it is perfectly legitimate to have various women around because we men have various needs—and they exist to serve us.

2. In Jesus' day it was quite common for little baby girls to be "exposed," or, in other words, left out in the elements to die. Because they wanted a boy. A boy brought value to the family. A girl brought additional burden.
 - a. There's a letter we've discovered dating from 1 BC written by a husband to his wife. And in this letter we see painfully illustrated for us the pagan world's casual disregard for little baby girls. The husband writes: "I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child, if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it" (as quoted by Mclaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 145).
- D. And, sadly, even in Jewish circles a similarly degrading posture towards women had settled into the culture.
1. So there was a Jewish saying: "Happy is he whose children are male, but alas for him whose children are female."
 2. Rabbis, so I've read, didn't even consider women worthy of being taught the sacred Scriptures. Hence the rabbinic saying: "Sooner let the words of the Law be burned than delivered to women" (b. *Sotah* 19a).
 3. And, to give one final example of this, though the OT does not specifically prohibit female witnesses in courtroom situations, Judaism generally would not permit their testimonies as valid or reliable unless no male witnesses were available.
 - a. So the Jewish historian Josephus writes: "From women let no evidence be accepted" (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.219). "We all know they can't be trusted. What they have to say isn't reliable. They're women. Give me a break."

First Witnesses!

- A. And, now, with all of this in the background, isn't it astounding that God, in his providence and his grace, the one who could've ordered these affairs any such way that he pleased, would see fit himself to set apart women as the very first witnesses of and testifiers to the resurrection of Jesus?! Did you notice that?!
 1. So v. 1: "[O]n the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared."
 - a. But who's the "they" here? Luke goes on to clarify the matter for us in v. 10, after this group had run back in their excitement to tell the other disciples. There Luke makes it plain: "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 . . ."
- B. And in case you think Luke's account a bit idiosyncratic here, it must be mentioned that all four of the gospel accounts take pains to mention this very fact—that women were the first to witness and testify of the risen Christ. We're simply not allowed to miss this point.

1. It's not a detail God is ashamed of. It's one he's jealous that we see and let move and transform us.
- C. Certainly God knows such a thing will grate on the then modern sensibilities of folks. Such a fact would seem at first to be a liability to the early church's cause, a fly in the ointment. "Women were the first to see and tell? How can this then be trusted?"
1. That would at least seem to be part of why the eleven apostles here are reluctant to believe Christ is risen. "Well, all we have is women's testimony to the matter." So Luke goes on to say in v. 11: *but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*
 - a. That word translated "idle tale" here—*lēros* in the Greek—it's a demeaning, belittling word, defined in the Greek lexicon as "that which is totally devoid of anything worthwhile, idle talk, nonsense" (BDAG).
 2. One scholar puts it this way: "Part of the reason for the apostles' unbelief is that a resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations; another reason may have been that Jewish officials considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable" (IVPNTBC).
 3. Another commentator points out that, in the ancient world, this continued to be an issue for the early church in terms of gaining credibility. So he writes: "Some two centuries after the Gospels were written the pagan philosopher Celsus could still needle Origen that the Christian doctrine of the resurrection was based on the testimony of 'half-frantic ... self-deceived women'" (Origen, Cels. 2.55 as quoted in PNTC).
- D. But you see God knows what he's doing with this. He's not worried about losing credibility here. His concern is to attack misogyny, to accent grace. Don't you see?
1. Though at first many might see these women witnesses as a liability to the cause, in time, the church at least, would come to see such a thing, not as a hindrance to the gospel message, but as a profound illustration of it.
 - a. After all, what is the gospel about but this very thing: in Jesus, because of the cross, the marginalized are being welcomed in and celebrated and trusted and valued and loved. It doesn't get any more gospel than this!
- E. It's as if God is here tightening his hands around the neck of that misogynistic mindset that has so polluted the hearts of men for millennia. It's as if he is taking a megaphone to his mouth in these moments and declaring the great value and worth that women enjoy so far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned.
1. He is elevating those whom the world has subjugated, pushed aside, and conveniently forgotten about. He is bringing in and embracing those who for so long have been in the margins.

