

## INTRODUCTION

Before we know it, spring is here. There will be stormy weather, lawn mowing and allergy. But to some sports fans, spring means Sweet Sixteen and Cinderella. No, I am not talking about fairy tales. I am referring to the college basketball tournament that takes place every year in March. People called it March Madness. Let me explain a little bit about the format of the event. For those who are following the games you can day-dream for a few minutes. Every year 64 men's and women's college teams will be selected for the competition. The 64 teams will be assigned to one of the four regions. The 16 teams in each region will then be ranked from the first to the sixteenth seeds. In the first round, the top seed will play against the sixteenth seed, the second seed versus the fifteenth seed, and so on. If you win, you will advance to the next round. But if you lose, you will go home. After the first two round of games only sixteen teams will remain, hence the name "Sweet Sixteen." Without exception, every year there will be teams from smaller schools that upset stronger teams. People called those surprising teams "Cinderellas." In theory, any team can defeat their opponents. But since 1985 when the current format of 64 teams is in place, no sixteenth seed had ever overcome a first seed. That is a record of 0 win over 135 games played. But an unbelievable thing happened two weeks ago. UMBC became the first sixteenth seed that beat University of Virginia, a number one seed. Most people like me will need to look up the internet to learn the full name of the school – University of Maryland, Baltimore County. It is a typical David versus Goliath drama. Virginia only lost two games all season long. UMBC is considered the weakest sixteenth seed. Just two months ago, UMBC lost an ugly game by a score of 39 to 83. No one, not even faithful fans of the school, expected UMBC to triumph over Virginia. A Cinderella team winning a bigger school is difficult, though not impossible. In comparison, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is humanly impossible. But that is not a Cinderella fiction, it is part of our human history. As we celebrate Easter today we will re-visit the resurrection account. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact verified by eye-witnesses.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. Believed in What They Saw 相信所看見的

The resurrection of Christ was first made known to a group of women. They believed in what they saw. Why were they at the tomb? **Verse 1** told us: On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. This group of ladies witnessed Jesus' death on the cross. They also saw where Jesus was buried. Let me refer you to **23:55-56** – 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. They were ready to pay a final tribute to Jesus. The Jews did not embalm and preserve the remain of a person to make an Egyptian mummy. The spices and perfumes were to cover the unpleasant smell and to slow down degradation. The women loved Jesus so much that they rushed to the tomb once the Sabbath was over. Luke gave us the background of those women in **8:2-3** – 2 ...some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven

demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. Those ladies received help from Jesus. They followed Jesus and His disciples and provided subsidies for their gospel mission. The women observed a few things at the tomb. Verse 2 tells us that they saw the stone that blocked the opening of the tomb was rolled away. The kind of tomb that we are familiar with is a hole dug into the ground. But at that time a tomb is a cave carved out from a stone wall. The gospel of Matthew tells us the religious leaders were afraid that someone might steal Jesus' body and make up a story that He had risen. Therefore, Pilate the Governor asked some soldiers to seal the tomb with a stone. The second thing the women noticed was not what they saw, but what they did not see. In verse 3 they realized that Jesus' body had disappeared. Naturally, they thought someone had moved the body elsewhere. As they were wondering what had happened, they saw a third thing - two angels appeared to them. They told the women in **verses 5-7**: 5 ... "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" The angels reminded the women of what Jesus had spoken earlier. The evidences the women witnessed verified what Jesus had prophesied about His death and resurrection. The women believed in what the angels said.

## 2. Doubted in What They Heard 懷疑所聽見的

After receiving the great news that the Lord was risen from the dead the women quickly conveyed the message to Jesus' disciples and other believers. But the group doubted in what they heard. **Verse 11** tells us: But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Why didn't they believe? Historical background indicates that at that time people considered women's testimonies unreliable. They were not even allowed to testify in court. But now we live in a different era when women's rights are seen as important. Common sense also convinces people that it is impossible for anyone to come back to life after death. Really impossible? The gospels record three incidents where Jesus raised dead people: a widow's son, the daughter of a synagogue's ruler and Lazarus. The believers who heard the women's report must have forgotten that Jesus had the power to overcome death. But among those followers of Christ who cast doubt there was Peter. He checked it out for himself what the women said. Look at **verse 12**: Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. Here we find another sign of Jesus' resurrection. The cloth that was used to wrap Jesus' body was there. If Jesus' remain was indeed stolen, then why bothered to remove the linen? Peter had first-hand experience that though Jesus' words were often hard to comprehend, they turned out to be true. Peter affirmed at the Last Supper just a few days ago that he would never forsake Jesus. But Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed Peter would deny Him three times. It indeed happened just as Jesus had predicted. Luke recorded three separate incidents when Jesus told His disciples that He would die. In two of the three occasions Jesus also stated that He would be resurrected. The first occurrence was when Peter professed that Jesus was the Christ. In **9:22** Jesus responded: ... "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Peter might be thinking: "What if the Lord's words about rising from the dead really happened?" Peter's doubt in the women's report caused him to verify the facts.

## CONCLUSION

That is the first resurrection account. God made the impossible possible. Jesus came back to life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact verified by eye-witnesses. The tomb stone was rolled away. Jesus' body was missing. The linen cloth laid on the side. The angels announced the resurrection. All that happened even before the resurrected Christ revealed Himself to anyone. That took place later in the gospels. The women believed in what they saw by simple faith. Other believers doubted in what they heard. Peter was amazed by what had happened.

What can we learn from these people? First, God chose the women as the initial witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. At that time, Jesus' disciples ran for their own lives. They were afraid that they would be arrested too. But those sisters followed Jesus faithfully. They believed in the message from the angels. The angels reported that what Jesus prophesied earlier indeed came true. The women then spread the news to others, even when people doubted their testimonies. God also calls us to be little evangelists. More than likely, people will not believe when we share the gospel to them. However, our task is not to change people's heart. That is the work of the Holy spirit. Our responsibility is to tell people what we believe, that is the objective truth from the Bible and to testify how God has changed our lives, which is our personal experience.

Peter wondered about what the women said. His curiosity motivated him to actions. Doubt does not necessarily mean rejection. If you have doubts, do what Peter did: go find out if what the Bible says is true. Be objective in your pursuit of truth. The Christian faith is rooted in facts. The testimonies of the women, Peter and other believers are real. Also, Jesus' resurrection changed the disciples. Their encounter with the resurrected Lord caused these cowards to become courageous gospel ambassadors and future church leaders. You see, the Christian faith is not a blind faith. It is not like everything in the Bible is true because I believe it to be so. Your belief cannot turn nothing into something. I can believe with all my heart that there is a million dollars in my bank account. But my belief cannot work magic. The Christian faith is built on verifiable evidences of historical facts and the undeniable changes in people's lives. After analyzing all those information, you need to decide whether to accept or deny the truth. Ultimately, the Bible is true because it is the Word of God.

To Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the foundation of our faith, it is also a guarantee of God's promises for our future. Everything the Bible prophesied up to Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven had been fulfilled. We have confidence that God will continue to complete the rest of His plan according to His schedule. Jesus will come a second time to receive all His followers into eternity, He will judge the sins of the world and there will be an end to the power of evil. Without resurrection the Christian faith is no different from good moral teaching. It serves as a good guiding principle for people's lives, but it is powerless in making sinful people righteous. But our Lord had defeated the authority of death. In Christ our sins are washed away. We are given a new life. God gives us an assurance for our eternal destiny. He also enables us to live a victorious life over temptation today. Jesus was raised from the dead. That is the core of the gospel message.