

Believing the Resurrection of Jesus

Luke 24

The Lord is Risen! Turn to Luke 24 please.

This is Easter Sunday. Christianity rests on the resurrection of Jesus more than any other single event in the Bible. In Acts, the resurrection is the core of their preaching. It took the early church a little while to understand why Jesus died, what that his death accomplished.

But from the start, they preached his resurrection. More than anything else, they followed Jesus because God raised Jesus from the dead. They took the resurrection to mean that God had proved something beyond any doubt: “This Jesus is the One person on earth that I, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, have selected and held up. Listen to everything he says, and put your hope in him.”

In their minds, the resurrection made that entirely clear, so they preached the resurrection of Jesus. The sermons in Acts say more than twice as much about the resurrection of Jesus as about forgiveness of sins, though forgiveness is included. Paul himself was clear: if Jesus was not raised, there is nothing left of our faith, it is all useless. But: God DID raise Jesus from the dead!

Luke 24 has three scenes and an epilogue. First scene tells of the women early in the morning, second scene tells of the two followers who walk to Emmaus later that same day, and the third scene tells of all the followers together in the evening, still on that first Sunday. Then there is a brief conclusion, probably a different day, where Jesus blessed them and ascended.

One more thing: Lk 24 is not the story of Jesus rising from the dead. Jesus is out of the tomb by Luke 24:1, risen and gone. We get no details about that. This long chapter how his followers figured out that he was risen from the dead. This Scripture tells us what it took to convince the women and men that what Jesus had actually risen.

Scene One – The Women are Convinced (Luke 23:55 – 24:12)

Luke 23:55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how Jesus' 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, (24:1) but 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. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “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 handed over to sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.

On that Sunday morning, it did not occur to the women that Jesus had been raised from the dead. What convinced the women that Jesus had risen? Three things.

(1) The tomb was empty. The empty tomb is a crucial part of this story. All kinds of people see spirits and ghosts and visions of dead people. Not rare. But that’s not resurrection. Those people don’t have empty tombs. The tomb of Jesus was empty. Keep that at the center of your resurrection faith. Lk 24 works hard to say that Jesus was not a vision or ghost. Empty tomb.

(2) Two heavenly men said Jesus was alive. That was not yet the turning point, but important.

(3) The two heavenly men reminded them of Jesus’ own words: *Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” ⁸ Then they remembered his words.* He’ll be handed over, crucified, and be raised.

The women looked at each other, and said, “That’s true, back in Galilee, Jesus did say just that to us.” That was the turning point. Along with the empty tomb, and the two heavenly men saying he was alive, they were convinced. They went and said all these things to the Eleven, to the apostles and the rest. But the men did not believe the women, the words seemed like nonsense.

Scene Two – Two more Followers are Convinced – 24:13-35

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped

that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning²³ but did not find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

²⁵ He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.²⁹ But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.³² They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together³⁴ and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Jesus played dumb with these two. He was genuinely curious as to how they would talk about him. How would they tell it? He wanted to know how much of his earlier teaching had taken root in their minds. Sadly, not enough. “*We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*” Jesus truly was that redeemer, but they assumed his death put an end to their hope.

Jesus was exasperated at how slow his followers were to understand: *How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!* So he explained from Moses and all the Prophets, all the things in the Scriptures about himself.

He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. This is what Jesus did at the Last Supper, but it also did it at the feeding of the 5,000, and also the feeding of the 4,000. Jesus had his own unique way of beginning a meal, every meal, and he did that here. And at that point these two disciples realized that only one person did that to start a meal: Jesus!

They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? These two men are scolding themselves. “Back there on the road we should have known that this was Jesus. Weren’t our hearts burning while he opened the Scriptures to us? Isn’t that what always happened when Jesus explained the Scriptures?”

“We should have known it was him.” What happened there on the road, Jesus explaining Scripture and their hearts and minds coming alive, that had happened to them often.

They went back to Jerusalem and told the Eleven and the rest what happened, and how *they recognized him in the breaking of the bread*. Scholars now are passionately divided on whether or not this hints at the Lord's Supper, and that we all recognize Jesus at the Lord's Supper.

