

He's Not Here, He is Risen

Luke 24

Luke 24 please. We're going to read the whole chapter, because the truth of our Christian faith rests on this story more than anything else, the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew and John also have this story.

When the earliest preachers spoke the gospel, the message began with the resurrection of Jesus, and the resurrection was most of the gospel message. "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins" was how we respond to the resurrection of Jesus. That's how they thought in the earliest days, and how they spoke.

There are quite a few sermons in Acts, places where we can read what they preached. In the sermons in Acts, the preacher spoke about the resurrection, and then about salvation, at a ratio of about 3½ to 1. Three or four sentences on Jesus raised from the dead, then one sentence on the offer of salvation. So this resurrection story is at the center of the gospel.

*Luke 24. The women rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment, 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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men, in clothes that gleamed like lightning, stood beside them. 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? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words.*

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

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

*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?” “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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”*

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

*As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 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.*

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?”*

*They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together. They said, “It is true! The Lord has risen, and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread.*

*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 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.”*

*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

*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.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

*He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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.”*

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*

This story shows us two things that are important to Luke, and the first is:

### **1 He’s Not a Vision, and he’s Not a Spirit**

Luke writes to make clear that they were not seeing a vision of Jesus, and he was not a spirit or ghost or hallucination, however you want to say that. They knew about such in those days. They knew that people had visions that were so vivid that they seemed real, and it was hard to tell if it was real or not. They knew that these things sometimes happened after someone dies.

They also knew about spirit beings or ghosts. Most people had not ever seen any, just as now, but they had stories of someone seeing a spirit or ghost, as do we. Luke knows about all this, as did the original followers of Jesus, and Luke wants to rule that out! The original followers were hard to persuade. Resurrections did not happen in those days either.

First, the tomb was empty! It was the right tomb. The women watched Joseph of Arimathea bury him. They knew which tomb. Sunday morning, the women walked right into the tomb. Later, Peter looked in far enough to see the body wrappings lying by themselves where they laid Jesus.

The empty tomb means we’re talking about something happening to a *body*. A vision would not leave an empty tomb behind. It is the right tomb, and the body is gone, and the grave clothes are left. If someone wanted to take the body, they would certainly leave it wrapped. Pay attention, says Luke.

Then there is this lovely paragraph: *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 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.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

For Luke, this is not idle curiosity, and this is not lack of faith. This is at the core of Christian faith. He had scars on his hands and feet, he had flesh and bones that you could feel. “Poke me” he said, “you can feel my flesh and bones.”

He offered to eat in front of them. Jesus did *not* say, “Just believe.” He did *not* say, “You need more faith.” He paraded himself. He wanted them to be completely sure, and Luke wants us to get this. Jesus did not pull food out of his pocket to eat it. That could be a trick. No, they gave him their own food, so he would eat their food in front of them.

It is no surprise that people doubt the resurrection of Jesus. It is hard to believe. Of course it is. Luke knows that, and he’s doing his best to help people who have misgivings. Acts 1 tells us that Jesus did things like this with the apostles repeatedly for forty days. Jesus made sure that the apostles would never doubt his resurrection. Our faith rests on their certainty.

*“We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”* Jesus and his followers had been in Jerusalem at least a week before he was crucified. We need to imagine conversations between his crowd of Galilean followers and their friends and relatives in Jerusalem.

The followers say, “we believe Jesus is the Christ.” The Jerusalem people say, “no, he is a fake, an imposter.” The followers say, “no, we are convinced he really is the Christ.” But Jerusalem says, “no, you are deceived.” When Jesus was crucified, Jerusalem said, “See, we told you.” The followers were devastated. They had thought the kingdom of God was going to appear.

And then they found out that the tomb was empty, and that God has raised Jesus from the dead. “Yes, we were right! Yes! He really is the Christ from God!” So much joy. The world gave its verdict on Jesus, condemned him and killed him. Then God gave his verdict on Jesus. He raised him back to life, to glorious life.

