

Guest Preacher - Mr Andrew Maciver (Elder North Tolsta)

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Preacher: Mr. Andrew Maciver

[0:00] If you turn back with me to chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke, we'll have a look at some of the sections that I read through there.

When I was a student, one of the books I was always on the bookstall in our Christian Union bookstalls was Who Moved the Stone by Frank Morrison.

And the book is still available today and it gets republished quite often, which is remarkable because the book was actually written in 1930.

Now, Frank Morrison started off, he set out, he didn't believe in God and he set out to write a book about the resurrection, trying to prove that the resurrection of Jesus had never happened, that it was a myth.

Now, the book that Frank Morrison set out to write, he never wrote because as he looked into the resurrection and he did his research on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, he actually came to believe that it was true.

[1:12] And so the book that he wrote, Who Moved the Stone, was actually proving that Jesus did actually rise from the dead.

And that book has been used amongst a lot of people who have read it in helping them to understand some of the background to the resurrection.

Now, there's still a lot of people out there, even within church circles, who still don't believe that the resurrection actually took place.

Even church leaders today, some of them believe that it's a total myth, that it actually happens. But the resurrection still, for us as Christians, still stands as one of the, really the foundation blocks of the Christian faith.

It's important for everything we do. It's important for our faith. It's important for our preaching. It's important for our mission in this world.

[2:12] And when we read through the gospel accounts about the resurrection, we see very much that Christ's resurrection really did change everything.

The disciples were transformed. When you look at the disciples before the crucifixion and the resurrection, and you look at them afterwards, they were completely transformed.

But the resurrection opened up a new era when the gospel message was preached throughout the known world, and of course continues even until today.

Now, the four gospel writers, they all give us an account of the resurrection. But of course, Luke, we read in Luke, Luke comes with the additional second volume, of course, the Acts of the Apostles.

Now, there is a little bit of overlap between what Luke writes here in chapter 24, and then what he goes on to write in Acts chapter 1, particularly from verses 1 to verse 11 of Acts chapter 1.

[3:24] And in Acts chapter 1, verse 3, he tells us that when Jesus rose, he actually spent 40 days with the disciples, which is quite a crucial period.

So what I want us to look at tonight is we're going to look at the resurrection and look at the background here in chapter 24 of Luke.

But we'll also think about what the resurrection means for us today. Now, I think there's a repeating word or a theme that runs through chapter 24, and that word is opened.

So what I'm hoping to do is we're going to look at this chapter under three headings. First one, verses 1 to 12, the tomb was opened.

Second, verses 36 to 47, their minds were opened. And then from verse 48 onwards to the end, I look at their mouths were opened.

[4:29] There are other references. If you read through it, you'll see that it talks about their hearts were opened, the scripture was opened. So there is this theme of opening, running through, which I want to focus on.

So let's look at the first one then, the tomb was opened. I read at the end of chapter 23 about Jesus' burial. Now, the sequence, of course, we're familiar with is that the crucifixion took place at the time of the Passover.

And Jesus was crucified on the Friday, as we know, the day of preparation before the Jewish Sabbath. So because the Jewish Sabbath started at sunset on the Friday night, the day before the Sabbath, then the body of Jesus had to be removed from the cross before sundown.

And this is where Joseph of Arimathea comes in. So he goes to Pilate and he asks Pilate for Jesus' body. And he takes the body, he prepares it for burial.

Now, I think it's John who tells us that with Joseph, Nicodemus also accompanied Joseph at this point. So they go away and they prepare the body for burial.

[5:52] And Joseph lays it in his own tomb, a tomb that nobody had previously been laying in.

And of course, they then, the big stone was rolled across the entrance to the tomb. Now, we also read that some of the women who had followed Jesus throughout his ministry years, they were also on the scene and they followed them to see where the body was going to be buried.

The women were wanting to anoint Jesus' body with spices. But by this time, because it was getting close to sundown, then they didn't have time to do that.

So they went home and they prepared the spices. But there was also from the Jews, there was concern that Jesus' body would be stolen from the tomb.

So they asked Pilate to provide soldiers for them, Roman soldiers, to guard the tomb as well. Now, can you think, can you imagine, you know, after all this has happened, Jesus is now buried in the tomb.

[7:11] Can you imagine what his disciples, his followers were going through at this point? And they've got the whole of the next day, the Sabbath, to think about everything that took place at Jesus' arrest, his crucifixion and everything.

