

The resurrection of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Luke chapter 24 and you can find this on page 1065. Luke chapter 24, reading verses 1 to 12.

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.

Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.

And they remembered his words. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

[1 : 28] But these words seemed to them an idle, idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb.

Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves, and he went home marveling at what had happened. The second reading is Luke chapter 24, verses 13 to 35, and can be found on page 1066 of the Church Bibles.

That's Luke chapter 24, beginning to read at verse 13. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?

[2 : 49] And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning. And when they did not find his body, they came back, saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

[4 : 26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if they were going further, but they urged him strongly, saying, Stay with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is now far spent.

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them.

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

And they rose that same hour, and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.

[5 : 49] Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. Ed, thanks very much indeed for reading for us.

Let me add my welcome to you this Easter Sunday. Please do keep Luke open, page 1066, and I'm going to pray for us as we begin.

Let's pray together. Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? Heavenly Father, we praise you very much for the fact that Jesus is risen, that he is Lord, and we pray this morning, as we look at your word together, we pray, please, that you would open our eyes, that our hearts might indeed burn within us.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, the question I want to ask, and answer this morning, is how do we meet with the risen Jesus Christ today, in 2016?

As Christians, we often talk, don't we, about knowing Jesus, we often talk about following Jesus, but what does that mean, to know Jesus, and to follow Jesus? After all, he is not here, we cannot see him, and touch him.

[7 : 10] There may be some here this morning, and perhaps we're feeling a bit stale, in our Christian lives. How can we rekindle the love for Jesus, that we know that perhaps we once had in the past?

There may well be some here this morning, who we don't yet know, the Lord Jesus for ourselves. Perhaps we're interested observers, so to speak, in terms of the Christian faith. Well, how can we know Jesus, for ourselves today?

Well, the facts of the resurrection, are there for all to see. It's one of the things we rejoice in, on Easter day. Christ is risen. Jesus died, he was buried, he was raised, and the risen Jesus was seen, by many eyewitnesses, in that first reading we had this morning, from the first part of Luke chapter 24, the empty tomb was witnessed by Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James, and then separately, by Peter, and John.

In that second reading, we've just had, the risen Jesus was then seen, by Cleopas, and another disciple, on the road to Emmaus, and then, if you look down to verse 36, which we didn't have read, Jesus then appears to all the disciples, at one time.

Indeed, Luke tells us elsewhere, that on one occasion, he is seen by more than 500. But here's the question, you see, how are we to connect, how are we to connect, these facts, of the resurrection, 2,000 years ago, with our experience, today.

[8 : 42] Even in churches, I think there is much confusion, as to how we meet, with Jesus today. For some, it's through music, for others, it's through mountaintop experiences, for still others, it's in silent meditation, or in the quiet of our own hearts, or it's as we dialogue, with others.

Well, here in Luke chapter 24, the risen Jesus tells us, how we meet with him, and what an ongoing relationship, looks like, with the risen Jesus.

It is a wonderful chapter. The scene is the first Easter Sunday, obviously. The most important event, in the history of the whole world, has just taken place. The death of Jesus, on Good Friday, the resurrection, of Jesus.

And just think, will you, how very selective, Luke is, in terms of what he writes. In Acts, Luke tells us, that Jesus was with his disciples, for 40 days.

There were 40 days, between his resurrection, and his ascension, his return, to heaven. But here, in Luke 24, he just focuses, on one, of those days.

[9 : 57] Notice, that in verses 1 to 12, the group of women, who go to Jesus' tomb, don't find him there. They're left asking, where is Jesus? The reply, verse 5, why do you seek, the living, among the dead?

If they want to meet, the risen Jesus, it will not be, in a cemetery. Well, after lunch, the scene switches, in verses 13 to 35, to two disciples, walking, along a road.

And then, in the evening, to all the disciples, verses 36 onwards, meeting, in a house. And it seems, that in each, of those three scenes, Luke deliberately, asks the question, how do we meet, with the risen Jesus, and experience, the risen Jesus, today?

Well, we're going to spend, most of our time, this morning, on that second scene, verses 13 to 35. And I simply, have two headings. First of all, blind eyes. Secondly, open eyes.

Because these disciples, they start off, completely blind, to who Jesus is. But by the end, their eyes, have been opened. So first of all, blind eyes.

