

LUKE

Part 84: "I Believe in the Resurrection"

Luke 24:33-53

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Sunday, April 19, 2020 (Easter Season)

Scripture Reading

"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!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!' But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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. 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, 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 for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.' And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Luke 24:33–53, ESV).

Heavenly Father, thank you for the resurrection of your Son Jesus. As you did with your first disciples two millennia ago, would you now open our minds to understand the Scriptures. In this Easter season, may your Holy Spirit clothe us with resurrection life so that we may declare and display your gospel to our neighbors and the nations. AMEN.

Introduction

The passage I just read was the final section of the Gospel According to Luke. As a church family, we have been in and out of Luke's gospel since the Advent season of

2016. Today will be our eighty-fourth and ending sermon from our long journey through this book [to listen to the other sermons in this series visit: redeemerchristianchurch.com/luke].

As we come to the end of this series, I want to remind us of the reason Luke wrote his gospel. Luke is writing his gospel account for Theophilus, a man whose name means “one who loves God.” Some people think Theophilus was a Roman official or a wealthy Christian who had recently converted. Whatever the case, Luke wants Theophilus, and he wants us as his readers, to know and trust Jesus Christ with great certainty. Let’s read the first verses of Luke once again, which function as a type of thesis for Luke’s gospel:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1–4, ESV).

You get the idea that Luke is adopting the posture of an investigative journalist. He wants us to know that the gospel does not belong to the genre of myth. Rather, the gospel is about something that happened in real history.¹

Luke’s gospel is the story of the long-awaited messiah coming into the world. Jesus came not with great wealth or privilege, but he was born in a manger (Luke 2:1-17). Jesus shows us in his life and ministry that true power comes not from military or political might, but through sacrificial love and obedience to God (Luke 6:27-36). He shows that God is a God of scandalous grace that consistently works in and through the unlikely and the unworthy (Luke 15). Luke shows us a vision of the Son of Man who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus will conquer the world, not by the power of the sword, but by the power of the cross, where he will die for the sins of his enemies (Luke 9:22).

But all of the significance of Jesus truly hinges one thing – his resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus is one of humanity’s noble but tragic figures. With the resurrection, Jesus is Lord and God.

As we conclude the book of Luke today, I want to look at four truths that flow from believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 25.

Exposition

1.) The Physicality of Resurrection Hope

The apostles are in a haze of confusion. In the last few days, they have been through an emotional rollercoaster. Jesus, their hero, was arrested, tried, and crucified to death on a cross.

This was not supposed to happen. All their hopes of Jesus restoring the kingdom of God were crushed. Everything they left their homes and jobs for now seemed pointless.

But then three days later, everything changes. The tomb is empty. People are claiming that they have seen Jesus alive. Some have actually encountered him and spoken to him!

And as they are talking about these things behind locked doors – trying to verbally process all of this – the resurrected Jesus appears to them [show image 1 [“The Appearance to the Apostles” \(1308-1311\) by Duccio](#)].

They are both shocked and over-joyed. There is a mix of rejoicing and doubt because the disciples believe this is too good to be true.

They wonder, “Is this a waking dream? Is this the ghost of Jesus? What is going on?”

But Jesus goes to great lengths to show that his resurrection is indeed a truly embodied and physical resurrection. Look back at our text, beginning in verse 37: *“But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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” (Luke 24:37–43, ESV).*

What I hope you see in this account is that the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus was every bit outside of the disciples’ paradigm and plausibility construct as it is out of ours.

In fact, the people of the ancient world were a lot more sophisticated and intelligent than people of our age would like to think. Many of us have bought in a post-enlightenment narrative that believes our ancestors were a bunch of simple buffoons, stumbling in the dark. C.S. Lewis called this type of superiority “chronological snobbery.” But contrary to popular belief, people in the ancient world believed that when people die, they stay dead.

So, when the resurrected Jesus encounters his own apostles, they simply can’t believe it. The first gut reaction to the resurrection of the ancient world was doubt and disbelief. It is still the gut reaction of the modern world today.

For the last few centuries, critical scholars have advanced various theories to rationalize the resurrection of Christ. Some have suggested the disciples stole the body of Jesus and made up the idea of resurrection. That way, they could build their own religion and acquire power. Okay, but would these men of Galilee, who had never been outside of ancient Palestine, really be willing to travel the ancient world to tell everyone they could about something they just made up? Would they be willing to suffer and die for this false truth? As the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal once wrote, *“I tend to believe those witnesses who get their throats cut.”*

Other critics argue for what they call “swoon theory.” According to this theory, Jesus never rose from the dead, because he never actually died on the cross. Rather, in his pain, he simply fainted (or “swooned”), and the Roman soldiers merely thought he was dead. Now, even among critical scholars, this view has gone out favor, not because critical scholars believe in the resurrection, but because of what we now know about crucifixion. Crucifixion was a horrific form of torture. It wasn’t something people walked away from and said, “I’m not dead; I’m just wounded very badly.” If the Romans were good at anything, it was killing people.

