

Remembering The Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Now, by now, you may know that I'm at home isolating because one of our family members has got COVID. So I'm bringing this year's Easter message to you from my study.

Well, if you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Luke chapter 23. And we're beginning on verse 50. Now, I wonder whether you can think of any situations in life where no matter how much you prepare, you're never quite ready or things don't turn out as you expect.

I think for many mothers, childbirth comes to mind. Likewise, the whole experience of going to Bible college. Last weekend, I was at a graduation at Ridley College, and it was a joy to hear the testimonies of three graduates.

And while they were all different, there was a single common thread that ran through their speeches. In reflecting of their time at college, each of them said that their experience did not turn out as they expected.

They had done their preparations, spoken to people beforehand. And yet, despite the research, things didn't turn out as expected. They were humbled and thankful, no doubt.

[1 : 12] But what they didn't expect was that they would grow in ways that they had not planned. They were blessed in ways that they didn't contemplate. Well, on the first Easter Sunday, something similar happened.

The events that transpired took the disciples by surprise, and things took time for them to sink in. Well, we start in the late of day, on the day of Jesus' death.

Despite the great sadness of Jesus' death, some made preparations to bury Jesus properly. So there was Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the council, a good and upright man who had not consented to Jesus' death.

He asked Pilate for Jesus' body. He had prepared a tomb for Jesus, one not used before. And because it was the preparation day, just before the Sabbath, they were required to rest on the next. Likewise, the women with Jesus, having seen where Jesus' body was laid, went home to prepare spices and perfumes to bury him properly.

[2 : 19] But being the Sabbath, they had to wait one more day. And so, in verse 1, we read, Now, as we look into the chapter, this is the common thing that we'll find, that there's a whole series of surprises that each group of people that Luke focuses on is surprised by Jesus' resurrection.

It doesn't matter what situation or context they find themselves in. And at one level, it's a natural reaction. Rising from the dead is impossible.

The only time it happened, sort of, was when Jesus himself raised Lazarus from the dead. But that was Jesus' doing. And now he himself is dead.

So, who's going to raise him? And yet, as we shall see, perhaps they shouldn't have been so surprised after all. But something else happened to startle the women.

Two angels appeared suddenly, with news, to tell them that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Now, we'll come back to the angels shortly. But for now, let's move on to the next set of reactions.

[3 : 43] This time, it's the eleven, minus Judas. When the women came and informed them of what they saw, look at verse 9. They taught all these things to the eleven and to all the others.

And those were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who taught this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Again, we see here surprise and disbelief. In fact, the disciples reacted rather poorly, actually, because they showed the women no respect for their words.

Peter, however, was intrigued enough and 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.

Thus far, no one has seen the risen Jesus. Although, as we know from John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene will shortly. But perhaps Peter should have known better.

[4 : 47] After all, what he saw was the linen lying there, without Jesus' body. It should have caused him to think, because if the body was simply taken away, the linen was unlikely to be there still.

Anyway, with all these events occurring, and no one being able to put two and two together, two of their number now headed to Emmaus. Now, often the road to Emmaus story is looked at in isolation.

But it's important to realize that it's part of the bigger story. And Luke puts it all together to make a point. So, let's read on from verse 13.

Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. In case you're wondering, seven miles is about the distance between the Melbourne CBD and Baldwin.

Not very far. Many of you do that distance and more, I'm pretty sure, on your runs or bike rides. And 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.

[5 : 52] 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.

Now, here is yet another sign to show that it hasn't quite sunk in yet. They still didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. One of them, named Clopas, asked him, Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

You can sense the mild annoyance, can't you, in Clopas' words. What things, Jesus innocently 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 hope 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.

[7 : 00] 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.

Now, this is actually a pretty good summation of the events. But notice, again, the skepticism. It was merely a vision of the angels. Yes, they acknowledged what the women said, but it didn't count, because no one had seen Jesus.

And I suppose we too might have reacted the same way. That is, even though the angels had said so, even though Jesus' body was no longer there, it just wasn't enough.

Not unless they saw Jesus in the flesh. Which, ironically, these two did. Jesus was right there with them. And yet, they were being kept from recognizing him.

Why? Well, I'll give you my reason a little later. But before that, let's finish with the final surprise encounter in verse 33. You see, Cleopas and his friend finally did recognize Jesus.

[8 : 07] And when they did, they rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others. Only to be greeted by the other 11 with further news. For in verse 34, they exclaimed, It is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

Appears then that in the meanwhile, Jesus did appear to Simon. Although no details are given here or in the other Gospels. Well, Cleopas and his friend now share their own story to Jesus appearing to them as well on the road to Emmaus.

But none of this prepares the disciples for when Jesus himself appears to all of them in verse 36. 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? 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. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

[9 : 17] And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked him, Do you have anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broad fish and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Now all along, we've sort of excused the reaction of the disciples each time. When the angels appeared to the women, we acknowledged that they didn't see Jesus face to face. Then the amazed who saw Jesus in the flesh, but we thought perhaps it was because Jesus was in disguise. But now we have Jesus appearing right before their eyes, announcing who he is and claiming to be alive. And yet they still couldn't quite believe their eyes.