And they must have spent the Sabbath day, the Jewish Sabbath day, thinking through what on earth has happened. They would be totally confused. They would be asking themselves, well, what about everything he taught us?

What about the miracles, the parables? What about the prophecies, the promises? They would have been thinking to themselves, it's all over now.

And the only thing they were probably thinking about is, where do we go from here? They were probably thinking about going back to their normal lives and going back to rebuild the lives that they had left three years previously to follow him.

But of course, we know that there was going to be a real shock in store for them. So as we read on into chapter 24, then we see that the first thing that happens on the day after the Sabbath, the women, they rise early, they go with the intention that they were going to do on the Friday, to go to the grave, to the tomb, and they were going to anoint Jesus' body with the spices.

[8:44] So they go to the tomb early on the Sunday morning. The women were led by Mary Magdalene. And when they get to the tomb, of course, they are totally puzzled because the soldiers were gone, the stone had been removed from the entrance, had been rolled away, and Jesus' body wasn't there.

So they stood in disbelief, probably thinking that somebody had definitely come along and taken the body and taken it away.

But then they see these two men dressed in white apparel, who turn out and say to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen.

So at this point, the disciples themselves were still probably away in the house that they were staying in in Jerusalem.

They were still probably hiding themselves away because they had all left Jesus when he was arrested. And probably thinking that, you know, that everything was over.

[10:00] Their master, he was tried as a criminal. He was executed and buried. And they would have been totally demoralized. Judas himself, Judas, of course, had betrayed their master.

Peter had denied him. And the rest of the disciples had run away and left him. They were under, of course, the impression that this Jesus was going to come.

He was going to be going to free Israel from Roman occupation. He was going to be more of a political messiah, not the spiritual messiah that maybe the...

Well, we see clearly now what happened. So they were all together. They were puzzled. They were confused. They were pretty much leaderless.

And then, all of a sudden, the women come back from the tomb to tell them the news that Jesus had actually risen.

[11:04] Of course, Matthew, I think, tells us as well that they actually did meet Jesus at this point. So Mary Magdalene was actually the first person to meet the risen Christ.

But Peter thought, well, the disciples completely, they didn't believe the women at all that this had happened.

But Peter thought that, well, I better go and check out for myself. And we know from the Gospel of John that John, well, he doesn't mention who it was, but it was obviously probably himself, also went with Peter to the tomb.

And they decided to have a look for themselves. So they went to the tomb. And, of course, just as the women had said that the tomb was opened and the tomb was empty, all they could see was that the grave clothes that Jesus' body had been wrapped in.

So now they were pretty much more confused than ever because they were wondering, well, has Jesus really risen?

[12:15] Has he come back to life? Now, at this point, just let me mention that people, I was talking earlier on about skeptics about the resurrection and people who accuse us of believing in a myth.

There's quite a number of theories that have been put forward for what happened. One theory was that the women actually went to the wrong tomb.

Well, if the women went to the wrong tomb, surely Peter and John wouldn't have made the same mistake as well. And then there's what's called the swoon theory.

The swoon theory says that Jesus didn't really die. Why? When they took him off the cross, he was in a coma. And when they laid him in the tomb, that he recovered from this coma.

But how on earth could he remove the stone himself? And then, of course, some people were saying, oh, somebody stole the body. Either the disciples or the Roman guards stole the body.

[13:19] And there was another theory that the disciples had imagined everything. They had imagined, they had a vision that this all happened and it wasn't really true.

So all these theories have been put forward by different people over years. But we know that none of them are true because Jesus did really rise from the grave, from the tomb.

So the obvious answer to all is the tomb was empty because Jesus has risen. And we know for a fact that there is just as much or more information, historical information, about Jesus having really existed.

There was a survey done in Britain just a few years ago. They asked people, do you believe Jesus was a real person? And 40% of the respondents said, no, they didn't believe he was real or they weren't sure.

But here we see that the great chapter on the resurrection is 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[14:34] Where Paul, the Corinthians were, some of them were disbelieving that the resurrection had really happened. And Paul there tells them in 1 Corinthians, starting at verse 3, he says, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, last of all, as one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

So we see there that here the Apostle Paul tells us at least 500 people more saw Jesus after he had risen.

And they were eyewitnesses to it all. So there's probably more information, we have more information about the reality of Jesus being a real person than we have of Julius Caesar being the emperor of Rome.

