

April 8, 2001 by Steve Brandon



The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

Luke 24:31

Year after year, in the life of the church across the world, there are two events upon which we focus our attention more than any other. These are Christmas and Easter.

As we lead up to Christmas, churches often celebrate it for as much as a month before hand. In the church in which I grew up, we celebrated "the advent season," by lighting candles in our worship service on each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. With respect to Easter, many churches designate the 40 weekdays between Ash Wednesday and Easter as the season of Lent (which means, "Spring"). Lent is intended to be a time of spiritual preparation for Easter. During this whole season, churches often have special services which focus our attention upon Easter. When I grew up, we always celebrated Palm Sunday by distributing Palm branches to all in the church. At Kishwaukee Bible Church, we will have a "Good Friday" service this Friday night.

While the Bible nowhere commands us to celebrate these events as we do, I do believe that it is a helpful practice to reflect upon the marvels of the Christian faith. For the next two weeks, we are going to look at the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to remind us once again of its marvels and importance to our lives today.

I feel that it is important to do so, because of the central significance that His Resurrection has in the Christian Faith. For instance, ...

- Paul said that our faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14) and we are still dead in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17) if Jesus didn't rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14).
- If Jesus didn't raise from the dead, He would have been shown to be a false prophet, rather than the Almighty Son of God and we would have no hope.
- The Bible says that Jesus was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God almighty in order that he would be head over all things (including the church). We have no head of the church if Jesus did not rise again from the dead (Eph. 1:18-23).
- We are not made alive together with Christ, nor raised up with him, nor seated with him in the heavenly places if Jesus did not rise from the dead (Eph. 2:5-6). Our own salvation is at stake
- The Bible says that Jesus "ascended on High and led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8). The gifts He gives to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), are dependent upon His resurrection.
- Jesus is called the first fruits of those who are asleep. The promise of eternal life to us who believe in Him and the transformation of our bodies into conformity with the body of His glory is dependent upon Christ's resurrection (Phil. 3:21).

Furthermore, anywhere the Bible speaks about Jesus carrying on His current work, is predicated upon His resurrection....

- Jesus' promise to go and send the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, was contingent upon His resurrection and His return to glory.
- Jesus' present ministry as Advocate for us and Intercessor on behalf of us, is predicated upon His resurrection.
- Jesus' current waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet implies that Jesus is alive and well, which assumes that He rose from the dead.

In other words, if you take away the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, you destroy Christianity. The non-believing world understands this and often attacks the Resurrection in an effort to discredit Christianity. If you want to destroy a building you strike at its foundation. If you want to tackle a football player, you go for his legs.

The natural man today asks, ""How can we believe anything completely unknown to human experience?" In this case, the physical resurrection of a human being. The questions are rightly asked. Let's face it, the resurrection is perhaps today the most difficult thing for people today to believe. Dead people just don't come to life. We understand this. People in the 1st century understood this. When the people at Athens understood that Paul was speaking about "the resurrection of the dead," they began to sneer.

But, though there were those in the first century who didn't believe, there were many that did believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And so should we believe it as well.

Tonight, I would like to strengthen the foundation of our faith, by examining the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whatever is attacked in our faith needs to be fortified. I would like to continue to encourage you in the fact of the resurrection. I would like to show you from Scripture how much proof there actually is for the resurrection. In ancient times, the gates to cities were often attacked. As a result, some of the most fortified places in the cities were the gates. So tonight, we fortify the resurrection, which is constantly under attack today.

In order to do this, I would like to direct our attention to two verses of scripture, which will form the general outline of our study this evening. We will use one verse tonight and we will use the other verse next Sunday evening. Please open your Bibles this evening to Luke, chapter

24. The two verses we are going to look at this evening are verses 31 and 32.

These verses come at the end of an exciting story that Luke has recorded for us. It is the story of the men on the Road to Emmaus. These men had believed in Jesus and had hoped that He was going to be the Messiah, who would come and redeem Israel from the bondage of the Roman governmental rule. They were disheartened when He was crucified, rather than being crowned King. They were walking back to Emmaus (about 7 miles from Jerusalem) after the great feast of the Passover in a daze, because of their disappointment. They were sort of like athletes who have just lost the big game. They had great expectations, but it didn't come to pass.

Jesus came along beside them but they couldn't recognize Him. He began to explain the Scriptures to them and why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer, die, and raise again. Finally, they arrived at Emmaus. Jesus came in to dine with them. That is the context of these verses.

