

LESSON TWELVE: LET'S FACE IT

Let's face it. We all have a terminal disease. It's called sin. The prognosis is death. We may not know the method death will come or the time, but rest assured, we will all die. That is why life is so precious to us. We have been advised to live every day as if it were our last. Fortunately, death is not the end for us. Even though we rebel against God with our continued sinning, God is not willing to leave us alone. He sent Jesus into the world to be our Savior and Lord. Jesus sends His Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps us in faith in God. That is how God has prepared us for a life that will last forever. That is another fact that we must face.

PRAY: Father in Heaven, You have made us and we are Yours. Thank You for directing Your love toward us through Jesus. Do not let the light of faith in our hearts ever go out. Rather, use that light to shed the truth of Your love in our sin-darkened world. Empower and equip us to seek Your face always. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: "The only essential difference that I can tell between Christians and non-Christians is not necessarily morality, it's that Christians have acknowledged that we're sinners and we can't make it on our own. We're failures and will continue to fail. And the church in the year 3000 will be just as full of problems as the church in the year 2000, as it was in the year 1000. No other institutions that I know of recognize that. Governments don't, a lot of other religions don't. But that's the baseline of Christianity. If we deny that, and try to put on a good face, then we fall into the trap of the original Pharisees of just trying to make ourselves look good and even make God look good. But God didn't seem all that concerned with it. He became sin for us, as Paul said."

—Philip Yancey, quoted by Doug Duncan, Thoughtful Evangelical: Philip Yancey Interview, *The Door*, May-June, 11.

BIBLE BASE: Ask a volunteer to read John 20:1-18. Ask the other participants to follow along in their own Bibles.

DISCUSS: (The following questions are for discussion. The answers are to help the leader guide the discussion. Participants may fill in the answers in the space provided.)

1. Why doesn't John tell us only about Mary Magdalene and not the other women?

John is an eyewitness, and he intends only to talk about what he saw and heard. He reports only what Mary Magdalene said. John accurately reports in verse two that Mary said, "we do not know where they have laid Him." Thus, John is aware that there was more than one woman at the tomb early in the morning.

2. Why did Mary report that the stone was already taken away from the mouth of the tomb?

The stone was a source of concern for the women. The stone was a solid piece carved in the shape of a wheel. It was rolled back and forth in a groove in front of the tomb to give people access. Matthew tells us that an angel removed the stone and sat on it. It would appear that the stone was thrown away from the tomb with some force for the angel to be sitting on it.

3. What did Mary think had happened to Jesus' body?

She thought the body had been stolen, probably by the very people who hated Him enough to kill Him. At this point it did not occur to her that Jesus was alive. She and the other women were focused only on performing the final preparations needed for a dead body.

4. Why did Peter and John run to the tomb?

They probably met the other women after they started for the tomb after speaking with Mary. It is possible that they thought what Mary said was nonsense. Then, after they heard the same story, they ran the rest of the way to see for themselves.

5. When Peter and John got to the tomb, what did they see?

They saw the linen strips that were carefully wrapped around Jesus' limbs and torso lying on the rock shelf still in the shape of His body. But His body was no longer in the wrappings. The wrappings were undisturbed as Jesus' body, albeit a glorified body, passed miraculously through the wrappings. Moreover, they also saw the head cloth rolled up separately next to the other wrappings. The empty wrappings were the empirical evidence that Jesus was alive. With that same glorified body Jesus passed through the solid rock walls of the tomb before the angel threw the stone away.

6. Why did Mary not recognize Jesus when He appeared to her?

There are several reasons. First, Mary was consumed in grief. Her statement to the angels indicates that she still thought His body had been stolen. Second, her grief even caused her not to recognize the angels. It is not reported that she was afraid. Moreover, the encounter was brief. When Jesus appeared, the angels would somehow have acknowledged Jesus' presence. That probably caused Mary to turn around. Third, Jesus had a glorified body. We cannot describe the change, but it seems the face Mary saw was somewhat different or altered.

7. After the encounter with Jesus, how had Mary changed?

She was filled with joy over the objective truth that Jesus was alive. She hurried back to the disciples once again, this time announcing that she had seen and spoken with the Lord.

CHALLENGE: Talk about what your group can do to communicate the objective truth of the resurrection in this post-modern age that denies there is any objective truth.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: Two millennia [after the birth of Christ], two billion people call themselves Christians. It is the world's largest religion, and in more than 20,000 sects and denominations, it offers an astonishing variety of ways to worship. Since the beginning, Christianity has been outlawed, persecuted, split, split again, warred against and—in the face of scientific advance—declared obsolete. But it has reshaped itself and mended itself, and even at the end of the 20th century, a century that has threatened Christianity in new and unpredictable ways, it lives. “What is Christianity's greatest accomplishment in our century?” asks Peter Gomes, preacher to Harvard University. “It has survived.”

—Robert Sullivan, 2000 years of Christianity, *Life*, December, 1999, 53.

Yes, Christianity has survived because of the objective truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Face the facts. Because Jesus lives, all those who believe in Him will also live, now and forever. Times may change, but neither God nor His plan of salvation will ever change.

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Jesus, we cannot begin to thank You enough for our forgiveness and salvation. You felt the pain of Your Father's wrath over the evil we are and have done. You died for us. Now You live so that we might have life also. Only because of Your forgiveness are we able to seek Your face. Preserve, O Lord, our faith in You so that we can live with You. In Your Name we pray, O Lord. Amen.