

The Risen Christ Improving the Faith of His Disciples

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[0 : 00] it's gospel and chapter 24. And we will draw particularly from it, although we'll touch on other references too, verses 36 to 34 of Luke 24.

And we're thinking here about the risen Jesus improving the faith of his disciples. In other words, developing it on from where it was at that time.

There's a sense, you see, in which here, in this whole context of Jesus appearing to the disciples, that we would think that his appearance to the women, to Mary Magdalene and to Peter, and then to the two disciples, Clopas, and the other unnamed disciple whom he met on the road to Emmaus, you'd think by this time the disciples were settled in their minds as to the reality of Jesus being alive again.

But it wasn't like that. And we sought to show earlier today that when they went to the tomb, when Mary Magdalene and the other women went to anoint the body, their minds were on the body, not the living Jesus.

Resurrection was the last thing on their minds. That's what we were saying. And that this was still the way. Although they had seen him, they were still questioning.

[1 : 37] They were full of unanswered questions. They had doubts and they had fears. And the fact of the matter is, their faith had taken a very serious knock.

You get a wonderful summary of how they felt in the words of the men on the road to Emmaus, to Jesus, whom they thought was a stranger.

We thought that he was the one who would redeem Israel. That gives us a really good insight to the thinking of the disciples, the men and the women.

They weren't expecting him to rise from the dead then. As to what would happen in the last day, that's a different subject. But here immediately, their faith had taken a serious knock.

The ugly, the horrendous death of Jesus on the cross, the actual blood and gore of it, not to mention the darkness that surrounded the place and his cries.

[2 : 46] These things all combined to really shake their faith. And so that the news of his resurrection, from those who had seen him, left them all in a kind of state of disbelief, of bewilderment, of amazement.

It's interesting that in that passage we read in the morning in John 20, when Peter and John had examined the tomb, and the evidence was, as we saw, that the Savior had literally rose up through the grave clothes and left them in their place.

They went home, they went to their own homes, I never emphasized this, but I'm doing it now. They went to their own homes to ponder these things.

To ponder them in relation to their faith, in relation to where they were at, in the light of all that had happened. And they were still in this almost mesmerized state.

And unbelief was mingled with their amazement. And if you think about it, in your own life's experience, there are situations that we come into that are traumatic.

[4 : 09] Some of you have had hugely traumatic experiences with the loss of loved ones, and with other calamities. But I think, more or less, we've all experienced traumatic things.

And if you recall that when you got into them, these things, as they unfold, leave us bewildered. They leave us amazed. They leave us wondering what's going on.

What's it all about? And faith is not unaffected by that. True faith. We wonder what it's all about. We wonder what the Lord is doing.

And we sometimes simply say, Lord, what's going on? What's happening? I can't really believe all that's happened.

You feel as if you're in a dream. Folk have said that. It all feels the way it's fallen out, like it's a dream, like it's not real. But it is real. And it's that type of thing that happened to the disciples, only more so.

[5 : 19] And they were still trying to grapple with what they had seen of the evidence in the tomb, that the savior was no longer there, hadn't been taken by robbers.

Something wonderful had happened. The report was that he was alive, and they're struggling. Report from the men who met him on the road to Emmaus, to whom he made himself known in the breaking of bread.

It was all too much. And you see, Jesus, knowing their need, knowing where they were at in their faith, he comes to them in this way.

And that's their first point. Jesus appeared among them and spoke peace. And we read it there.

Verse 36. And now when they had said these things, that's when the men came back up from Emmaus to report to the disciples who were in hiding in that room. And Jesus himself stood in the midst of them and said to them, Peace to you.

[6 : 24] Now it's apparent that, as we said earlier today, the doors were bolted, the windows shut, for fear of the Jews. And Jesus appeared in the midst of them, saying, Peace to you.

He appeared, and he spoke. And he spoke peace. Do you remember that as he was coming towards the end of the upper room discourse, and he was telling them about himself, departing from them, that he spoke peace to them?

John 14, and verse 28, is it 27? Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you.

Not as the world gives unto you, so give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither be afraid. He spoke peace to them. He told them he was giving them his peace. And he picks that up again, you see, as there is in one.

He speaks peace to them. That's what they needed at that time. That's what they needed to calm their troubled spirits. You see, verse 37 says, When they saw him, they were terrified and frightened.

[7 : 49] They were scared stiff. And, in a sense, you see, the peace he spoke to them in the upper room ought to have maintained their composure all through what had happened in his mock trial.