Nothing in the Scripture requires this to be about the Lord's Supper. The meal in Emmaus was not the Lord's Supper, and this line just mentions bread, nothing about cup. But it is hard to read the words, "recognizing the Lord in the breaking of the bread," and not at least wonder if this is the Lord's Supper. Cleopas might not be thinking Lord's Supper, but I expect Luke is.

Scene Three – Jesus Convinces the Eleven and the Rest (24:36-49)

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The followers of Jesus were not easy to convince that Jesus had risen. They thought he was a ghost, a spirit, a vision, and they doubted. They knew that these things simply do not happen, people dead and buried get up and walk around among the living. And Jesus had to convince them, **he** had to do whatever it took to convince **them**, because **they** had to convince **others**.

There is an idea around that in the ancient world people could believe in someone being raised from the dead, because they were ignorant. But now that we have science, we know better, we know that Jesus could not have risen. That is naïve and arrogant on our part, the assumption that we are wise and the ancients were fools.

They were not fools, they were hard to persuade, just as we would be, and that's good for us. Jesus was not a ghost, not a spirit, not a vision. That was the point of the empty tomb, and it is the point here.

Once Jesus had convinced them that he had flesh and blood, let them touch him and watch him eat food that they gave him, then he did the same as the two on the road, he explained the Scriptures about himself.

Jesus got two things done with his followers. One, he showed them that he was bodily raised from the dead, he let them touch him and see him and watch him eat. Two, he showed them from the Scriptures that this was no surprise, the Scriptures had been saying these things all along.

My biggest surprise this week was how much Jesus used the Scripture, the OT, to understand himself and explain his death and resurrection. *How slow to believe all that the **prophets** have spoken. Beginning with **Moses** and all the **Prophets**, he explained all the **Scriptures** about himself. Were not our hearts burning while he opened the **Scriptures** to us? Jesus - I told you: everything must be fulfilled that was **written** about me in the **Law of Moses**, the **Prophets**, and the **Psalms**. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the **Scriptures**. He told them: this is what is **written**: the Messiah would suffer, he would rise, and he would be preached.*

Knowing that Jesus had risen from the dead was not enough. That was the first half. The second half was know how this fit with their Bible, the OT. On the first Easter Sunday, Jesus was mostly a Bible teacher.

This is probably why Jesus only appeared to followers, never to any of his enemies. He did not want his resurrection announced apart from his explanation of the Scripture. And they got it.

This is why Paul summarizes the gospel this way: *Christ died for our sins, **according to the Scriptures**, he was buried, and rose the third day, **according to the Scriptures**.* That, folks, is Paul's own summary of the gospel that he preached in every city. (1 Cor 15).

If we want to know what Jesus taught them about the OT, we just need to read the first half of Acts. Those early sermons all have lots of OT in them. They were just using and passing on what they got from Jesus after he rose.

We can believe that Christ rose from the dead without knowing the OT story. But we cannot understand his death and resurrection without knowing the OT story.

Listen to these lines from Jesus using the Scriptures in the last hours before he died: *You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. (Zech 13)* The crowd came with Judas in the evening to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. They carried swords and clubs, and Jesus was indignant. *Swords and clubs? Every day I was in the temple courts, but you did not come then. But, the Scriptures must be fulfilled.*

His disciples defended Jesus. Jesus told them not to do that. *The Father would give me more than 12 legions of angels. But, then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?*

On the cross, Jesus died praying the Psalms. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Ps 22. He prayed, *Into your hands I commit my spirit.* Ps 31.

Conclusion: Blessing and Ascension (24:50-53)

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

This needs no help.

From the start, the apostles preached Christ's resurrection. Above all, they followed Jesus because God raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection meant that God had proved this beyond any doubt: "This Jesus is the One person on earth that I, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, have selected and held up. Listen to what he says, and put your hope in him." Amen.

Prayer: Our God and Father, this is the gospel that you brought to us. This is the gospel we received, and on this we have taken our stand. By this we will be saved, if we hold firmly: that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose from the dead according to the Scriptures, and then he convincingly appeared to his followers. And repentance for the forgiveness of sins has been preached to the nations, right up to us here this morning.

Almighty God, we remind ourselves of these things with joy. We worship you, Father, and we worship you, Jesus our Lord, and we thank you for the promised Holy Spirit, who helps us so that we can act and speak faithfully before you. Amen.