Continuation and Climax

- A. And this, really, should not have come as much of a surprise for us. In so many ways, this is just a continuation and climaxing of what we've seen so much of already in Jesus' earthly life and ministry. It makes sense that this is how things should go here near the end of it when we consider all that's come before.
- B. Jesus' whole ministry, in many ways, has been this systematic dismantling of the misogynistic notion that man is somehow more important, more intelligent, more significant, more essential, more loved and valued by God. Nope. If anything it's the opposite that comes into view.
1. I mean look at these guys. Did you notice? They've looked foolish through this whole thing. "I will never fall away" and they all agree . . . and then they all fall away.
 2. And the women are still there around the cross. They're the ones who are increasingly foregrounded near the end. You remember how Paul sums up the gospel in [1 Cor. 15: "3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . ." \(vv. 3–4\)](#). He died, was buried, and was raised.
 - a. Well, I wonder if you realized, it's only these women who can say they stood with Jesus through it all. They're the only ones who can actually say they witnessed the death, burial, and resurrection. The other disciples fell back and away at one point or another.
 - i. And when the women run in here to testify to the risen Lord, well, there the men are making a joke of it.
- C. But the point here has not been to say that women are better than men so much as it is to say they are equal in dignity and value. ["God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" \(Gen. 1:27\)](#).
1. That's been lost. That's part of what Jesus has come to regain.
- D. And it's very interesting, you know, Luke's gospel, in particular, has long been understood as the one gospel that especially emphasizes this point.
1. For this, I'd love to just read you something. It's a bit long, but I love how the author here, Rebecca Mclaughlin, really sums up the whole sweep of Luke's gospel concerning this issue. It's quite profound and worth putting on your listening ears for. She's going to show us in a few paragraphs what Jesus has been up to with regard to women for so many chapters now. So let me just read it . . .

["The portrayal of women in the Gospels—particularly in Luke's Gospel—is stunningly countercultural. Luke constantly pairs men with women, and when he compares the two, it is almost always in the woman's favor. Before Jesus' birth, two people are visited by the angel Gabriel and told they are going to become parents. One is Zechariah, who becomes John the Baptist's father. The other is Jesus' mother, Mary. Both ask Gabriel how this can be. But while Zechariah is punished with months of](#)

dumbness for his unbelief, Mary is only commended. The prominent role of women in Luke continues as Mary and her cousin Elizabeth prophesy over Jesus in the womb, and as a prophet (Simeon) and a prophetess (Anna) prophesy over the infant Jesus.

The adult Jesus consistently weaves women into his preaching. In his first sermon, he enrages his audience with two Old Testament examples of God's love reaching beyond the Jews: one is a woman, the other is a man (Luke 4:25-27). In Luke 15, the female-oriented parable of the lost coin is nestled between the male-oriented parables of the lost sheep and the lost (or prodigal) son. In Luke 18, the female-oriented prayer parable of the persistent widow is paired with the male-oriented prayer parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. . . . In a male-dominated culture, his attention to women throughout his preaching is remarkable.

This male-and-female thread works its way through Luke's healing accounts. First, Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit (Luke 4:33-35). Then he heals Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39). In chapter 7, Jesus heals a centurion's servant and then raises a widow's son, out of compassion for the grieving mother. In chapter 8, Jesus heals a man with a demon, then a bleeding woman, and then a synagogue ruler's daughter. Jesus' last healing in Luke is of a woman with a disabling spirit. She praises God. When the male synagogue ruler objects, Jesus calls him a hypocrite and reminds him of the woman's status as a 'daughter of Abraham' (Luke 13:16-17).

Jesus' elevation of women as moral examples is yet more striking. In Luke 7, he is dining at Simon the Pharisee's house, when a 'sinful woman' (likely a prostitute) disrupts the party. She weeps on Jesus' feet, wipes them with her hair, and anoints him with ointment. Simon is appalled: surely if Jesus were a prophet, he would know this woman is utterly unworthy of touching him! But Jesus turns the contrast on its head and holds this woman up as an example to shame Simon. In cultural terms, Simon has every advantage. He is a man; she is a woman. He is religiously admired; she is despised. He's hosting a dinner party; she is a weeping, prostrate embarrassment. But according to Jesus, she surpasses Simon on every count (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus elevates another low-status woman as a moral example in Luke 21, when he commends the poor widow for her gift of two small copper coins. In Jesus' eyes, this offering exceeds the much larger gifts the rich are putting in the offering box (Luke 21:1-4).

Luke [also] emphasizes the women who followed Jesus . . . [see Luke 8:1-3 where we're not only given some of their names but we're also told that these women helped provide for Jesus and his ministry 'out of their means']. Like Jesus' male disciples, these women were in for the long haul (see Luke 23:49, 56). They were there at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the end. But can these women legitimately be called disciples?