Another theory that has been advanced to explain the resurrection is that the disciples in their grief and pain simply experienced a *mass hallucination*. They didn’t want Jesus to be dead, so they all envisioned him alive. But this doesn’t line up with what we see in the Bible. For example, in John’s gospel, Thomas the apostle refuses to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead, even when his best friends say they have witnessed him [show image 2 *“The Incredulity of Saint Thomas” (1601-1602) by Caravaggio*]. He says that unless he can see and touch Jesus, he will not believe. In other words, Thomas sounds a whole lot like a modern-day scientist demanding scientific proof. But that proof is exactly what Thomas gets. Jesus appears to Thomas. Thomas places his hands in Jesus’s wounds, and Thomas responds to Jesus with the words, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Today, the most popular rationalization of the resurrection is to spiritualize it. It is to say, “Jesus didn’t really die and rise again, in a literal sense. Instead, his resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, in the sense that the ‘spirit’ Jesus still live on in those who embody his message of love.” Such a take on the resurrection seems attractive because it seems intellectually respectable. But in reality, a Christianity without resurrection is no Christianity at all.

As the American author John Updike once wrote, *“Make no mistake: if he rose at all / It was as His body; / If the cell’s dissolution did not reverse, the molecule reknit, / The amino acids rekindle, / The Church will fall.”*

The resurrection is not an expendable doctrine for the Christian. The New Testament explicitly teaches that without the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Christians are a people with no real hope. The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian Church, *“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied”* (1 Corinthians 15:17–19, ESV).

But we are not a people without hope. We are a people with unflinching and eternal hope, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

By every standard of historicity, few events in the history of the ancient world are more attested than the resurrection Christ. From an external evidence standpoint, there is more definitive and consistent testimony that Jesus died and rose again than there is evidence that Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

His resurrection was attested by no less than 500 eyewitnesses (1 Cor 15:6). The message of this resurrection was confirmed by supernatural signs wonders and miracles from Jerusalem unto Rome. This message was so undeniable and so compelling that by the end of the first century, more than a million people from various nations and languages called themselves Christians. By the end of the fourth century, it was the majority religion in the Roman Empire. Today, in the western world, the way we measure time is split into two pieces because of God's dramatic intrusion into human history in life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Can we explain all this away by conspiracy or hallucination or spiritualization? No. The simplest explanation for this turn of events is that the resurrection happened. The resurrection is true.

And because the resurrection is true, Christians are invited to be a people of resurrection. As Paul says to the Romans: *"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his"* (Romans 6:5, ESV).

In the resurrection of Christ, we have witnessed the beginning of New Creation. In other words, the resurrection doesn't stop with Jesus. The power of Jesus's resurrection will one day restore our broken bodies and our broken world. One day, the power of resurrection will make all things new.

2.) The Plan of Redemption

Once the disciples come to terms with bodily resurrection of their Lord, Jesus launches into the same mind-bending Sunday School lesson that we saw in last week's sermon. He shows them how all of Scripture points to him. Look back at our text, beginning in verse 44: *"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, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead'"* (Luke 24:44–46, ESV).

Now, I know this might go against the grain of what you may have heard about the Bible, but the Bible is not best understood as a practical manual for life. The Bible does include practical wisdom for life that is divinely inspired. However, the Bible is not

primarily human-centered. It is God-centered. The Bible is God's self-revelation; his self-disclosure of who he is.

If God is infinite, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-knowing, how is it possible for us to truly know him? The truth is that no human rationality, no human will-power, no human moral goodness would ever be enough for us to come to a redeeming knowledge of God. No, the only way we could ever know God is for him to reveal himself to us. And in Holy Scripture, that is exactly what he has done.

The Bible reveals how God made the heavens and the earth and how he made the universe in perfection and harmony. He made man and woman as his image-bearers to rule over and steward God's creation. But humanity rebelled. We chose to worship creation rather than our Creator. We chose to define good and evil according to our own self-interest, apart from reference to God. We brought sin and death into the world, and fractured God's good creation.

But instead of abandoning his creation to self-annihilation, God initiated a rescue operation that he had planned before the foundation of the world. From all nations of the world, he chose a nation of weak slaves named Israel. And through the history of Israel, he revealed his character and nature to the world. He delivered Israel from bondage and brought them to a promised land. He gave them a kingdom but sent them into exile for rejecting his Lordship. He then brought them back and restored them. And through every detail of Israel's history – the temple, the sacrifices, the prophets, the priests, and the kings – God was revealing himself.