Let me begin reading at verse 30, "And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:30-32).

Now, the reason that I have picked these two verses for us to examine tonight is because these two verses demonstrate the two **means** through which Christ has made His resurrection known as well as the two **obstacles** to benefit from these means.

If you think about it with me for a moment, you might be able to discern the two **means** which Christ used to make known His resurrection. The first is simply the appearances that He made -- visible, tangible, real life flesh and blood proof. Historic proof! The second is through the testimony of God's inspired writers concerning to the resurrection. Scriptural proof!

Tonight, we are going to look at the first of these - His appearances. Thus, the title of my message, "Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus."

In verse 31, we see Jesus Christ appearing in flesh and blood to some of His disciples. The text says, "their eyes were opened and they recognized Him." At this point, I might tell you, "Isn't this great! Jesus appeared to these disciples. They recognized Him. They knew it was Him. And so likewise, we ought to believe in the resurrection of Jesus simply from this testimony alone."

Yet, sometimes we feel like the disciples, who refused to believe the testimony of the women who saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. Luke records for us that these words appeared to the disciples as nonsense, and they would not believe these women (Luke 24:11).

Tonight, I simply want to compound the evidence by showing you how many times the testimony of the Scriptures is that Christ rose from the dead. Though it would be sufficient for us if one verse in the Bible said, "Jesus rose from the dead," our faith is strengthened in the many, many times in which Jesus appeared to other people. Furthermore, I would like to trace the appearances of Jesus chronologically through Scripture (which will require that you get your fingers ready to move).

Furthermore, tonight will be spent much more in simply identifying the appearances of Jesus and describing the physical surroundings of His appearance. We will not spend much time expounding any of these appearances. I simply want the weight of the number of times that Jesus appeared to impress upon us the over-whelming proof that there is for His resurrection.

Appearance #1

Jesus' first appearance of Jesus after His resurrection was to Mary Magdalene. (She was the one from whom seven demons were cast out). The testimony to this is found in John 20. In verse 1, we find Mary coming to the tomb and finding it empty. In verse 2, it is recorded that she ran to tell Peter and John, who returned to the tomb. Peter and John found the tomb to be empty and left Mary at the tomb.

We pick the narrative up in verse 11, "But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' When she had said this, she turned around, and beheld Jesus standing [there,] and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!' (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and [that] He had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18).

Notice that when Jesus appeared to her, he was back in flesh and blood. Mary clutched Him and grabbed hold of Him, but Jesus had to tell her to let go. The Jehovah witnesses claim that when Jesus came back, he was merely a spiritual being. But the scripture describes Jesus as having tangible flesh that could be felt.

Appearance #2

Jesus' second appearance was to Mary Magdalene and to another Mary. This is recorded for us in Matt. 28:8-10. You can see in verse 1 that it says that Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" came to look at the tomb. (This "other Mary" was Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, as it states in 27:56). In verse 8, we see that Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary."

"And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and take word

to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me" (Matthew 28:8-10).

Appearance #3

The third time Jesus appeared to anyone was probably when He appeared to Peter. Now, the only details that we have concerning this are found in 1 Cor. 15:5. Picking up Paul's comments, he says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

Apparently, Jesus showed Himself to Cephas (another name for Peter), before He did to the rest of the disciples. So, for this reason, we place this appearance as Jesus' third appearance. We will pick up Jesus' appearance to the twelve after the Road to Emmaus incident we have seen before.

It is probable that Jesus appeared to Peter first, because Peter was their leader and He was the one that betrayed Jesus 3 times. Jesus certainly wanted to re-assure Peter for the importance of his role in the furtherance of the gospel.

Appearance #4

Jesus' fourth appearance was to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, found in Luke 24. We know who one of them was - Cleopas (verse 18) and the other, we don't know. Speculation abound. Some say Luke. Some say Cleopas' wife or son. We don't know. Notice that we get some reference to when these things took place in Luke 24:13, "And behold, two of them were going that very day [probably a reference to the first day of the week, as Luke 24:1 states, the same day that Jesus rose from the dead] to a village named Emmaus."

We have already seen how Jesus manifested Himself to these disciples, but look again, in verse 31, "And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. ... And they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, 'The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon. 'And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:31,33-35).

So these men were relating to the other disciples how Jesus had appeared to them. Notice also, that they mention how Jesus had also appeared to Peter as well. It is difficult to know of the exact timing of things, but before Jesus appeared to the 12, He appeared to Peter and these two disciples. If we keep reading, we will find Jesus appearing to the disciples.