Jesus answers that question for us in Luke 10 when we first meet two of Jesus' female friends: Mary and Martha. Martha is playing a traditionally female role, serving her guests, while her sister Mary is assuming a traditionally male role, sitting at Jesus' feet with the other disciples. Martha asks Jesus to correct this, to tell Mary to get up and help with the serving. But Jesus affirms Mary: 'Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:42).

Luke's final comparison surrounds Jesus' resurrection. In Luke 24, some of his female disciples visit the tomb to anoint his body. There, they encounter angels who announce the resurrection. The women report this to the apostles, who don't believe them. Peter runs to the tomb to check the facts. But even then, they are not convinced. . . .

Jesus' valuing of women is unmistakable. In a culture in which women were devalued and often exploited, it underscores their equal status before God and his desire for personal relationship with them" (Confronting Christianity, 136-38). **The marginalized are embraced!**

E. And this sort of thing carries on into the early church. One sociologist, Rodney Stark, estimates that perhaps two-thirds of the Christian community during the second century was made up of women.

1. This number is particularly striking when you consider that this was precisely the opposite of the broader Greco-Roman world at the time, where women only made up about one-third of the population (due to things like infanticide of baby girls and maternal deaths in childbirth).
- F. So, in other words: it was obvious to women, there is a place for them in Jesus, in the church. The resurrection had broken down those social/cultural barriers. The ground was level at the foot of the cross.
1. Men and women could come and find place together around it. They could find a home in Jesus and link arms together in ministry as we see Paul mention so frequently these women that he had partnered with in the gospel (cf. [Rom. 16:1-15](#) where he lists out and greets nine such women).

Implications for Our Faith, Community, and Mission

- A. It's amazing. And all this is rich with implications for us. We talk a lot here about our core values of Faith, Community, and Mission—as they flow out from our mission as a church.
1. And they really mark out three dimensions so critical to any local church: namely, our relationship with God, our relationship with one another in the church, and our relationship with the city and world outside. Faith, Community, and Mission.
- B. And I just want to take what we've seen here and draw out implications for these three values of ours.

Implications for Our Faith

- A. So let's take Faith first. What do we learn about our relationship with God here?
1. Well, listen, here's what we learn: if you feel like you are in the margins of this world, forgotten, undervalued, dehumanized—there's a place for you in Jesus' arms, in the economy of heaven. You are welcome here. The barrier has been broken in the gospel.
- B. Certainly, this is a direct message to our woman, you are not second-class citizens. You are not brought in and then set on the bench while the men do the important work. No! It was women who first witnessed and testified to the resurrection. And God did that on purpose. Let that sink in.
- C. But, you know, this is not just a message for women, in this limited sense, right? This is a message for anyone who's ever felt outside.
1. This is the kind of God we have. He loves breaking down those barriers, leaving the 99 and going after the 1. Going after you.
 - a. Jesus, in one sense, was as inside as it gets, right? With his Father, in glory, on the throne. And he leaves all that, to go outside, to be marginalized, to be hung up on a cross, slapped, shamed, devalued, dehumanized, why? To save you. To bring you in.

Implications for Our Community

- A. But what about Community? What do we learn about our relationship with each other. What should the church be like in view of these things?
1. Now, there's so much I'd like to say at this point, but I feel like I should at least bring out something concerning the relation between genders here at Mercy Hill.
- B. Listen, Jesus, the early church, they were attacked by the culture of their day for going too far with this idea of valuing women and things.
1. So in the early third century, Minucius Felix could mock the church for the way it seemed to be recruiting from "the dregs of the populace and credulous women with the inability natural to their sex" (Oct. 8.4). "These Christians, look at how they value and dignify women. It's embarrassing and a sign of the weakness and foolishness of their cause."
 - a. The modern culture for the early church was offended by how far Christians would go in bringing women in.
- C. But now, isn't it true, that our modern culture today is still offended by the church, but for precisely the opposite reason: it's that we're going too far, but that, according to their estimation, we're not going far enough.
1. You see, we're a complementarian church, which means that, while we believe with all of our hearts that men and women are inherently and essentially equal in dignity and value before God as being made together in his image, we also believe from the Scriptures that God has divided certain roles and functions along the lines of gender.
 - a. And this plays out in the home and in the church, in marriage and in ministry.
 - i. So Paul says that husbands are the head of their wives . . .
 - ii. . . . and that men alone can be elders in the church.
- D. And this, of course, hits our modern culture like fingernails down a chalkboard. Some of your ears just started bleeding, right? And the culture attacks us on this point and calls us misogynistic and all of these things.
1. But that's simply not the case at all. We're merely following Jesus. And I think we've already made clear the case that he's one of history's most powerful proponents of women's value and dignity and rights.
 - a. But you see Jesus isn't looking to obliterate male authority in the home and church as our modern secular culture would have it (indeed, they are not only interested in obliterating male authority but gender itself, which is now this fluid thing). No, he's looking to redeem it.