They're still surprised and amazed, even though mixed with joy. Can this really be? It's probably what they're thinking. Jesus therefore had to resort to showing them his hands and feet.

Yes, I am the one you saw crucified. Touch me. Give me some food to eat. Because a ghost can't do that. They don't have flesh and bones. You know, with ghosts you can walk right through them, can't you?

[10:26] We've seen that in the movies. Not Jesus, but us. But no, this was not a ghost. Because Jesus was really alive. Now perhaps Simon Peter, Cleopas and the others did believe.

It was just taking time to sink in. Still, Luke's overall account of them is one of surprise and confusion. The consistent picture that we have is that no one expected the resurrection to occur, even when it stares them in the face.

And as I said earlier, at one level, it's understandable. I would have probably reacted the same way. And yet at another level, Luke tells us Jesus thought differently.

Because the plexus plainly points that way. All right. All right. I'm going to pause now for a few minutes and let you look at the Bible for yourselves. Perhaps in pairs where you're sitting.

Look at verses 6 to 8, then 24 to 27, and then finally verses 44 to 49. So that's verses 6 to 8, verses 24 to 27, and verses 44 to 49.

[11:39] You should find those verses on your outline as well or newsletter. And the question I want to ask is, can you identify what the common theme is in all three passages?

What is the one thing which the angels and Jesus repeating? Well, I wonder how you went.

Did you manage to find that common thread? Well, let's go through each of them quickly, shall we?

Firstly, in verse 6, what did the angels say? We read, 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. This is when the women remembered Jesus' words, and this was their aha moment.

Likewise, the Emmaus two were chided by Jesus in verse 25. 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?

[12:57] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. And what were they being told off over?

Well, for being slow to believe the scriptures. For not paying attention to what it foretold of the Messiah. This was the same point the angels made.

Now, to be fair, the Old Testament didn't lay it all out explicitly. Jesus would have been referring, for example, to the servant songs, Isaiah 42, for example, which we read today.

But also Isaiah 53, which we read last week, and Isaiah 49. And then there are other passages in Zechariah and the Psalms.

But Jesus had taught them these things before. All the Gospels explicitly know Jesus telling them of his impending death and resurrection.

[13:56] So, if you look in Luke chapter 18, for instance, in this very Gospel, in verse 31, this is what it says. And this was the third time Jesus did this, mind you.

It was repeated and reinforced. But did they understand at the time? No. Because what do we then go on to find and read?

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. And now when Jesus appears before them behind closed doors, he again repeats and reinforces this.

And this is now the third time in this chapter that it happens, in verse 44. 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 that they could understand the scriptures. He told them, What then is Luke's main point?

[15 : 42] Well this, that assurance of Jesus' resurrection comes from knowing the scriptures and believing in it. That's why I believe Jesus kept the two from recognizing him at Emmaus.

He wanted to first explain the scriptures to them before revealing himself to them. And that's why in verse 32, After their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, Do you see what they said to each other?

Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us? In each case, what can be inferred is that if they had paid special attention to Jesus' words, and in particular his teachings from scripture, then they would have been in a position to believe. It would not have taken them by surprise, even if the whole event may have been a surprising one at first. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus is a most unlikely event, but Jesus had prepared them for it, by teaching them and repeatedly telling them it was to occur.

What's more, God more generally had prepared Israel for it, through the scriptures, over many hundreds of years before. Of course, none of them got it, because it still required Jesus to open their minds before they could really understand it all.

[17 : 12] And this is no different for us. We too need God to open our minds by his spirit, before we are able to believe. But this is something that God will do, gladly, for anyone who humbly asks.

God is never going to deny anyone who desires to know him. But at the same time, we need to realize that it is God's ordained means for us to know him.

And that is through the scriptures. Even when he came to his own resurrection, even though he graciously showed them his hands and feet, the key thing Jesus did consistently before and after his death is to point them to the witness of God's word.

And even after his resurrection, Jesus' bodily presence was no substitute for the word of God. And that really is a comfort to us, for those of us who haven't seen Jesus in the flesh and would in this life.

Meeting him face to face is no bar to knowing him. We are able to have certainty of who he is and what he's done, including the fact that he's alive, slowly through his word and by his spirit.

[18 : 31] We don't need to see him face to face. And for those of us who already know him, then let us take to heart everything that is in God's word.

Yes, on Easter Sunday, we reassure ourselves that he is risen indeed. But because of that, we can have confidence too in everything else that is written in the word.

Of the hope of our own resurrection, of the new creation and the end to all suffering, of God listening to our prayers, of God forgiving us of our sins, of Jesus coming again to be the righteous judge.

All of this is true. So let us not be slow in believing, but let us rejoice and live confidently in the light of God's sure word.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that as you promised, your son Jesus is alive today. That he appeared to the eleven and taught them all that Moses and the prophets had foretold.

[19 : 36] Thank you that they faithfully handed on what they learned and witnessed, so that in both the Old Testament and new, we have certainty that your son Jesus is alive today and reigns with you at your right hand.

Help us to rejoice and live in the light of his resurrection and to long for our own resurrection, which you've promised in your word. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.