[11 : 16] Have a look again, at verses 13 to 16. That very day, two of them, were going to a village, named Emmaus, about seven miles, from Jerusalem.

And they were talking, with each other, about all these things, that had happened. While they were talking, discussing together, Jesus himself, drew near, and went with them. But their eyes, were kept, from recognizing him.

These two, aren't Jesus' apostles, but part of his, wider group, it seems, of disciples. As we, read on, we discover, that although, they knew the facts, of what had happened, over the last couple of days, they completely, failed to grasp, the significance, of what had happened.

It's almost comical, isn't it, in verse 17. As Jesus says to them, what are you talking about? One of them replies, verse 18, you've got to be joking, you must be the only person, in Jerusalem, who doesn't know, what's happened, over these last couple, of days or so.

Jesus presses the point, further, verse 19, what things, he asks. And they reply, verses 19 to 24, Jesus of Nazareth, this great prophet, sent by God, he's been killed, by the chief priests, and the rulers, they've crucified him.

[12 : 29] We thought he was the Messiah. But now, three days later, and there's still no sign of him. Some of the women went to the tomb, and they said the tomb's empty.

Others have said the same thing, but we still haven't seen him. It's extraordinary, isn't it? Here they are, they're walking with Jesus. Picture the scene, they're walking with Jesus, yet totally blind, to who they are walking with.

They can tell him, the facts of what happened, but the facts don't live. It's just a history lesson. Notice too, they're confused.

Verse 20, they blame Jesus' death, on the leaders. Verse 21, they think Jesus' death, was a total failure. As they say, but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Confused, just like the women who went to the tomb earlier, and just like the other disciples later on in verse 37, who think they've seen a ghost. I wonder if you've had the experience of watching a small child trying to piece together a jigsaw, perhaps a picture of Noah's Ark, or something like that, and all the pieces are there in front of them, and you see their brain almost in sort of overdrive, as they're trying to fit the pieces together, and they're trying to fit the head of a monkey to the body of a hippopotamus, and that doesn't quite work, and then some other bits, and total confusion, despite their very best efforts, completely bewildered, blind, as to how the whole thing fits together.

[14 : 09] Well, similarly, these disciples are blind. It seems they have the facts, but they are kept from recognizing who Jesus is. Why should that be?

Well, perhaps because they weren't expecting Jesus to be raised to life. Perhaps because Jesus' resurrection body was very different from his pre-resurrection body. But the reason we're given verse 16 is their spiritual blindness, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

There are several occasions, aren't there, in the Gospels when the disciples are unable to understand who Jesus is, what Jesus is saying, why Jesus has come.

Their blindness, a symptom of the fact that they remain clueless. indeed, that they are under God's judgment. And before they can understand, Jesus must work a miracle to open their eyes to grant spiritual sight and understanding.

It shows, of course, why people don't believe in Jesus Christ today. The facts about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are public facts. They are there, the facts of history.

[15 : 28] They are there for all to see. They're in the public arena. There are plenty of books, many good books on the bookstore, which demonstrate we don't have to sort of take our brains out and disconnect from the facts of history in order to believe in Jesus.

There is good, reliable evidence that Jesus Christ really is God in the flesh, that he rose from death to life. It is not lack of evidence that is the reason why people don't believe.

It is spiritual blindness. I imagine many of us will know people who have come to hear the message of Jesus. Perhaps one of the Week of Talks events a couple of weeks ago.

Or perhaps a friend who's done a Christianity Explore course. Or perhaps someone who's expressed some kind of interest in Christian things. And at one level, like these disciples, they know the facts.

They have come to grasp the facts. Yet another level, completely blind to the significance of the facts. They haven't encountered the living, risen Jesus.

[16 : 45] I might describe one or two here this morning. Perhaps we find it difficult to relate to these events events of 2,000 years ago. Perhaps we're thinking to ourselves, well, in a sense, I want to believe it.

Or perhaps you're simply more skeptical here this morning altogether, wondering how it's possible in 2016 to believe and to follow Jesus.

Well, look again at verse 16. Their eyes were kept from recognizing him. Why? Why is it they're kept from recognizing Jesus? Well, what we're going to see is that it is for our benefit.

Jesus could have opened their eyes there and then, immediately, that he saw them on that road. But of course, that wouldn't be much help to us, would it?