So before the resurrection, disciples were confused, they had deserted their Lord. But after the resurrection, they were dramatically changed.

[15:59] So what made the difference? So that brings us to the next part, which is, if you jump forward now to verse 36.

So this section I've called, their minds were opened. So Luke now continues.

I missed out the story about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but it is linked in a way, but it's quite a long reading, so I left that part out. But it does link in to the next part as well.

Because the two disciples on the road to Emmaus came back to tell the disciples about what they had experienced as well, having met the risen Lord.

So from verse 36 onwards to 47, Luke continues the story. And Jesus then appears to the disciples as they were meeting in this house they were in in Jerusalem.

[17:02] And he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. So this is a crucial bit. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

So Jesus suddenly appears to them, all of them, as they were gathered in this house in Jerusalem. And initially they're startled, they're frightened.

They thought they were seeing a spirit. But then Jesus tries to show them that he did have a real body. And he asks them to, he shows them his hands and his feet.

And he asks them to touch his hand. And he asks them for something to eat, to show that he was actually a real, he had a real body. He wasn't just a spirit, which initially they had thought.

Now, this section, he spent a bit of time with them here. But if you were to read this part of Luke only, you'd probably get the impression that the Lord rose and then he was ascended very quickly afterwards.

[18:15] But there is an obvious break between verse 43 and 44. And we know from other gospels that Jesus, for example, he went to Galilee as well.

So, and of course, we have the version in 1 Acts 1, verse 3, where Luke tells us that Jesus spent 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension, and mostly spending it with, or coming to meet, periodically meet with his disciples and teaching them.

Now, when Jesus met, that he would meet them over this 40-day period. And this is when he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

What does Jesus do? Well, he explains to them the Old Testament. He says, the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

So, the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms really sums up the whole of the Old Testament. And Jesus is opening that understanding to help them understand that the whole of the Old Testament was pointing towards him.

[19:28] And the message that he brought them is quite important because you see from verse 46, 47, he says, His message was that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

So, this is the message that he was teaching them about the kingdom of God. He was opening that understanding to help them understand all about himself from the scripture of the Old Testament.

So, then he tells them as well that they were going to be his witnesses. And he was going to send the promise of his father to them after he left them, the Holy Spirit.

But then he tells them to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes. So, we told in verse 49 that he told them to wait.

And they did wait. So, they waited 10 days. It was 10 days between Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

[20:45] Now, the Holy Spirit came on day 50, which was Pentecost. The word Pentecost is a Greek word for 50th.

And it was celebrated 50 days after the Passover on the 50th day. Now, in the Old Testament, the Pentecost festival was traditionally like a harvest festival celebration.

But later in Jewish tradition, it was also used to commemorate the giving of the law, the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai as well.

But I don't think it's an exaggeration for us to say that these 40 days that Jesus spent with the disciples were probably one of the most significant turning points in world history.

Because I think during these 40 days, what Jesus taught them changed the world, changed the world forever. So, what did he actually teach them?

[21 : 50] Well, I think there's five things that really clearly come out. First of all, they met the risen Christ. They were convinced that Christ had risen.

He taught them from the scripture of the Old Testament. So, they started to really understand. Remember, Jesus had been with them for three years and he did teach them.

But they didn't quite grasp everything until he taught them during these 40 days. He also, thirdly, told them they were going to be his witnesses.

And then they saw him ascend to heaven before their very eyes. And then finally, of course, he promised them that he would send the Holy Spirit to them.

So, what exactly does the resurrection mean for us as Christians today? Well, three things, three main things. Firstly, Jesus' resurrection means that his sacrifice for sin on the cross was complete and acceptable to God the Father.

[22 : 56] Secondly, the resurrection means that Jesus will reign eternally. He's now ascended to the right hand of the Father. He will reign eternally.

And thirdly, Jesus' resurrection means that all who follow him and believe in him will one day also rise with him in the same way.

So, that brings us now to my third point, which is their mouths will be opened. Now, I'm looking here into the future.

Their mouths will be opened. Now, towards the end of the reading, verse 48 onwards, what I want to look at now is what happened next.

Basically, what happened next. What Jesus taught them changed them forever. It really dramatically changed them forever.

[23 : 56] Why did this happen? Well, the disciples, as I mentioned, they finally got it. They finally understood what the whole crucifixion, resurrection was about.

