

The Reality of the Resurrection

Luke 24:36-43

Tampa Covenant Church

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Proposition: The Christian's faith is rooted in the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead as witnessed by many and recorded faithfully in Scripture.

FCF: Believers' faith and hope not grounded in the reality of Christ's person and work.

RHF: Through Christ's resurrection from the dead, we can be assured we will ultimately gain an imperishable, glorified spiritual body just like his on the day of his return.

(#1) Introduction:

I once shared a plane ride with an elderly couple who were flying to Tampa to see their grandchildren. As soon as we got to cruising altitude, we started chatting. Once the wife learned I was a pastor, the conversation swerved toward spiritual things. And she pressed me a little and asked: "*what do you think of the resurrection?*" I responded, well... Since Christ was raised bodily from the dead, we live with hope that when he returns, we too will experience a bodily resurrection like his. She responded, "*I can't believe that*" and her husband was like oh, oh! Now, whadda you do with that kind of response?

I could've responded like Paul in 1 Cor 15, "*You foolish person!* But I don't think that would've gone over well. So, I said, "*what do you believe?*" She made it clear she was a spiritual person and leaned more towards being transformed into a disembodied spirit, free to live forever. The response was more like a wish she wanted to be true but not what scripture teaches. That the resurrection of Christ was a real historical event with remarkable implications for the believer.

Today, we'll witness how Christ's closest followers struggled to trust in this reality. And we'll see how their doubt, joy and marvel reflect a genuine human response toward something that seemed unbelievable but was indeed true. The good news of today's text is that our faith is not rooted in what we wish be true. It's rooted in the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead and the sure biblical hope that one day we too will experience a resurrection like his.

Jesus Initiates Reconciliation: Offering of Peace: (vv.33-35)

Recall in the house at Emmaus, Jesus blesses and breaks the bread then he vanishes. In the same hour Cleopas and his friend get up and return to Jerusalem with opened eyes and burning hearts to the fact that Jesus is alive. When they found the other disciples, they were told, "*The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!*" And they were able to tell their story of what happened on the road and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. **(#2) Now we read** in v.36, "*As they were sharing their stories, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"*" When we turn to John's account, he colors it in a little more for us: It's the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were locked because the disciples feared the Jews, and Jesus miraculously appears.

And the first thing out of his mouth is an offer of peace to every single person in that room. If we're familiar with the (#3 Blank) series of events before Jesus' crucifixion, we should marvel at the words of our Savior. Because it wasn't a good look for the disciples. While in the upper room, Judas is identified as the betrayer and scurries off. Afterward, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus says, "You will all fall away because of me this night?" And Peter responds by throwing everyone under the bus, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." And when Jesus predicts his betrayal, Peter exclaims he would die with him and they all agree they would do the same. However, in the garden, they couldn't "watch and pray" with Jesus... And when Jesus is arrested, "all the disciples left him and fled." The final straw is seen in Peter publicly and emphatically denying he ever knew Jesus.

When we say to each other, "Jesus knows what you're going through," this is but one of the numerous examples to which we point. We often experience heartbreak in our various relationships due to a myriad of reasons. And that heart break sets a dark cloud over the relationship until reconciliation enters the picture. And here's the key...someone has to initiate reconciliation. Someone has to take it in the teeth and swallow their pride for the sake of the relationship. We've all been there and we know how tempting it is to qualify our forgiveness. "I forgive you but..." Not Jesus, he didn't qualify anything and that's what makes it so powerful. Christ's cross work ushered in peace with God and man. The forgiveness we desperately needed from God came at the expense of his life. And now here he is, standing before these disciples in the flesh and instead of chiding them for their cowardice and failure at his darkest hour; he offers a greeting of Shalom, peace, well-being and wholeness.¹

But things kinda went downhill from there. (#4) Instead of running to embrace Jesus with joy and thanksgiving, Luke tells us, *they were startled and frightened*,² just like the women when they encountered the angels at the empty tomb. They were all convinced they were seeing a ghost! Just earlier everyone was sharing stories that "The Lord has risen indeed." But now in the presence of the risen Jesus, they're overwhelmed by sheer terror. If we put ourselves in their shoes, we should be able to empathize a little bit. Because it's one thing to believe that Jesus has risen indeed while in a locked room. But quite another for him to suddenly appear out of nowhere while you're in that locked room. Their fear was a normal human response to the supernatural.³