And in his, well, in his mock trial at the hands of various folk, Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod and then back to Pilate.

His peace ought to have calmed their hearts, but they were in, they were in confusion and they were distressed. And a raft of anxieties had filled their hearts, doubts arising from end belief, fear of the future, what's going to happen?

Now he's gone, but wait a minute, some are saying he's alive, and so on. And his peace is not affecting them as it should. And he comes in and he speaks peace to them.

And you might ask the question, in fact, it's good to ask the question, I think, was there anything better Jesus could give them than his peace?

- [9 : 06] And the answer is no. Think about that for a moment. Because it's weighty. Could Jesus have given them anything better than his peace?
- To meet their needs at that time? No. There was nothing better. And this is the rule.
- This is the rule that is applicable to you and me today, tonight. There's nothing better than to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.
- That's what we're called to. If we're the Lord's people, that's what we're called to. Paul says there in Colossians 3.15, when he has gone up to the heights of the Christ things and of the reality of Christ's people united to him, being with him.
- If then you are raised with Christ, set your minds on the Christ things where he sits at the right hand of God. And so on. And before he gets to the end of chapter 3 of Colossians, he's telling us, let the peace of God or of Christ rule in your hearts.
- [10 : 25] Let it be the, you'll remember, some of you, let it be the empire. Let it be the referee. Let it sort the conflict that goes on within you. Let the peace of Christ have the last word.
- And it is wonderful and revealing and important to you and me that wherever we're at in our experience, the word of Christ is applicable, peace to you.
- My peace I give to you. And we're simply to rest in that and to use that peace that he has promised us to have the final word.
- Because it's his. We never think about the peace of God without Christ in the frame. And Jesus, when he appeared in this way, said to them, Shalom Lechem, peace to you.
- The second thing we want to consider then is the response of the disciples to Christ's presence. Well, we've touched on this already, but let's look more closely at it.
- [11 : 43] They were terrified. They were really frightened. And they thought they had seen a ghost, a spirit, a phantom from the spiritual world had appeared.
- This is what they were impressed with. This is what made them terrified. You remember that way back, early on, in the Savior's ministry, he walked upon the sea to them.
- And they cried out in utter terror that they saw a ghost on the sea. And Jesus, of course, came alongside them and said, Fear not to desire.
- He came to them. They were very switched on to these things. And here again, they're terrified, supposing they had seen a spirit.
- I think, you see, in our familiarity with this, we can fail to really get into it, fail to really appreciate that these grown men and women, people who had listened to Jesus for these years, were really scared.
- [12 : 55] they were utterly terrified at his presence, supposing this is a spirit.
- And you see, this takes us back to what I was saying in the introduction. Their faith needed to be restored. They needed to come out of where they were and move on.
- And he was there to make sure that happened. Here again, you see, as it was on the lake these years before, their response was the same, terrified.
- They had seen a ghost. A moment before we move on from this feeling of terror.
- We can appreciate it if we're thinking about this. Jesus came in, there's no other explanation for it, he came in through a closed door or through a wall, whatever.
- [13 : 59] We saw earlier on his resurrection body had capacities that it hadn't got before. And he appeared in this way. And you can understand perfectly well why they were terrified.
- A body can't come through a door or it can't come through walls unless the door opens and the wall falls down or something like that. It can't be done. But, you see, they weren't really thinking about what they had already understood about Jesus.

The empty grave clothes lying there on the rock ledge, the head covering, the turban, in its own place on the raised little niche.

they weren't really thinking. The stone, we read it there, the stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out but to let the disciples in.

So he had come out of the rock tomb without the stone rolled away. And such was this state, this turmoil in them, they weren't thinking in the way that he wanted them to.

[15 : 20] They needed his peace to rule and their faith to be revived as it were and unbelief to be driven out. But here at this point they were still affected in their judgment as regards Jesus.

They were terrified and supposed they had seen a ghost. And Jesus said, why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts?

They're still not believing it's really him. And there's something here for you and me. The problem of unbelief that it creeps, it spreads in our own soul and affects us more and more.

And at the bottom it is, it can't be. It can't be. How can it be? Impossible.

How can such a thing be the case? And at the bottom here, when it says they were terrified and frightened and suppose they had seen a spirit, they weren't going to say it's the resurrected Jesus.

[16 : 39] It can't be. See what I'm saying? And belief was affecting them. They were doubting. Now, unless you think I've been a bit hard on the disciples here, let me remind you that that in the feeding of the 4,000, which came after the feeding of the 5,000, when they were asked to supply food for the 4,000, what they said was, we're in a desert place, how can this be?

