

Make It Make Sense

Luke 23:50-24:12

Introduction

Make It Make Sense: You ever look at something, and you think, “Make it make sense.”

- Kids will say they’re starving, take two bites of their lunch, say they’re full, then ask for a snack 12 minutes later.
- The grocery store has 36 lanes, but only 1 is open.
- That friend who is chronically online, posting on Instagram 57 times a day and sending you memes every 30 seconds until you ask a question, and then it’s crickets.
- Do you know one of the ways they prevent forest fires? Setting the forest on fire. They actually set a *controlled burn*, a small fire, to prevent a larger fire. It seems counterintuitive and destructive, but the fire that looks like it’s ruining everything is actually the thing that saves it.

Centrality of the Resurrection: When you get to the end of Luke 23, in many ways, things don’t make sense for the disciples.

- They have walked with Jesus for years, watching him heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They understand him to be chosen by God to bring about his kingdom... yet he has been convicted in a sham trial and executed as a criminal.
 - They are scared,¹ confused,² and are struggling to believe what they’re hearing.³
 - What they thought they knew about Jesus, what they hoped he would do, doesn’t make sense anymore.
- How did the earliest Christians come to believe, against all odds and all expectations, that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead?⁴
 - Even a renowned critic of Christianity, Bart Ehrman, agrees with this historical fact: “It is indisputable that... the followers of Jesus came to think... he had been raised from the dead, and something had to have happened to make them think so.”⁵
 - Other would-be messiahs had been executed, and their movements died with them.
 - What is powerful enough to make them believe in the resurrection, go from scared and hiding to bold and proclaiming?
 - The resurrection of Jesus is not a crutch for the weak-minded but the power we all need to have true life, life that’s worth living. It is historically, logically, and theologically true.

The reality of Jesus’ resurrection is the only thing that makes sense of our faith.

¹ Lk 24:37

² Lk 24:4

³ Lk 24:11

⁴ HT Kruger, cf. Wright, *Resurrection*, 562.

⁵ Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 182-3.

⁵⁰ 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, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. 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.

1. Jesus is Truly Dead and Buried (vv. 50-56)

⁵⁰ 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, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Historical Credibility: ⁵⁰ 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, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

- Another specific and unique character shows up in the story: Joseph of Arimathea.
 - There is undeniable historical credibility with the people and places of the story of Jesus (e.g., Joseph, Herod, Pilate, the women in the story, etc.). This isn't mythology, it's history.
 - Luke recorded his gospel 25 (conservative) to 50 (skeptical) years after these events. The people who witnessed the crucifixion and the resurrected Jesus would've been alive. You could go visit them and talk to them.

- That's like me standing up here and telling you something that happened in the 1980s or 90s. You don't have to take my word for it, you can go ask the people involved.
- A shockingly small number of things are mentioned in *all* four Gospel accounts, but Joseph is.⁶
 - Matthew describes him as wealthy.⁷
 - Mark explains that he is a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council that condemned Jesus.⁸
 - John explains he's a secret disciple, a follower of Jesus who feared being publicly identified.⁹
- Luke describes him as good and righteous¹⁰ and a man who was looking for the kingdom of God.
 - Joseph recognized Jesus as the king because he was seeking the kingdom.
 - Herod was too preoccupied with preserving his power.
 - Pilate was too concerned with protecting his position.
 - Jewish leaders were too committed to maintaining their authority.
 - If we're not careful, we'll miss the true king because we're building our own kingdom.

The Burial and the Body: ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the **body** of Jesus. ⁵³ 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. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the **tomb** and how his **body** was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

- **The Burial:** The burial of Jesus was not a foregone conclusion. Because crucifixion was a humiliating execution of criminals and enemies of the state, the dead were usually *barred* from a proper burial. They would be left to be scavenged by animals.
 - It was a daring moment for Joseph of Arimathea to step up and ask for his body. Joseph was a real person with a prominent position and a strong incentive *not* to go public about his connection to Jesus, yet he did it anyway.
 - **Who will step up and ask?** We see disciples like Peter and others make *bold declarations*, but this is a moment to step up and act. Less talk and more action.
- **The Body:** The body language makes it clear that Jesus was physically dead. Luke wants you to see this clearly: Jesus is not mostly dead, He is fully dead and buried.
 - The body was physically prepared (wrapped in a linen shroud), the women saw the body laid in the tomb, and planned to bring oils and spices to prevent the stench of decomposition (cf. Jn 11:39 KJV: "by this time he stinketh").

