

## Introduction

Once upon a time — isn't that how all good stories begin? — there was a man. And his name was Jesus.

Jesus was a very good man. When I say that he was good, I mean that if I try to compare his goodness to ours, it's like saying that the sun is very bright when we stare directly into it, compared to standing in the corner of a room, facing the wall, with our eyes closed, with one small candle lit on a table in the center of the room.

He was so good that many people hated him.

Those who especially hated him were — strangely enough — those who were spiritual leaders. That's because Jesus' version of good, like the bright sun I just mentioned, shed light on the badness of everyone around him. That's what you get for being light in a world that loves darkness.

On top of that, Jesus was a very powerful man. He was quite humble; but underneath the surface of his very good character, there was incredible power.

He showed that power with things that he did, doing things like turning barrels of tap water into good wine and even raising people from the dead.

He also showed his power by what he said. He was unafraid to speak the truth, no matter what the consequences. I sometimes wonder if the power to speak the truth without fearing the consequences is one of the most powerful and dangerous ethical traits there is.

In any event, Jesus pushed one time too often against the establishment and they had him killed. Oh how their hatred came out then! To say that they had him killed is an understatement!

- They tortured him, beating him until the flesh literally was stripped from his bones.
- They used an execution method designed to kill the victim over hours, sometimes even days, by means of slow blood loss and suffocation.
- They stuck a spear in his heart.
- They were so intimidated by Jesus that they then put him inside of a cave.
- They rolled a huge rock in front of the cave so that his friends couldn't get in.
- They had the cave guarded by soldiers.
- All of this was accomplished by very efficient, experienced professional killers.

His enemies made sure that he wasn't merely dead. He was really and sincerely dead.

Afterwards, everyone went home and said, “I’m glad that’s over!” That should’ve been the end of the story. But it wasn’t, which brings us to Luke 24.

In vs 36, we enter into the story as two of the disciples are telling some crazy story about how they had seen Jesus on a road outside of Jerusalem. While they are talking, Jesus suddenly shows up.

I don’t know if we can fully appreciate the shock. It had been a very stressful weekend. They were hiding from the authorities in fear. They were tired, fearful, confused, sad. In their minds, Jesus is undeniably dead.

As the disciples are listening to the two tell their story, you can imagine that the disciples were likely responding to the story being told with a lot of “no way”s and hearing, “yes, way!”. No wonder the first thing Jesus says is, “Peace be with you” — a polite Hebrew form of the English idiom, “don’t have a cow, man!”

I love how the gospels are so human. At first (37), they think that they are seeing a ghost. And then (41) they are so overwhelmed by the slow realization that this really is Jesus that they still have a hard time believing.

Jesus reacts to his believers in three ways, which I want us to see today.

1. Jesus proves the resurrection.
2. Jesus anchors the resurrection in history and theology.
3. Jesus applies the resurrection.

## Proven

The first thing that Jesus does is take the time to prove that he really is Jesus and that he really is present.

*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.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them (39–43).*

We ought not estimate how important this is. Proving that he was once dead, but is now alive is a critical part of the New Testament testimony. That’s why Paul finds it important to mention to the Corinthians that

*[Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:4–8.

Without the resurrection, the whole fabric of the story of existence comes apart. As Paul puts it, “if there is no resurrection of the dead:

- then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised,
- then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.
- we are ... found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ,
- you are still in your sins,
- if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus takes the time to prove that he is real and really alive.

## Anchored

As I said, it is critical to the whole story of the Bible that the resurrection be real. It is the event at the crux of all of history.

But what does it mean? To simply say that there was a man who was dead and who is now alive is meaningless by itself. One wants to know what to do with such information. Jesus tells the disciples and us by anchoring the resurrection in historical and theological contexts (44–47).

*He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

Jesus anchors the fact of the resurrection in a precise context: that of the Scriptures. The Scriptures contain the essential information we need about everything that could be said about this world. The essential points of reality are all contained therein.

- Everything about how we foolishly destroy ourselves and those around us because of selfishness, lost, arrogance is in there.
- The facts about the corruption of nature that entirely permeates all people, throughout all time, through the entirety of our humanity — all in there.
- Everything we need to know about God’s grace, the immensity of his holiness, the scope of his justice, and the full breadth of his mercy — also in there.
- The final state of the rebellious is in there.
- So also is the final state of those who put themselves under God’s mercy.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12–19.