See? How can this be? Same disciples. The disciples had witnessed the feeding of the 5,000 plus, are saying regarding the 4,000 plus, how can this be?

How can we give this people bread in the wilderness, this wilderness, this desert place? And all of a sudden, you're right back to the days of Moses and the people of Israel in the desert.

How can it be? And what I'm saying to you is this, it's wrong to think about the disciples as not developing in their faith, as not progressing through their mistakes, their weaknesses, their doubts.

They were of like passions as ourselves. Yes, they were special and chosen and apostles, but their faith, my dear friends, in terms of their trust towards the Lord, was a developing thing.

[18 : 19] And often it came up against things that made them say, it can't be done. How can it be? It can't be Jesus in the room speaking peace to us.

That's where they were at. How can somebody who is in the body simply come into this room?

It's against the ordinary round of life. I don't suppose they were into talking about natural laws of physics and so on. But the bottom line is they knew it couldn't happen.

But it did. And so they were being taught not only about the reality of Jesus' resurrection body and its capacities, but about this great principle that with Christ things that are for us impossible become gloriously possible.

And they were being taught that they had to take a different view of their faith in him. them. They were being taught what the prophet long ago Zechariah said to Zerubbabel, you remember, in chapter 4, verse 7, who are you, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel, before the man of faith, you shall become a plain, you shall be leveled.

[19 : 46] And they were being taught that this is the way they needed to think about Jesus, that having faith in him was to see him as mighty and conquering and able, and they were to expect great things of him, who was their great savior.

Why are you troubled? And why do doubts still arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, and so on.

So let's see then where they were at, how mistaken they were, and how much they needed to rethink and to move on in their faith.

And that leads us to the last thing we want to consider, and that is Jesus calmed their fearful hearts. He calmed them.

And He calmed them with these questions we've just quoted. Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your heart? He put His finger on the problem.

[21 : 04] And He did it in such a way that they heard the questions that told them the nature of the problem within themselves. They had this inner conflict.

like we were speaking about. They had this turmoil regarding Him. And that's why He says to them in answer to their doubts and their troubled minds, look here, it's really me.

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. In the original, this emphasis of myself at the end is there deliberately because although it's last in the sequence, it's first.

I myself is where the focus lies. I want you to see, really see that it is I myself. Check me out, is the modern way of putting it, isn't it?

Check me out, he says. Yes, it's really me. Examine me, put me to the test, see it is really me. Examine my hands and my feet before you go on to the difficult question as to how can I do the things I'm doing now.

[22 : 23] Just make sure it's really me. Look at me and see it is really me in the body. And he says, you see, there in the second part, handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

He wants them to examine him and to be satisfied that it is really him. Look at me, he says, handle me, deal with me in the closest possible way.

see my hands and my feet, see them that were pierced for you. See the proof of my death and the proof of my resurrection life.

I always think when I read this bit that the apostle John was talking about this at the beginning of his first letter. Remember how he begins it, that which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled concerning the word of life.

And the life was manifest and we have seen him and declare unto you that eternal life who was with the Father. And he begins in the language that we are pondering here tonight.

[23 : 59] handle me, says Jesus. See, it is I myself.

And this was important, you see. Jesus wanted them to get beyond any notion that he was a mere spirit now, or as the JWs say, a spirit creature.

If you're ever dealing with JWs and witnessing to them, and they'll tell you they believe Jesus rose from the dead, watch that, because their belief is not that he rose in the body, but that he's a spirit creature.

No, Jesus wanted them to see that this is really him, in the flesh, flesh and bones. Don't think I just seem to be that.

Jesus is saying, in effect, I am really the same Jesus. Glorious body, resurrection body, but in the body. And that's why he allowed them to check out the wound marks.

[25 : 11] This was, if you like, a vital proof of the reality of his being in the body. And then he further demonstrated the reality of his body by eating the broiled fish, as we saw, and the honeycomb.

He wanted them to recognize it. Now, we haven't time this evening, and it's not part of our area of reflection, but expositors do notice that Jesus is flesh and bones and not flesh and blood.

You remember, Paul tells us concerning the resurrection, that flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. And theologians and expositors think, and I think they're right, that the resurrection body is flesh and bones, it's real, that you can eat, but you don't need to eat.