But ultimately, the law of Moses, the history of Israel, and the word of the prophets were not designed to be the complete revelation of God. Instead, they worked together to prefigure and build the categories for God's ultimate revelation which would come through a *person* – the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in Jesus Christ that we see the righteousness of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

As the author of Hebrew begins his book, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power”* (Hebrews 1:1–3a, ESV).

If this is true, this means that we cannot afford to see Jesus as a life-coach or a positive role model. Jesus is not just a good example. Jesus is not just a moral teacher or a wise human philosopher. Jesus is not just a metaphor or symbol for a noble life of love. Jesus Christ is the ultimate self-revelation of God!

All of life, all of history, all of the cosmos points to him! All of our lives are to be centered on him!

And if this is true, it means that we have a mission. It means “...repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Belief gospel of God includes and demands participation in the mission of God.

But we are not to go about this mission in our own strength. And that leads us to the next point.

3.) The Promise of the Father

As Jesus commissions his apostles for the ongoing mission of the church, he does so by making a profound promise: “You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:48–49, ESV).

This “Promise of the Father” is nothing less than the being baptized by and filled with the Holy Spirit of God (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:33). And in Luke’s sequel, the book of Acts, we are able to witness the power of the Holy Spirit work in and through the early church.

Now, there is a lot to say about the Holy Spirit that can’t be said in one point of one sermon. But suffice it to say, the Holy Spirit is not a force; he is God. He is a co-equal and co-eternal person within the Divine Trinity, who saves, sanctifies, and sends us.

The Holy Spirit saves us. He is the one who removes the veil of death that lies over our hearts so that we can behold the face of Jesus in faith (cf. 2 Cor 3:16-18). As he raised Jesus from the dead, the Holy Spirit also regenerates our souls. He renews our minds so that we might believe the gospel and trust in Jesus!

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us. He applies to us all that Christ has accomplished, so that we might be justified, adopted, sanctified, and ultimately glorified in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:11).

And the Holy Spirit sends us. The Holy Spirit actively empowers the body of Christ to continue the ministry of Christ. We are to declare and display the gospel. But we do not engage in this mission in our own strength. We are to be a Spirit-dependent and Spirit-empowered people.

We have a mission. Our lives have an eternally significant purpose.

4.) The Ongoing Prayer Ministry of Jesus

At the end of forty days (Acts 1:3), wherein Jesus teaches and trains his disciples about the kingdom of God, it is time for him to return to heaven.

Look at 24:50: “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into

heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:50–53, ESV).

Christians have called this major moment the “Ascension of Christ” [[show image 3 "The Ascension of Christ" \(c. 1340\) by Pacino di Bonaguida](#)].

Jesus ascends to the right hand of his Father in heaven (cf. Acts 2:33; Psalm 110). This ascension is Jesus’s moment of enthronement. Jesus has been exalted over his enemies and over death itself. He is Christ the Victor and the Divine Warrior, who triumphs over all rival powers.

And what does the Bible tell us that Jesus does in this position of great cosmic authority?

He prays.

He prays for his people. He prays for you, and he prays for me. He continues his ministry on our behalf, as our great High Priest who lives and intercedes for you and me. As the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*” (Romans 8:34, ESV).

Conclusion

Right now, in our time of global pandemic and economic turmoil, I can think of no greater hope than the one offered to us by the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we say we believe in the resurrection, we are saying that we believe that in the same way that Jesus rose again from death, the power of Jesus’s resurrection will bring life out of our death. We are saying that what God has done in Jesus, he will one day do in all of creation. We are saying that the same Holy Spirit that rose Jesus from the grave lives within us and empowers us for the mission of God. We are saying that right now, our resurrected Lord is interceding on behalf of his people from the throne of heaven.

Redeemer Christian Church, may we know the resurrection of Christ. May we believe in the resurrection of Christ. And may we rest in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, now in this Easter season, and forevermore.

AMEN.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you that your Holy Spirit inspired the Gospel According to Luke to be written for our sake, so that we might have certainty concerning the things we have been taught about Jesus. I pray that your gospel would be an unshakable foundation of hope in these uncertain times.

Lord, we continue to pray for the sick, the weak, and the vulnerable, would you give them healing and protection.

We continue to pray for our medical professionals and essential workers, would you shield them and strengthen them with your power.

We continue to pray for our workers and businesses that have lost jobs and income, would you grant them miraculous provision.

We continue to pray for our governmental leaders and officials, would you guide their hearts and minds with wisdom and compassion.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you would break the power of this virus and end the days of distancing and the inability to work. But until that day comes, help us to be good neighbors. Help us to find our peace in you and not our circumstances. Help us to foster kindness and unity, not strife and division. May your Holy Spirit empower us to give glory to your name in the way we give, in the way we serve, and in the way we live.

Sign and seal the words of your gospel deep within our hearts, so that we might declare this gospel with our words and display this gospel with our lives to our neighbors and to the nations. In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray. AMEN.

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