The Reality of the Resurrection: *A spiritual body suited for eternity (vv.38-40)*

But Jesus doesn't utter the familiar phrase, "do not be afraid." (#5) Rather he asks questions in bringing the real issue to the surface, "why are you troubled (frightened), and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" The word translated "doubts" denotes an inner reasoning that gives rise to uncertainty and it's never used in a positive sense.⁴ We've seen this before in Luke's Gospel. (#6) Back in chap 1, when the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah, he's shaken with fear; so much so that he questions the good news that he and Elizabeth will have a son in their advanced years. Later, when Gabriel appears to Mary and says, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you," we're told she was *greatly troubled* and tried to discern what kind of greeting it could be. Now, 23 chaps later, we find the disciples in a similar place; wrestling with the supernatural reality of a bodily resurrection. Is this truly Jesus, risen from the dead or is it a ghost?⁵

So, what does Jesus do in response to their fears and doubts, he invites them to examine the physical evidence for themselves. (#7) In v.39 he says, *“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”*⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. Jesus is telling them to use their eyes: *“See my hands and feet.”* And by implication, they would’ve seen the scars where the nails were driven. Next, he tells them to use their hands: *“Touch me and see.”* Feel the reality of my resurrected body because ghosts don’t have the flesh and bones.

(#8 Blank) The disciples weren’t interacting with some disembodied spirit floating around the room. Rather, they were engaging with the resurrected body of their Savior and our Savior. There’s no question that Jesus’ body was different in some sense. In this chapter, we recognize he’s no longer impeded by barriers and distance isn’t an issue as he suddenly appears and disappears without notice. But at the same time, he’s also walking, talking, breathing, and eating because he wasn’t a ghost. Luke is helping us to see that Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t some resuscitation of a dead body but the transformation of our Savior into his eternal state, and this transformed state involved a real body.⁶ And Church, this affirms that our physical bodies matter to God and that will be the case into eternity.

In 1 Cor 15, Paul writes concerning (#9) the transformation of our bodies at Christ’s return, *“So it is with the resurrection from the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.”*⁴³ *It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”*⁴⁴ *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* In describing the resurrection transformation, Paul contrasts the natural with the spiritual body: The natural body is earthbound; in its fallen state it’s perishable (subject to decay). It lacks honor and it’s weak because in this life, it succumbs to sickness, disease and ultimately death. But that’s not the case with the resurrection body. It will be a different flesh (not subject to decay); a different body (one that is glorious and powerful). If we believe that one day we’ll live forever in the presence of our savior; then we have to know when that day comes, we’ll need to be outfitted with a new body; one that is spiritual. Now we’re not talking about spiritual in a ghostly and immaterial sense but one that will be material and well suited for the new heavens and new earth. In that day, our bodies will be free from limitation, the taint of sin, sickness, disease and death.

Disbelieving for Joy: *Persevering faith grounded in reality (vv.41-43)*

(#10) After examining Jesus’ body, Luke tells us the disciples *“still disbelieved for joy and were marveling.”* That phrase, *“disbelieved for joy”* feels somewhat oxymoronic, doesn’t it? Don’t think they were disbelieving in a skeptical sense. Seems more like they were so filled with joy and amazement that they couldn’t process the reality of it all. They were caught in that bizarre moment where something feels too good to be true but you know it’s real.⁷

A few years ago, when Daniela served in the Army, Aida and I drove up to surprise her for her promotion ceremony. And when we arrived, I knocked on the door. Thinking it was the pizza guy, she opened the door and as soon as our eyes met, she started jumping up and down, screaming, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy! In that moment, she was *“disbelieving for joy”* as her mind was trying to process what she was actually seeing. Mommy and Daddy’s arrival was unexpectedly real. In that moment, it was unbelievable but it

was true. And once again, how does Jesus respond as they continue process the reality of his bodily resurrection? He doesn't shame them. Instead, with divine patience, he asks another question, "*Have you anything here to eat?*" They give him a piece of broiled fish, and he eats it right in front of them. In doing so, he gives another clear, physical sign that he's no ghost; he's the risen Lord in the flesh.