Because you and I cannot meet the risen Jesus physically, face to face, as they did. Instead, Jesus uses something else to open their eyes in order to show us the normal way in which, from now on, people will encounter the risen Jesus for themselves.

[18 : 01] So, my second heading, Eyes Opened. Have a look at verse 25. And he said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe, all that the prophets have spoken.

Now, just have a look, will you, again at that verse and just think to yourself, what is surprising in that verse? I think we'd expect Jesus to say, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe in the resurrection.

But actually, he says, how slow they are to believe all the prophets had spoken in the Old Testament. if only they'd understood the scriptures, the Old Testament, which of course is all they had.

Then they'd have known that Jesus was not only going to die, but then be raised to life. Jesus goes on, verse 26, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. You see, this is why these disciples were confused, because they hadn't grasped the scriptures of the Old Testament.

[19 : 25] Perhaps their reading of it had been selective. Perhaps they had believed the prophecies which spoke of messianic victory, but not those which spoke of a Messiah who would suffer and who would die.

Such that when Jesus then did die, they thought it was the end. If only they knew the Old Testament better. If only they believed all the prophets had said. It's extraordinary, is it?

Verse 25, Jesus saying, all the prophets spoke about Jesus. verse 27, all the Old Testament points to Jesus.

That little phrase made in the prophets so often used as shorthands for the whole of the Old Testament. Must have been the most marvelous Bible study, mustn't it?

As Jesus opens the Old Testament and enables them to understand the Old Testament. Well, they carry on walking, they invite Jesus to their home and what is the result?

[20 : 29] Verse 30, when he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? Their eyes finally opened having encountered the risen Jesus as the scriptures were explained to them.

But then, bizarrely, verse 31, Jesus disappears from their sight. That again looks odd, doesn't it? But you see, the point is that now that they have encountered the risen Jesus through the scriptures, so to speak, well, he will no longer be physically present with them.

That's the point, I think, that is being made. He will no longer be physically present with them as he was previously. Rather, the norm will be for these disciples to believe in him and to go on knowing him through the scriptures rather than face to face as they had done so before.

It's exactly what happens later on when the disciples all meet together. Have a look at verse 44. Then Jesus 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.

[22 : 02] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. Here are all the apostles together and we have a very similar thing.

Their eyes being opened to understand the scriptures. Now, of course, wonderfully, you and I today are in a much better position than those disciples were 2,000 years ago because we have not only the Old Testament but the New Testament as well to explain for us the significance of the coming and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask, have you ever thought to yourself, if only I'd been one of those original disciples, if only I'd seen Jesus face to face 2,000 years ago, if only I could have walked along that road and had that same Bible study, would that not have been marvelous that those disciples had?

If only I'd been there then, then I'd believe. Then my faith would be stronger or then the Christian life would be so much easier. You see, what is Luke telling us?

He's telling us that post-resurrection that is not normal. From now on, that is not the normal way in which people will encounter the risen Jesus.

[23 : 24] From now on, Jesus' followers will not see him face to face but will come to know him through the scriptures, through the Bible. It might seem odd, I guess, to some of us in our increasingly non-book culture.

Perhaps it may seem strange to us, perhaps even rather awkward. But it is the way in which Jesus says that from now on people will know him and follow him.

The story is told of a rich city businessman. He lived in one of the most fashionable parts of London. Big house, lots of cars, lovely family. Every morning his chauffeur picked him up from his house, drove him out of the drive.

There was a beggar just sitting always every morning in the same place on the street outside his drive that the man hardly noticed him engrossed in the financial times. One day, they both died.

Both the rich man and the beggar died. The beggar found himself in heaven. The rich man found himself in hell. In the distance, the rich man could see Abraham.

[24 : 37] He called out to him, I've got five brothers. Abraham, will you send someone back to warn them, each one of the five?

Well, of course, Jesus told a very similar parable. Turn back, will you, to Luke chapter 16. Luke chapter 16, page 1055. chapter 16, verse 28.

Luke chapter 16, verse 28. verse 28. For I have five brothers. Sorry, let's go back to verse 27.

And he said to them, then I beg you, Father, Father Abraham, to send him to my father's house. For I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, no, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

[25 : 50] He said to them, if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. Isn't that very striking?

How does Jesus say in that parable, blind eyes will be opened, the eyes of this man's brothers who are still alive, how will people be convinced? Well, not even, says Jesus, if someone should rise from the grave, obviously speaking of himself, and show himself to them.