⁶ E.g., Feeding of the 5,000, John the Baptist, Triumphal Entry, Last Supper, Pilate, Crucifixion, Empty Tomb, etc.

⁷ Matt 27:57

⁸ Mk 15:43

⁹ Jn 19:38

¹⁰ δίκαιος (the same word used by centurion of Jesus)

- The spiritual reality of the resurrection must never diminish its physical reality.¹¹
- There is no doubt that Jesus is truly dead and buried.

Feel it: Sit with the disciples in this moment: shocked and defeated. The story appears over. It's time to pick up the pieces and move on. *Then something happens that changes everything.*

2. The Tomb is Unexpectedly Empty (vv. 1-6a)

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.

Surprise, Surprise: ¹ But on the first day of the week,¹² 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.

- These women who had come with spices and ointments for the body, **find**¹³ what they don't expect (the stone rolled away from the tomb), and **don't find** what they expect (the body of the Lord Jesus).
 - They are not expecting a resurrection; they are *expecting* a corpse. They arrive, prepared for death, but find the stone *has been* rolled away.¹⁴
 - They expect a stone blocking the tomb and a body inside. The stone is moved, and the body is missing.
- The main thing (the plain thing), all the records agree: the tomb is empty.¹⁵

Why So Shocked: They are standing there in a state of confusion (perplexed). At this point, they don't know *what* happened. They're not yet thinking 'resurrection', they're thinking 'something is wrong.'

Angelic Answer: Heaven shows up to clear the confusion. They receive clarity in an undeniable way: two angels appear.

- We know they're angels from the other Gospels,¹⁶ from their description later in the chapter,¹⁷ from similar descriptions of angels elsewhere,¹⁸ and from the response of the women: they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground.

¹¹ *Contra* Gnosticism, Liberalism, etc.

¹² In Luke 24:1, "Sabbath" is plural (τῶν σαββάτων), unlike the singular in 23:54, 56 (σάββατον). The plural can denote the week, reflecting Jewish reckoning from Sabbath to Sabbath; thus "the first day of the week" (lit. "first of the Sabbaths") refers to Sunday.

¹³ εὑροῦ

¹⁴ Passive ἀποκεκυλισμένον

¹⁵ All four Gospels

¹⁶ Jn 20:12

¹⁷ Lk 24:23

¹⁸ Acts 1:10, Gen 18:2, 19:1, Matt 28:2-3

- We often see people respond with fear in the presence of angels (e.g., Zechariah, Mary, Shepherds, etc.).¹⁹

What're You Looking For?: The men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? This is *the* clarifying question: Why do you seek the living among the dead?"²⁰

- They are looking in the wrong place. They assume a dead messiah would be in the tomb.
- They searched for him in a tomb because they couldn't imagine a resurrection, despite being told it was coming.
 - They might have loved his demeanor and counsel, rejoiced at his healings, and been inspired by his teachings, but couldn't believe in a supernatural resurrection.
 - They were confused as to who Jesus *really* was and what he *really* came to do.
 - This question is a loving rebuke. A direct but important diagnostic question.
- How many today are no different? We think we're modern and they're primitive, but we struggle to believe the resurrection. That God really took on flesh, died in our place, and defeated sin and death.
 - It has always been impossible to believe Jesus rose from the dead, "but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

It Happened: ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. This is the truth. His body is not merely missing, it is raised. He is not simply absent; he is alive.

- Every person must ask, "What if it's true?"
 - Look at all the sermons in Acts (e.g., Peter, Paul, etc.). The resurrection isn't a side note, it's the proof that demands a response.
 - The tomb is empty. The disciples are transformed. The witnesses agree.
 - This is not written as a myth (like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*). The facts are in.
 - This isn't blind faith; this is the kind of faith that does justice to the facts. The kind of *faith* that makes sense of what we see.
 - I think many of the people who dismiss the resurrection are *ignoring* the facts. They are not thinking; they are closing their eyes to the evidence.
- What if it's all true? What if God really did this? If it's true, then everything they thought didn't make sense suddenly starts to.

3. Now It All Makes Sense (vv. 6b-12)

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

¹⁹ People often fall to the ground as well (e.g., Dan 8:17, 10:9, 10:12, Judg 13:20, Rev 1:17, 22:8-9).

²⁰ Τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν

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.

Reminded to Remember: 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,

- It's like they forgot until the angels reminded them (“oh yeah, he *did* say that”).
- Remember? How can you forget?
 - “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Lk 9:22)
 - And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (Lk 18:31-33).