- i. There's a part of God's design whereby the genders are to work together in different, complementary ways, to showcase the glory of God. And Jesus has come to bring us back to that.

- E. This is why, tucked within our text, there's this hint towards these things, I wonder if you noticed it.
 - 1. In the opening verses, as I've said, the women are highlighted as being the first witnesses and testifiers of the resurrection and yet who does Luke say they first go and testify to? Well, we see it there in v. 9: "[A]nd returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven"
 - a. Now, who are they? The apostles, men.
 - b. Appointed by who? Jesus ([Luke 6:12-16](#)).
 - c. To do what? Lead in the church.
 - i. In other words, Jesus doesn't say: "Women, you get it, let's leave these idiot men, behind."
 - ii. He doesn't say: "Women, you get it, let's make you apostles as well."
 - iii. No he says: "Women, you get it, now let's go help those ridiculous guys I appointed to lead. You're needed desperately in this mission, but I've still called them to head it up."

- F. Do you see this? He values and elevates women at the very same time as he upholds male authority in the church and things.
 - 1. That's so important. Because our culture has no idea how the two ideas could hold together. But in Jesus they do.
 - a. Our culture looks at this here and says: "Oh Jesus, you were almost enlightened, you almost went all the way and then you chickened out and kept men in a place of authority in the church."
 - b. But read the gospels. Jesus cowers before no one. He capitulates to no passing zeitgeist. What he does he does on purpose and for good reason. He didn't obliterate male authority here because he didn't mean to.

- G. He didn't mean to obliterate it, he meant to redeem it, reform it, recontextualize it, balance it out appropriately.
 - 1. Men are still charged by God to lead in the home and in the church but now we see clearly . . .
 - a. On the one hand, this in no way means that women are disposable, second-class, Junior Varsity;
 - b. and on the other hand, it certainly does mean that now men, though they are called to lead in the home and the church, when they do lead they must do so with the heart and in the manner of Jesus.

- H. Male authority still exists as designed by God from the start, but now it's been corrected and conditioned by the cross. And that's the essential point!
1. So Jesus says to these apostles: “⁴² You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45).
 - a. It's crazy. The “Son of Man” here is a reference to that magnificent figure in Daniel 7 who has all dominion and power and authority. And yet how does Jesus say he's going to wield it? In sacrificial love.
 2. In a similar manner, Paul says to husbands: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . ” (Eph. 5:25).
 - a. Oh, it's an easy verse to memorize, and we feel all warm-hearted when we consider it. But do we really hear what he's saying? Husbands, get on the cross for your brides.
- I. When a dude uses the Scriptures in the home or in the church to justify his domination of women, all it says is that that guy doesn't get the gospel. It hasn't penetrated you, affected you, transformed you like it should. When it does, this kind of behavior is utterly incompatible.
1. Authority, leadership, according to Jesus, it means you're the first to die. We think it means I'm first on the throne, what it really means is I'm first on the cross.
 - a. Jesus doesn't hand men a king's scepter. He hands them a servant's towel. This isn't a fast-track to the seat of honor, brothers. It's a fast-track to the floor.
- J. Husbands: die!; apostles, elders: die! . . . in love for those under your care (nearly all the apostles did go on to literally die for the sake of the church!). When you lead, lead from down low! That's the call.
1. That's what I want in this community. Don't ever act like men are more important, more intelligent, more essential, or something. Shame on us if that's the vibe we give off. Let's honor and lift up and die for our ladies.

Implications for Our Mission

- A. Here all I want to say is: God's come after us, when we were in the margins, and he brought us in. So let's go do the same! Let's go break barriers down in Jesus' name and embrace the outsider. Let's be a church that goes out to the highways and hedges of the city and care for those the world might be prone to neglect or forget. Let's bring them good news of this great God who's ready to embrace them in Jesus.
- B. For example, Joey Wang: “When I walk into a room, my eyes naturally gravitate towards those in the margins, the ones no one else is talking to or engaging. And I go and talk with them.”