If they will not listen to the prophets, they will not listen to one who rises from the dead. It's interesting that John makes exactly the same point in his gospel, in his account of the resurrection.

Just turn on to the end of John's gospel for a moment. page 1093. And just as in Luke, the eyewitnesses have seen the risen Jesus, physically they've seen him, the disciples, Mary, and then finally Thomas.

But then John records these words of Jesus to Thomas, who was doubting and is no longer doubting. Verse 29 of John chapter 20.

[27 : 10] Jesus said to him, have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Yes, Thomas believed because he saw the risen Jesus, he touched the risen Jesus.

But Jesus says, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So how is that going to happen? How are people in the future going to believe in Jesus without seeing him and touching him?

Well, verse 30. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

On May the 24th, 1738, a young man went to a Christian meeting at Aldersgate Street in the city of London. He found himself listening to an explanation of St. Paul's letter to the Romans.

As the Bible was being explained, he later wrote in his journal, at about quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

[28 : 24] I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that he had indeed taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

John Wesley's conviction that the gospel was true came through the Bible being explained to him, in his case, from Romans.

And like these disciples you see in Luke chapter 24, his heart burned within him. Well, let's draw things together.

What about for those here this morning who are not yet followers of Jesus Christ? Well, don't expect Jesus to show himself to you physically in the same way that he did to those original disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Don't hold out for some supernatural miracle to convince you that the claims of Jesus Christ are true. If Jesus was with us today, he would not do a miracle to convince us to believe in him.

[29 : 33] He'd simply get us, wouldn't he, to open our Bibles, to read our Bibles, to trust our Bibles. Why not read through Luke's account of Jesus' life, asking the question, who is this man?

Why did he die? What are the implications of the fact that he rose again? And pray that as you do so, he would open your eyes to understand. What about for those of us who are followers of Jesus?

Well, I take it if we're to grow as Jesus' disciples, we need to be reading God's Word, the Bible, don't we, and engaging with God's Word, the Bible. This is what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus.

This is real Christian spirituality, if you like. In other words, as Christians, we don't look for God and to grow in our relationship with God through mountaintop experiences or through quiet stillness or spine-tingling music or whatever it is.

But how do we encounter the risen Jesus today? Through the pages of the Bible. This is the Word of God. This is what the Spirit of God powerfully uses to get his work done today.

[30 : 47] It is through the pages of the Bible that we meet with the risen Jesus. Which means, of course, that Bible study groups, sermons, reading the Bible on our own, these things are not simply for those who happen to have a particularly academic slant or who enjoy in-depth Bible studies or complicated discussions or whatever it is.

I think it's so easy for us to think like that. So easy to think the kind of spirituality which has the Bible at its heart is for some Christians, the kind of clever ones, but not for every Christian.

Whereas the point is, isn't it, that this is normal Christianity. This is how we encounter Jesus. This is how we follow Jesus. Authentic Christian spirituality from the lips of Jesus himself.

It's why the Bible is the heart of everything we do here at Grace Church. On a Sunday morning, the sermons, midweek, our growth group, Sunday morning again, our children's work, Sunday evening, our youth work, Christianity Explore, whatever it is.

It's why the Bible is at the heart of all we do, because our aim is to encounter the risen Jesus and to follow him. It's why we encourage each other to set time aside each day to read the Bible on our own, so that we can engage with the risen Jesus through his word.

[32 : 11] And as we do that, let's not forget the great promise of these verses as we take God's word to heart, as we internalize it, that we will find the person of Jesus Christ walking off the pages, that our hearts would indeed be strangely warmed within as we do that, just as it was for those original disciples.

Why don't we have a few moments quiet, thoughts, and then I shall lead us in prayer. Amen. Then 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. Heavenly Father, we praise you very much indeed that Jesus rose from the dead, that he is indeed Lord, and we thank you for the wonderful way which Luke portrays and shows the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, how he met with those disciples, but also too how the Lord Jesus paves the way and shows us how in his physical absence yet we can encounter him and know him and follow him today.

And we pray therefore, Heavenly Father, this would indeed be our experience, that our hearts would indeed burn within as we read the scriptures, as we take them to heart. that you would equip us to know and follow Jesus today. And we ask it in his name. Amen.