

Risen Indeed

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[0 : 00] You'll find it helpful if you open your Bibles to Luke 24, the reading that was just read for us on page 885. We're going to focus on the appearance of Jesus to the disciples, which is the third and final story in Luke 24 of the resurrection.

So on page 885, as you turn there, you know we all love reversals. We love reversals. Turning point in a plot line when things go upside down or right way up and there is true change. And then all the implications get figured out later. From Greek mythology to Star Wars. From Shakespeare to Harry Potter. I'm trying to cover everyone here. From Dostoevsky to Avatar. And since the third chapter of the Bible in Genesis, the story of the Bible has been about how God turns things the right way up.

And Luke's Gospel is about how salvation itself is a massive reversal of things for us. And that from the beginning of Jesus' life and ministry, he comes to bring this massive reversal.

[1 : 19] So at the beginning of Luke, when Mary knows that she is to bear the Christ child, she sings this song. God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those who are humble.

And now at the end of the Gospel, what we celebrate today is the greatest reversal that has taken place in creation, since creation. Because in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, he's overthrown death.

He's established a new creation. And he has opened a door through which we too enter into life and hope. And there's something very strange for us because there's something in us that resists this reversal of resurrection.

There's something about the reversal that upsets things. And it doesn't matter how much we complain about life now. We kind of like things the way they are.

So every time we come to this chapter, and I don't know if you experienced it again as it was being read, there's something a bit disorienting about it. It's a little bit alien and foreign to us.

[2 : 29] It's precisely because what God is doing is so new. It's so different. It's so original. And so I want to look at this little story under these three headings.

The reversal that God brings in the resurrection of Jesus presents us with a new body, a new heart, and a new hope. Firstly, then, a new body.

And if we look at this third story, which has a little heading over it, Jesus appears to his disciples. It's a third of three, which all take place on the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

And Jesus appears to his disciples at night in the upper room, as Dan pointed out to the children. They were terrified out of their wits. The physical and bodily resurrection of Jesus was somehow offensive, outrageous, and shocking to them.

And unless it's a little bit outrageous and shocking to us, we haven't really understood it. And if you scan your eyes through the verses on this appearance of Jesus, it's like an overload on our senses.

[3 : 43] Just look down there at verse 36. Jesus appears to them behind locked doors. He then speaks a word of greeting they see in here. Verse 37. They're startled and terrified.

And the best that they can come up with is they're seeing a spirit. I'm not sure ghost is quite the right interpretation, Dan Gifford, but something like that. Verse 39.

Jesus says, see my hands and feet, that it is touch me. And then he says, verse 39. Did you notice this? The spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.

And they're standing there gobsmacked. He asks for a piece of fish to eat and eats it in front of them. I think the key part of this that we struggle with is the flesh and bones side.

He's been resurrected from the dead. He's reversed death and he has a resurrection body which is material, physical, and that just doesn't fit any categories, certainly that they had.

[4 : 51] And although there's joy, it's accompanied with unbelief or disbelief. But I just point out, it's the bodiness, it's the flesh and bones-ness of Jesus' resurrection which is at the heart of the reversal.

And it's the bodiness and flesh and bones-ness that's so offensive and upsetting to us and always has been. And so we work very hard to explain this part away or to diminish this part or to take away the terror and shock and to try and domesticate and tame the resurrection of Jesus so that it might be just a little bit more comfortable for us.

And there are all sorts of ways to do this. There are shallow and superficial ways and there are cultured and sophisticated ways. One of the most superficial came from the, I read this week, in the culture section in the National Post.

One of the culture commentators, which is a job that I'd really like, said this, and I quote, To me, Easter is about coming back and carrying on, finding the power to rise above one's circumstances. Well, there's only one thing missing from that, and it's Jesus. And if you remove Jesus from the equation, of course, we can make Easter whatever we want to make it.

[6 : 10] Much more common, perhaps, in church land is the attempt to spiritualise the resurrection of Jesus, to remove the flesh and bones from the evidence covered. And you hear this from many pulpits and from bishops and theologians, that Jesus did not bodily and physically rise from the dead.