They understood the way of salvation. They were very clear about the kingdom of God, what the kingdom of God was going to be. And they were very clear that they were now going to be his witnesses.

They were the ones who were going out there to preach the gospel. And once the Savior ascended, the Holy Spirit came in power. So, Christ's resurrection transformed his followers, their attitude to death, and it transformed their hope.

The resurrection was, to me, one of the most important turning points in history. John Stott, the late Anglican minister, said, Christianity is, in its very essence, a resurrection religion.

The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed. Now, these early Christians, they wanted the world to know what had happened.

[25 : 15] And this is what I'm saying. Their mouths were opened. Their mouths were opened. They spoke up. They started to speak up about this gospel. And the gospel message, of course, they were preaching, clearly showed that the cross and the resurrection were really the heart, the heart of the saving work of Christ.

The resurrection formed the core of the apostles' preaching. Now, in the book of Acts, you know, in the book of Acts, there's approximately about 11 major sermons that the different, well, Peter, mostly Peter and Paul, but Stephen as well, preached.

And the resurrection was the central, one of the central themes in the preaching. So that what we find here in Luke's gospel, in these verses in 44 to 47, really sums up, it's like a summary of what these sermons in the book of Acts were based on.

That was what the outline of each of the sermons was really based on. Jesus fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the promised Messiah. The resurrection was central to the preaching. Repentance and faith are required. The hearers are summoned to turn to God. We see forgiveness and live differently. And salvation is by grace alone and for all.

[26 : 52] For Jews, for Gentiles, they are all saved in the same way, on the same basis through faith in the Lord Jesus. So their message was very much, if you look through the book of Acts, these words are defined in Luke 24.

Very similar themes to what these later sermons were based on.

Now, I mentioned 1 Corinthians 15. If you get a chance sometime to read through 1 Corinthians 15, it's a long chapter, but it's really Paul's argument to the Corinthians.

Some of the Corinthians were disbelieving that the resurrection had happened and that they would be resurrected themselves. So Paul writes this very long part at the end of his 1 Corinthians book to

them, trying to come around.

This is what he said. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, some of you who didn't believe the resurrection. He said, If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

[28:11] So have a look at that chapter sometime. It really gives us such a comprehensive overview of the resurrection. So what is our support for saying that all this happened, that Jesus rose from the tomb?

Well, everything changed after this. If you think about the changes that came after Christ rose, for example, it was the start of the Christian church.

This is when the church started, obviously at the beginning of Acts. There was a new day for worship that the Christians worshipped on the first day of the week, the day that Christ rose from the dead.

And then, of course, we have all the evidence from the New Testament. We have the four Gospels. We have the letters of Paul, Peter, and John, and others to convince.

So we have so much more evidence now, so much more evidence for the resurrection in front of us. And when you think of it, you know, the book of Acts itself, the book of Acts covers a period of about 30 years.

[29:20] And within 30 years, within 30 years of Christ's resurrection, the Gospel had gone right across the whole of the Mediterranean region. It had gone from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, into North Africa, into Asia, which is more than Turkey, Greece, and Rome.

So within a 30-year period, the whole of the known world at the time was pretty much impacted by the Gospel. And then, of course, the Gospel didn't stop in the book of Acts.

Of course, it continued and continued being preached. It reached ourselves. But sometimes, you know, we can become a little bit discouraged. And I think maybe in Lewis and maybe in the UK at the moment, we are a little bit discouraged when we see our numbers are declining.

We're not seeing a lot of conversions taking place in many places. But if you think of it globally, then there's a completely different picture.

Because at the moment, the population of the world has gone past about 8 billion people. Well, we think there's probably in the region of over 2 billion who would call themselves Christian.

[30:42] But that takes in everybody who Orthodox, Roman, Catholic, Evangelicals. We think there's probably in the region of 600 million to 900 million Evangelical Christians in the world.

Which I was working, doing some calculations the other day, and I thought probably around, let's say 10% of the world is Evangelical Christian. But although we're seeing our numbers declining in Europe and in North America, then of course there's real growth in other parts of the world like Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Probably the fastest growing countries in the world are Nigeria, Brazil, and China. Nigeria has millions and millions of Christians.

Brazil, I read the other day, Brazil now has 25% of the population are Evangelical Christians. Now, both Nigeria and Brazil, maybe there is a proportion who are into prosperity gospel, health and wealth gospel.