Knowing all of this, I think of my conversation partner's objection to my belief in the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection; "I can't believe that!" Well, as we've seen in this passage, neither could Jesus' disciples. (#11) Someone once said, "*The art of doubting is easy, for it is an ability that is born within us.*"⁸ See, we're naturally inclined to call into question what our finite minds can't fully grasp. In a fallen world, doubting the supernatural is part of the human condition. Doubt retorts, "*if it's too good to be true*" and "*if I can't understand it; I can't believe it.*" Hence the pushback in our world concerning the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection.

(#12 Blank) But the good news of the gospel says believing in the reality of the resurrection doesn't depend on our natural ability to believe it's true; it depends on the supernatural grace of God. An amazing grace that enlightens our hearts and minds in the knowledge of Christ's person and work on our behalf. That's what's happening in this locked room in Jerusalem. Jesus isn't demanding blind faith from his disciples. Rather, he comes to them in peace, pursues them with questions and invites them to examine his body as living proof he has indeed risen bodily from the dead!

And this eyewitness account of what took place so long ago in that room has been inscripturated for us. So that we too can see and examine the evidence for ourselves and discover how it corresponds to the truth of our Savior's resurrection from the dead. And the truth of his gospel. And as we we'll discover in the weeks ahead, the doubts plaguing Christ's disciples will eventually give way to faith and their fear will be supplanted by a real tangible hope in Christ. And the call for us is to recognize when doubts arise in our hearts and bring them to Jesus and let him lead and guide us into the joy of re-discovering the reality of his resurrection and how it applies to our lives. It's not about understanding everything perfectly; it's knowing we have good reasons for walking with him in faith. And it's a faith that perseveres in the face of confusion, shock and suspicion.⁹

Meaning, we can trust in Christ amid the things we don't understand because he's proven himself faithful. It's not a feel-good faith, focused on our feelings. Our very own (#13) Dolores Morris put it this way, "*A faith focused on how a believer feels is likely to be given up—when it stops providing comfort, when a new source of comfort is found, or when the believer is told that real maturity requires that you not need any comfort objects at all.*"¹⁰ Rather, it's the kind of faith Dolores goes on to describe as, a faith with substance, one we think deeply about and why we believe it, one that's compatible with Scripture, with the history of Christian thought and one with truths made evident in the world around us.¹¹ Church, it's a (#14 Blank) faith not grounded in personal comfort, a wish or an idea. But grounded in a historic person; Jesus Christ our Lord. The one who actually lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death and rose bodily from the grave in redeeming us from sin and misery and bringing us new life now as we live for the life to come.

Conclusion:

Thus, we realize on this side of eternity; things are not the way they ought as we too live with the consequences of the fall. Paul tells us in Rom 8 that all of creation groans and we who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit...we groan too as we eagerly await our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies. This is the hope all believers share that those who trust in the person and work of Christ will ultimately receive an imperishable, glorified body on the day of his return. And while we wait for that day, we continually renew our hope in God's sovereign plan for our future as we point our faith to his great and glorious promises. So church, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and let the reality of his resurrection grant us the faith, hope and love we need to live for him. Now and forevermore. Amen.

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- ¹ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 419.
- ² ἔμφοβος (*emphobos*), terrified, very afraid (Lk 24:5, 37; Ac 10:4; 24:25; Rev 11:13+; Ac 22:9)
- ³ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 360.
- ⁴ διαλογισμός (*dialogismos*): doubt, be uncertain about (Lk 24:38+). This noun depicts various types of thought and the end product of thinking. It is used to express doubts (*dialogismos*) from an individual (Luke 24:38) and may be modified adjectively to represent evil (πονηρός, *ponēros*) thoughts (*dialogismos*; Matt 15:19; Jas 2:4). Jesus perceives the thoughts (*dialogismos*) of the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 5:22, and even though the word is not further modified there, in that context evil and malicious reasoning is implied. The word *dialogismos* is not used in the nt to refer to good thoughts. David M. Emanuel, "Thinking," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).
- ⁵ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 617.
- ⁶ Ibid, 618–619.
- ⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 902.
- ⁸ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, (New York, NY: Evangelical Press, 1984), Logos Software. This quote has been attributed to Martin Luther but is also considered as unknown.
- ⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 729.
- ¹⁰ Dolores G. Morris, *Believing Philosophy, A Guide to Becoming a Christian Philosopher*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 11.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 11.