His resurrection was just a spiritual one. His flesh and bones still lie amouldering in the grave somewhere in Palestine. They say, no, no, Easter is about life after death, a new beginning, light in the dark.

And what happened to the disciples is that they had an overwhelming experience of realising that the power and truth of Jesus' teaching was great. And so that ethical teaching of Jesus and that spiritual realisation, that's what resurrection is.

The problem with the spiritual resurrection is that it just doesn't have any power to terrify or transform anyone. If you reduce the resurrection to a warm, comfortable sentiment, you steal the hard edge of its power to create the reversal in us.

It can't bring new joy. It can't bring new hope. It can't bring forgiveness of sins or life after death. It's not that Jesus' ideas live on. He lives on with raised bones and flesh which have been transformed and changed forever.

[7 : 35] But the best attempt I've read recently of trying to tame the resurrection was in the Vancouver Sun on Friday in the editorial. And I know that's not perhaps the best place to look for an interpretation of Easter.

However, I thought it was a sophisticated attempt. The editor says this, that Jesus was killed, quote, because of his refusal to conform to either the prevailing Judaic religious convention or the rights prescribed by Rome's state religion, reminding us that the Easter story is about the value and importance of tolerance, the importance of self-determination, that the mainstream is not always right, don't put your faith in repressive authorities.

Then he says, Jesus was resurrected into eternal life, quote, so as the world is reborn after the bleak days of winter, Christian believers are renewed in their faith and the rest of us may celebrate our tolerance, diversity and sense of community.

I think the cleverness here is that ties our current cultural Canadian values to aspects of the Easter story.

And the fact is that these values do indeed come from the Bible. The only trouble is that it carefully removes the living Jesus and takes the resurrected body out of the picture.

[8 : 56] And then the resurrection of Jesus becomes something which serves a current agenda and again removes the power and reversal of his resurrection. But the message of Easter is that Jesus has his flesh and bones.

And if you're tempted to think in any one of those three ways, you may miss this reversal that happens at Easter. Because it's not just that Jesus' ideas survived death, it's not just that Jesus himself survived death to live on in the memories of his followers, nor that he died and rose to help us toward tolerance and diversity.

First of all, this is a material resurrection. It is Jesus' body that has been raised. It's a body that has a different relation to space and time than our bodies do.

It doesn't seem to be bound by the old rules. But God has taken the flesh and bones that Jesus had in this world and he has raised them and transformed them into a resurrection body which is now capable of bearing eternity and the great weight of glory.

Flesh and bones, that's what it says. He's not a zombie or a ghost or a vision or a figment of their imagination. Same Jesus, born in Bethlehem, walked to Jerusalem, nailed to the cross is the man standing there with the scars of the nails, with flesh and bones, the flesh and bones of the new creation.

[10 : 26] And as Dan pointed out, while they're spluttering and looking and touching, he says, look, I've just got to eat something. And they give him a bit of barbecued fish.

It's a stretch to think of Pacific salmon. I've had the privilege of eating fish at the Sea of Galilee and it is not Pacific salmon.

Just so there. Tom Wright, his commentator, has written a massive, massive tome on the resurrection. He says that if Jesus is only raised spiritually from the dead, then Easter is just about me and me finding a spiritual dimension.

But if he's truly risen, flesh and bones, it has implications for the world. He says if you take Easter away, Karl Marx was right to accuse Christianity of ignoring political problems of this material world. He says take Easter away, and Freud was right to say Christianity is wish fulfilment. Take Easter away. Nietzsche was right to say Christianity is for wimps.

[11 : 42] But if Jesus has been raised from the dead in flesh and bones, he is the firstborn from the dead. And something has happened in this world that's never happened before.

The old creation has met its Lord. And for the first time in the old creation, the future has been brought into the old.

The new creation in Jesus' resurrected body appears in the old creation. The body which is deathless and glorious, not the process of some natural function, but an act of God.