But they would still classify themselves as Evangelical, I suppose, in a way. But the real big growth has taken place in China. Now, before I moved back to Lu, I used to live in Edinburgh.

[32:03] I was a university lecturer. I used to spend a lot of time teaching in China. And I was primarily teaching in Shanghai. But I used to, on Sunday morning, I would wander down to the Chinese church just along from where I was staying.

Every Sunday morning, that church was completely packed out. If you would go to any church in Shanghai or other cities, they would be packed out. Now, if you think about what happened in China, 100 years of missionary work up to 1949, when Chamber of Mao came to power, resulted, they reckon, there was about 800,000 Christians in China in 1949 when the communists came to power.

And the communists, of course, started to clamp down on the church. And the worst period for the church was during what's called the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 76.

The communists closed down all the churches. They confiscated Bibles. Christians were persecuted. And many Christians were actually killed during this period. Then when Mao died in 76, Deng Xiaoping came to power.

And things started to change. Suddenly, the churches started to reopen again. So now, where are we? We've reached a point now, 2026.

[33:24] There's an estimated 100 million Christians in China today. And most of them would be pretty sound evangelicals. And what's happening in China is that the communist government are still clamping down on them.

But what's happened in China is people turn their back on the atheistic communist doctrine that the Mao Zedong and all the others were putting forward.

And they believed, they came to believe in the resurrection, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. They turned to Christ because they didn't find any answers in the communist doctrines that they were being encouraged to believe.

So we should be encouraged. Maybe we're not encouraged by what's happening in our own land and our own areas, but we should be encouraged by what's happening in other parts of the world. So let me try and just draw this to our conclusion now. So the resurrection of Jesus challenges each one of us to believe. Jesus rose from the tomb.

[34:34] He ascended into heaven. And now he's taken his place in glory. But he also said that he will, one day he will return and he will judge the world.

So that's why it's important for me, for you, for each one of us to believe in the resurrection and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He challenges each one of us to believe in him and to trust in him. Now we can't just sit on the fence. We can't just say, oh, I'm not sure.

We have to make a decision, decide either way. We can either believe, yes, I believe, I think the resurrection did really happen and Christ is the saviour.

Or else we don't believe, we turn away and we reject a teaching. But it's not evident, it's not evident for the resurrection that draws us to Christ.

[35:34] It's the offer of life that he gives us. He calls us to believe in himself and to submit to him as saviour and Lord.

And with this, I finish. I'm just quoting what Jesus said himself. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? So God bless, may God bless this word to us. Let me just say a word of prayer.

Lord, we do give thanks. We thank you for our Lord Jesus. We thank you for the death that he faced on our behalf and the fact that he rose again from the dead.

And we now know that he's ascended. He sits at the right hand of the Father. He intercedes for us. He mediates for us. We thank you, Lord, for the atoning work on the cross and the resurrection.

[36:38] We can trust him. We know that we need to trust him. We know that we are sinners. Each one of us are sinners who need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ.

So thank you, Lord, for his death on the cross on our behalf. We thank you for his resurrection. And we pray that you would encourage each one of us by looking to Jesus.

Help us to look to him each day. May every decision we make every day, every plan we make, may it be based on our union with him and that we would always look to follow him wholeheartedly each and every day.

So we give you the praise and the glory now and we thank you, Lord, for Jesus and for what he has done for us. We ask this in his name.

Amen. So we're going to finish our service. We're going to sing in the psalm we had, which is Psalm 16 in the Psalter.

[37:45] Psalm 16, page 216 again. And we're going to sing the last part of the psalm from verse 7 down to verse 11.

So verse 7, I bless the Lord because he does by counsel me conduct and in the seasons of the night my reigns do me instruct.

So we'll sing these verses down to the end of the psalm to God's praise. I bless the Lord because he does by counsel me conduct and in the seasons of the night my reigns to me is tried.

before me still the Lord I said with it is so that he doth ever stand at my right hand I shall not let me because of this my heart is glad and joy shall be expressed in by my glory and my flesh in confidence shall rest because my soul in grave to dwell!

shall not be there by thee nor will thou give thine holy one the roth shall to see!

[40 : 38] thou wilt be the path of life of joy there is to store before thy face at thy right hand our pleasures ever more can I just leave you with this thought this is from 1 Corinthians 15 as well verses 20 to 22 Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep for as by a man came death by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead for as in Adam all die so also in

Christ shall all be made alive God bless you all