Must: 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.”

- Some people reject the *miracle* of the resurrection, and some people misunderstand the meaning.²¹
 - Some people thought he should die because he was a rebel or a criminal, but those who knew his innocence missed that he **must** die as part of God's plan.
 - Jesus' death is not just a morality tale about injustice or an example of endurance, but God's plan to provide a substitutionary sacrifice.
 - God planned to die. Jesus chose to die. He's not merely an example of suffering or a martyr, but a willing substitute.
- This is at the heart of the gospel: Jesus in my place. He takes the punishment I owe, pays the debt I can't pay, and dies the death I deserve to die. And through it, he gives me the right to be a child of God (Jn 1:12). He gives me life and resurrection.
 - Is there somebody here tonight, and you believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead? And in saying that, you believe that the reason that God raised Jesus from the dead was because God was accepting the sacrifice for sin that Jesus had offered. You believe he was a necessary sacrifice, not just for people (generic) but for you. **Then you can be saved.**

Had to Tell: 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,

²¹ HT Keller

- These women just *had* to tell. When you realize the resurrection, it springs you into action. It's a news too great to keep quiet about (e.g., engagement, pregnancy, new job, band, etc.).

Doubting Eleven: ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

- Thomas isn't the only doubter (😄). "Not everyone arrives as quickly as others do at the place of bold discipleship" (e.g., Joseph vs. these disciples).
- Too good to be true.
 - In 2019, a woman named Patricia Chandler got a call telling her she had won \$1 million from a North Carolina second-chance drawing. Her response? She hung up. She assumed it was a scam. The lottery had to call her back and convince her it was real. It was too good to be true.
 - How many people have "hung up" on the good news of the gospel because it seems "too good to be true"?

See for Yourself: 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.

- Peter rose²² and ran (urgency!).²³ The news of the resurrection requires *movement*.
 - I'm not asking you to simply take my word for it, but to investigate it yourself.
 - See for yourself and be amazed. It's not enough to be inspired, you need to personally be amazed, sense presence.²⁴
- If Jesus rose from the dead, you have to accept everything he said. If he didn't rise, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.²⁵
 - If Christ hasn't been raised, then your faith is futile.²⁶
 - If he hasn't defeated sin and death, then you are still "dead in your trespasses" (Eph 2:1) and a "slave to sin" (Rom 5:6).
 - This is why Jesus can't be just a religious teacher or moral example; if that's all he is, then you are powerless, you are stuck in your sin forever, you can't change.
 - Without the gospel, we are only left to our human strength (e.g., workout forever, still die). But with the gospel, we have the power of the risen Lord.
 - Without the resurrection, our faith is meaningless, Christ is powerless, and our behavior doesn't matter. But since the resurrection is real, our faith is essential, Christ is sovereign over everything, and our lives are transformed.
 - When I say the resurrection is "essential," I mean it is the essence of our faith. Without it, we don't have faith (e.g., flour out of bread; taking the water out of a pool).

²² ἀναστὰς (cf. to Jesus v. 7 ἀναστῆναι)

²³ Irregular verb run ἔδραμεν from τρέχω

²⁴ θαυμάζων (Luke 1:21; 1:63; 2:18; 2:33; 4:22; 7:9; 8:25; 11:14; 20:26; 24:12)

²⁵ HT Keller

²⁶ 1 Cor 15

- Without the resurrection, we have no Christian faith, no future hope, and no present power.
- If the resurrection is real (and in fact it is), and Jesus is alive (and he is), then the miraculous Savior who was raised from the dead can miraculously raise us from the dead.
- If true, we are redeemed from our sins. We can have the power of new life. We can know that the worst thing is not the last thing, and that, one day, the sad will come untrue.²⁷
- The resurrection is the only thing that makes sense of the evidence and answers the longing of our hearts.

Conclusion

The resurrection changes everything. Are you living like Jesus rose from the dead? What would it mean if it were actually true?

- Or, are you seeking the living among the dead?
- Are you looking for the life that only God can give among the dead things of this world?
- The question the angels ask is meant to show them they're looking in the wrong place.
- Have you been looking in the wrong place?
 - Morality? (be good enough)
 - False religion?
 - Human relationship? Family?
 - Success? Approval? Control?
- Stop looking for life among the dead and come to the one who died and is now alive.
 - He has risen, and that changes everything.

²⁷ Lk 24:21, 2 Cor 5:17, Is 11:6-9