For the first time in the old creation, we don't just see the end of the beginning, but with Jesus' resurrection, we see the beginning of the end. And the worst thing that this creation can throw at any one of us, which is death itself, has been overturned.

So this is the first point. It's new body. The reversal of death to life is a bodily death to a bodily life. Old creation to new creation, which means if you follow Jesus, your future is a physical future.

[12 : 51] You don't leave all this stuff behind. We leave a lot of it behind. But we are raised in bodies that are immortal and glorious and eternal. New bodies. Secondly, new heart.

This is a wonderful chapter. And I encourage you if you... I encourage you to read the chapter this afternoon. And notice, each of the three stories follows the same pattern.

It begins with the disciples confused and bewildered and afraid and terrified. It finishes with the disciples in joy and peace and spontaneous worship. And in between, in the middle, Jesus appears to them and teaches them his word.

Except in the first story, where an angel appears to them and teaches them Jesus' word. During his time with his disciples, before the cross, he clearly taught he would be crucified and rise again. But despite his clear teaching, they just could not bring themselves to believe what was happening, either when he was crucified or when he rose again from the dead.

[13 : 58] And here is the reality that's inside us when we come this morning to meet this great reversal of God. There's something in us that's just hostile to hearing God's word. It's a spiritual heart disease.

Jesus calls it slowness of heart. And the word means a kind of a deliberate holding back. It's a deliberately always choosing the wrong track, the one God says not to choose.

And in the story before ours, the walk to Emmaus, two of Jesus' followers are going away from Jerusalem, disillusioned, disappointed, disheartened that Jesus had been executed.

And as they're walking along, Jesus himself comes, the risen Jesus, and walks beside them. He says, what are you talking about? And they report his sad story. And they say, look, even the women say they've seen Jesus alive, but we just can't believe it.

What does Jesus do? Look at verse 25, please. And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken.

[15 : 05] 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.

The reason they don't recognize Jesus and don't believe in the resurrection is not because they don't have enough evidence. It's not because Jesus looks so different. It's their own spiritual blindness and slowness of heart. And it's only as Jesus teaches to them the Old Testament and how the Old Testament, all of the Old Testament, speaks about him. They say their hearts burn within them. And this is the burn of the reversal. It's the burn of the new creation. And so they race back to Jerusalem and they tell the others, verse 34, they burst into the door, they say, the Lord has risen, he's appeared to Simon. And everyone starts talking and in verse 36, Jesus suddenly appears amongst them. And again, look at their reaction. It's the furthest thing from what they are expecting, verse 36. [16:15] Shock, fear, terror. And again, what does Jesus say, verse 38? He says, why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts?

Jesus sees the problem as something that's going on in our hearts. that what's needed is some form of inner transformation or change before we can receive this great good news and the reversal.

Why is it? See, despite Jesus' clear teaching, the disciples clung on to their current worldview. It was a Jewish worldview. And the Jewish worldview, we know, was that there will be a day of resurrection, but it'll come at the judgment day when God will raise all the righteous together in one and there's absolutely no room for one person being raised from the dead before that day. Remember back in John 11, that magnificent chapter in the Gospels where Jesus raises Lazarus back to life. Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, they call for Jesus when Lazarus falls ill and Jesus delays and when he arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days. He deliberately delays, of course, so that he'll raise Lazarus. And when he arrives, Jesus says to Martha, your brother will rise again. She says, yes, I believe that's going to happen at the end of time, but I want him now.

[17:49] And Jesus says to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Martha, he says, do you believe this? You see, Jesus is the life and he is the resurrection. And it's so hard to cut through our worldviews to see this.

He walks up to the tomb and Jesus raises Lazarus back to life and Lazarus becomes one of a number of people in the scriptures we know who were raised back to life. life. But what makes Jesus' resurrection truly unique is that he was raised back not to this life but to resurrection life never to die again.