And Jesus was demonstrating this at least concerning it, that he could eat, and did eat. and there are a few references to him sitting down and eating with his disciples during the 40-day period prior to his ascension.

He wants them to be sure. He wants to rid them of their doubts, of their turmoil in their hearts. He wants them to be at peace by what they would see.

[26 : 50] his presence, his real bodily presence, was to be an encouragement to them, to drive out any uncertainty from them. And you see, when all was said and done, when he completed that, when he moved them on in their faith, they were ready for something else.

Verse 41, but while they still, now notice this, but while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, they were so thrilled by what they were seeing and hearing, they still hadn't got the thing properly, and Jesus said, have you any food?

And so he got the food and he ate the food. And only then are they ready to move on. Verse 44, then he said to them, these are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you in his pre-resurrection state.

While I was still with you that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms concerning me. And only then, when they were ready to move on in their faith, he opened their understanding that they might comprehend the scriptures.

He enabled them to recognize the things that were written and how that God's purpose was being fulfilled in what they were witnesses to.

[28 : 33] There was a mist about this. The Savior ought to have died and did die, as he ought to have suffered and ought to rise on the third day.

You see verse 46, this it is written, and this it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.

And only then did light, heavenly light, fled into their understanding regarding Jesus, and their faith moved forward. And this is important to you and me because we're never standing still in the faith.

If we're followers of Christ, it's a mistake to imagine that we're standing still. Oh, I'm just standing still. No, no. If we're not going forward, we're slithering back.

If our faith is not moving on, we're in a bit of a slide, that's a backward slide. It may not be pleasant to think about, but that's the reality.

[29 : 47] And our faith always needs to be moving forward, developing on. Part of the communion season is about a strengthening of our faith.

It's developing on from where we were. And central to our development is the Bible.

We need to be students of the word. And we need to use every opportunity to study that word. Jesus is not embarrassed to say to them, the things must be fulfilled, verse 44, which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me.

And these things are fleshed out for us in the New Testament and we are to be students of the word so that our understanding is opened and our faith is deepened and strengthened and we are moved on.

of course they learned about his resurrection body and its powers. It could come into the room through the walls or through the door, shut door.

[31 : 06] It could disappear in a moment. He could become visible or invisible at will. He could move from place to place with great speed and ease. He could eat, although he didn't need to eat, and so on.

And what we need to recognize here then is that this same Jesus, who dealt with the doubts and the turmoil of his disciples then, by speaking peace to them and opening the word to them, is the Jesus that speaks peace to you and me, and focuses our thoughts on the scriptures as the way whereby he opens our understanding that we may grow and grow in our faith and grow in his grace.

We are to recognize that we have him by faith in our hearts. His spirit dwells within and that spirit is committed to teaching us so that we don't simply think about him as a way out there on the throne of the universe, but we think about him as here within our heart, ruling and defending us, teaching us his ways, guiding us by his spirit so that we may develop on in the most holy faith.

But note what I say, develop on. We need to be developing on and we are wise when we come clean within our own hearts and say, I'm not where I was in the faith.

I need to move on. And it's important that when we see things like that and we feel that we've somehow slipped back from our allegiance to him, from our confidence in him, from simply experiencing day by day the wonderful ways of Christ in our lives, answering our cries, deepening our faith, blessing our witness and so on.

[33 : 23] See, it's interesting, most interesting and revealing, I just will touch on it as we finish, that when he opened their understanding and showed them the necessity of his sufferings and death and resurrection, he then goes on to talk about the witness, the proclamation, and that repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

and you are witnesses of these things. And my dear friends, what he said to these men and women, he says to us still, it's not just the job of the minister or the elders, it's the job of the Lord's people to be witnesses to the great things that he has done and to be witnesses of his power to direct us and help us.

And to go back over the glorious things that concern his sufferings and death and his resurrection, that we may help others to see.

Let us rejoice then that he is risen, that he's coming again, and that he has promised that his peace would be with us always in the midst of the troubles and storms of life that battered our frail vessel in these stormy seas.

And if we will have it, he speaks peace to us here tonight. He has secured it by his work on the cross.

[35 : 20] peace to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God by the death of his sin, and in him we have peace.

If we will have it, we have that peace. He has secured it, and more he gives it to all who by faith receive him. And we're to make that our business.

To all who by faith receive him. have done with doubts, have done with fears and anxieties, he is able.

He is our peace. And let us honor him by resting on his word. And let the peace of Christ rule in your heart.

Let it have the final say, the final word. Amen. Well, may he take us away. May he take us
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