- And the way God expresses his mercy in the sacrifice of his only son on our behalf is in there.

It's too much to cover in one sermon or even in one day. But it's well summarized, when Jesus refers to "the law of Moses ... the prophets and the Psalms". Everything we need to know about time and eternity that's essential for our souls is well anchored in the words, "that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name".

## Applied

Someone suggested to me this week that Jesus could have done a variety of things after the resurrection that he didn't do. He could have showed up at Pilate's or Herod's palace, or in the temple in Jerusalem, as examples, and said, "I told you!" But those parties had already decided that they didn't want their worlds confused with the facts, in spite of all the unbelievable things that Jesus had already said and done. It would have been a waste.

One could have understood how Jesus might have been eager to leave the place that had so abused him and return to his rightful glory. Instead,

*He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup>*

Jesus shows up to those who love and follow him. For their sake, he doesn't want to yet say good-bye. He still has new things for them to learn and old things of which they need to be reminded. We know very little of what Jesus discusses with his disciples between the resurrection and the ascension. Here in Luke 24, we get a small glimpse as Jesus applies the resurrection in two ways.

## Witnesses

He says that the disciples "are witnesses of these things" (48). They have seen the events concerning Jesus. He has opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (45). They are therefore able to link their experiences with the truth of Scripture.

They now have all they need to pass on the facts and the meaning of Jesus' resurrection to others. They are prepared to give testimony to the court of human history and tell what they have seen.

## Recipients

Second, Jesus says that the disciples are to be recipients of "the promise of my father" — referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit that will come after Christ's ascension.

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 1:3.

The disciples were given a simple job: report and repeat what you know from the Scriptures, what you have seen, and what it means. And all the power and wisdom you know, I'm going to see to it that you get it.

That task continues to this day with us. If you are in the faith, it's because someone — a parent, a friend, a pastor, a neighbor — someone told you about the reliable historical record of the Scriptures and also what they had personally seen and experienced. You decided to respond to it with faith.

And now you, too, have that same responsibility. But don't worry, everything you need for the task is already given to you, too!

## Conclusion

A couple of weeks ago, preaching on another passage from the Gospels, I asked, "what are you going to do with Jesus?" Some rejected him. Some followed him.

Today, I asked the question, "what are you going to do with the resurrection?"

You cannot remain unmoved. The event is too significant. If we suddenly discovered that  $1 + 1 = 3$ , or that the earth is going to crash into the sun next year, we wouldn't be able to ignore that information.

People say that when they have had a near death experience, or certain life-threatening conditions, like open heart surgery, that their lives are never the same.

Well, the conquering of death, which is the proper outcome of sin — that's also too big to ignore. That's news that turns the world on its head. If people believed that the resurrection is true, could you imagine the headlines? "Death: no longer the greatest adventure!" "Life: but wait, there's more!" "Heaven: the best is yet to come!"

With the resurrection, all the rules change.

First, it makes us able to face death. Death is a certainty. It's a necessary result of the corruption of human nature. But if the resurrection is real, then as the hymn says,

*Jesus lives, and death is now  
But my entrance into glory. Courage, then, my soul, for  
thou Hast a crown of life before thee;  
Thou shalt find thy hopes were just;  
Jesus is the Christian's Trust.*<sup>4</sup>

It what gives courage to the martyr and to the mother and father. It made Stephen unchanged by the threat of death. It made Paul able to write,

*I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the*

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<sup>4</sup> Trinity Hymnal. "Jesus lives, and so shall I — Jesus, meine Zuversicht". #596.

*righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*<sup>5</sup>

If the resurrection is real, it also make us able to face life.

Without the resurrection, life is a long struggle towards an uncertain end. With the resurrection, life is a clear path through the wicket gate of Bunyan's story. Through that gate of faith in Christ, we find ourselves on the king's highway toward the celestial city. That means life is freer for us, bolder, and more meaningful.

*Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee,  
Who from the heavens the streams of His mercy doth send thee.  
Ponder anew What the Almighty can do,  
Who with His love doth befriend thee.*

The tomb still empty. What are you going to do about the resurrection?

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 4:6–8.