Everybody else in scripture was raised to this life with mortal bodies. They were given a few more years but then all of them had to experience death again. That's why you can't meet them today. But Jesus broke the power of death from the inside because he is the resurrection and the life. He blew a wide hole in death and now he lives in this realm which is beyond death in his resurrection body with flesh and bones flesh and bones which are immortal and eternal.

[19:10] He is the firstborn from the dead. So if you want the new body of the resurrection you need a new heart and you may not have a Jewish first century worldview it's more likely a scientific worldview or materialist worldview but that's okay.

None of us will receive new bodies until we have new hearts hearts that are humble before God's word that take time to listen. So new body new heart and thirdly new hope and I want to finish with this.

What does it all mean for us? I mean what's the difference if Jesus really did rise? What are the implications for us today? Look down at verse 44 with me will you?

Then he said to them these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you now he's going back to his words again that everything written about me in the law of Moses the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled and he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

It's wonderful. The fact that Jesus refers back to the words that he spoke in the past means that he knows about the future and controls the future and that means that whenever we go to Jesus' words what he says about the future will come true and so we rest our hope in him.

[20:33] That's why we gather week by week to hear the words of Jesus. And he takes the whole Bible and he says I am the centre and the heart and the focus and the reason for the story.

And he goes through the prophets and he goes through the Psalms and he shows how he fulfills them. And here are two things it means. It means this if Jesus has risen from the dead if he is really

the master of life and death it means the search is over.

And I know we love the idea of searching don't we? It's flattering to our spiritual independence and our sophistication and wisdom. They say we say there's very little there's a little bit of truth in every religion no one has all the truth I'm a spiritual seeker therefore I can do what I want and no one can tell me otherwise.

But if Jesus has risen from the dead and he holds the key to death and hell and heaven and life it's not time to search it's time to bow and to worship him and to follow him.

Wonderful illustration from the book of Acts a little later on when the apostle Paul goes to Athens and the philosophers invite him up to address them these are the key thinkers of the day and he begins his message and they just love it Paul says you know we're all searching and they say yes we're all searching and then Paul continues through Jesus and he gets to the resurrection and suddenly things get very uncomfortable he says this this is the apostle Paul the times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given us assurance by raising him from the dead and you know what happens amongst the careful and thoughtful philosophers it's bedlam they stand up and they stop him speaking because they can see that if Jesus has risen from the dead then the search is over doesn't mean it's the end of curiosity or mystery because there's more and more to Jesus Christ than we can possibly know but it means the day of searching for the answer is over and now it's time to repent and call him

[22 : 55] Lord and it also means we don't have to live life with regret I owe this thought to Tim Keller who's a pastor in New York you see our hope in Christ changes how we live lives now Keller points out that we live frantic lives usually in case we miss out on something we want great family great sex great travel great experiences and we work furiously we grab it all because we don't want to miss out and Easter says don't be so ridiculous since Jesus has died and risen again if you turn to him and place your faith in him you're not going to miss out on anything this life is not all there is and therefore we can live this life now you live a life of sacrifice you can give your money generously you can give yourself to other people the apostle Paul writing later in the book of Romans says that God who did not spare his own son but gave his son up for us all will he not with him graciously give us all things all things which means even the finest experiences you and

I have now are nothing to be compared with the true life and the true fellowship we have that he is preparing for us you see the resurrection of Jesus radically alters our hope we don't have to milk every experience here and now we can live this life in a way that's less anxious more restful more trusting for Christ has been raised from the dead flesh and bones have been raised with all the perfection that belongs to humanity and he has ascended into heaven and will come again and this is the great reversal we celebrate today that Christ has completed for us and opens to us new bodies new hearts new hope and if you humble your heart before him now and you turn to him as Lord and God begging him to forgive you placing your trust in him he will reverse your hope and what he does is he makes us citizens of heaven even now and if we are citizens of heaven where Christ is now we eagerly wait for him to return as our saviour and we know that he will take our weak mortal bodies change them into his glorious bodies like his own using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control so let's kneel and pray