Our resurrection will happen the same way. We don’t get new bodies, we still have this present body, only it will be glorified. The casket will be empty, the nice clothes will still be in there, but no body, because the body will be alive. The jar of ashes will be empty. When we are raised, we will not find ourselves in a different body. It will be the body we always had, only glorified.

## **2 No Resurrection Preaching without the Scriptures**

Have you ever wondered why Jesus, after he rose from the dead, did not show himself to some of his enemies? No appearance to Pilate or the Jewish Council? Only to his regular followers? I have wondered about that. Luke gives us his answer in this story.

Jesus does not think it is enough to know that he rose from the dead. What people need to know is how his resurrection fills out the Old Testament story. The resurrection, by itself, could mean almost anything. Jesus used the Old Testament to explain his death and his resurrection. That was the only way he wanted people to preach the resurrection.

Jesus did not prove his resurrection to anyone he could not also educate about how the Old Testament was leading toward this all along. He would only show himself carefully to those he could also teach carefully about the Old Testament.

This comes up three different times in our story today. First, to the two on the road. He scolded them for their slowness to believe the prophets: *How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Was the problem that they did not believe the women? No. Was the problem that they did not believe Jesus himself, when he predicted ahead of time that he would rise the third day? No. They were foolishly slow to believe *the prophets*. And as they walked along, Jesus gave them an Old Testament Bible lesson about himself.

The second time we hear about Jesus and the Scriptures is when they speak to each other right after they recognized Jesus and he disappeared: *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

So, as they walked on the road, and Jesus explained the Scriptures, their hearts were burning. Why did they say that to each other after they recognized him? Because that was a familiar experience, something they should have recognized! They are scolding themselves. This had often happened, walking down the road with Jesus, and he’s giving a Bible lesson and their hearts burn – they should have recognized him then.

And then, the third time we hear about Jesus and the Scriptures was when they were all together, Jesus gave the same lesson again: *He said, “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.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* Jesus needed them to know about these things.

The preachers in Acts use the Old Testament all the time when they talk about Jesus. By the time we have read through the book of Acts, we have gotten the Lord’s whole Old Testament lesson, most of it by the end of Acts 15.

Jesus wanted his first preachers to be certain that he had risen, that the tomb was empty and he was not a ghost or a vision. And, they needed to know how the Scriptures foretold his story. Then Jesus had done his job, and they were ready to wait for the Holy Spirit.

### **3 The Story is Full of Joy!**

There’s one more thing in this story, and that is joy. We only read that word once, but it is a joyful story. The first joy moment is when the women see that the tomb is empty, and the angels tell them that Jesus has risen, just as he said he would. Those are happy women!

So the first joy moment is the women at the tomb. The second joy moment is when Jesus takes the bread and blesses it, breaks it and gives it, and the two recognize him. “It’s you!!” And then they run all the way back to Jerusalem, to the Eleven and the others with them, and they’re telling them about the second joy moment, and then Jesus appears to all of them together there.

At first they were startled and frightened, but that turned into joy and amazement, the third joy moment, when they saw the scars in his hands and feet, and could touch him and feel that he was real, and they watched him eat their piece of fish. Joy!

The fourth joy moment happens at the very end. After Jesus had ascended, gone to heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. He was gone, and he would return. But he had risen from the dead! The world was a different place. By raising Jesus from the dead, God had made the world a different place for them. Once God has raised Jesus from the dead, he had given hope and confidence to all of life. So they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

The whole chapter is a happy story, and it should be. And that’s why we meet on the first day of the week. We celebrate the resurrection once a year. The first churches celebrated it once a week. Every Sunday has the flavour of Easter. Amen.

**PRAYER:** O God, today we worship you, the God who raised Jesus. You are the God that Jesus served, the God that Jesus obeyed when he submitted to death, the God Jesus trusted and prayed to. Above all, you are the God that raised him from the dead. You’re our God, and we’re your people. You, O God, the God that raised Jesus from the dead and brought him out of that tomb, in that God we trust, to that God we pray, that God we worship and serve. We thank you, O God, for turning the big story around. Glory and honour and majesty are yours forever. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.