Appearance #5

The fifth appearance is found beginning in verse 36. Let me read, "And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst" (Luke 24:36). The sense is that he simply appeared. Nobody let Him in the door. The disciples simply found Him in their midst. It makes sense then why they were "startled and frightened."

"But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing 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 could not believe [it] for joy and were marveling, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate [it] before them" (Luke 24:37-43).

Notice that again, Jesus came back in the flesh. Notice that Jesus ate some fish with them. He appeared to all of the disciples.

By the way, this is the same appearance as is recorded in John 20:19-23. Turn over there. Again, we see the same thing happen, because it was probably referring to the same event.

"When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week [again a reference to that first Sunday evening], and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst" (John 20:19).

This is the appearance that Paul referred to when He spoke about Jesus appearing to "the twelve," (in 1 Cor. 15), which was a coined term used to refer to the core group of the disciples. Really, there were only 10 of them there on this occasion: Judas had hanged himself (Matt. 27:5) and Thomas didn't see Jesus. It says in verse 24, that "Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them." Thomas later said (in verse 25) to reports that they had seen Jesus, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Later, Jesus would appear to Thomas, as we shall see.

Appearance #6

The sixth appearance continues right on here in John 20. Up until now, the previous 5 appearances of Jesus had all occurred on the day in which he rose from the dead. The women came to the tomb very early in the morning and Jesus appeared to the disciples late that night. We pick up the reference now 8 days later, when Thomas gets to see Jesus and place his finger in Jesus' hand and his hand in Jesus' side.

"And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace [be] with you.' Then He *said to Thomas, 'Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed [are] they who did not see, and [yet] believed' (John 20:26-29).

We all are like Thomas was before he physically saw Jesus. We haven't seen the raised Jesus. And Jesus calls us blessed if we still believe.

So far, we have many different appearances of Jesus in many different circumstances to many different people. This would be a most difficult thing to "stage" or "fake." Magicians get pretty good at doing their tricks on the stage using their props with their environment after lots of practice. However, Jesus appears here in many different ways and many people give testimony to this.

Appearance #7

For the seventh appearance of Jesus, we simply continue on in John's account. John 21:1, "After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias [We don't really know how long after appearance #6 this was, but it was enough time for the disciples to resume their fishing business.], and He manifested Himself in this way, ..." Verses 2-23 describe Jesus' miraculous catch of fish and the ensuing discussion He had with His disciples.

It is important to note how Jesus somewhat veiled His appearance to the disciples. It seems as if Jesus didn't stay with the disciples all the time. If so, I don't think that Peter would have jumped out of the boat and begin to swim to shore before the boat if Jesus was around every day (John 21:7, "That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea").

This is the context in which Jesus charged Peter with his task to care for His sheep.

Appearance #8

For the eighth appearance, we need to turn back to 1 Cor. 15. We have already seen verse 5, "that He appeared to Cephas (i.e. Peter), then to the twelve (several times, now)." Continuing on in verse 6, Paul writes, "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep."

This is the only details that we have recorded for us in the Scripture of this appearance. Paul simply says that Jesus appeared to 500 people all at once. Perhaps people simply saw Him. Perhaps He preached to them. We don't know.

What is very significant, however, is that Paul says, that most of these people are still alive (i.e. they "remain until now" as opposed to falling asleep - that is dying). When Paul says that most of these people are still alive, the idea is that if you doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, go and ask any of these 500 people. They will tell you that this testimony is true. Such claims certainly gave Paul credibility in his testimony.

Appearance #9

The ninth appearance is found in the next verse of 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 7 reads, "Then He appeared to James." James was the Lord's brother, who, by the way, may not have been a believer, until Jesus appeared to him (John 7:3; Acts 1:14; Gal. 1:19).

Appearance #10

The next verse simply says, "then to all the apostles." This probably refers to the next two appearances, when Jesus was giving His final instructions to the disciples, as is found in Matt. 28 and Acts 1, which we will see. Turn to Matthew 28.

"But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped [Him]; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:16-20).

Appearance #11

The eleventh appearance of Jesus was his last appearance prior to His ascension and glorification in heaven.

It is found in Luke, chapter 24 and in Acts, chapter 1. For the sake of time, we will look only at Acts 1. In verses 3-8, Jesus was appearing to His disciples and was giving final instructions to them. Verse 9 reads, "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Now, you might think that we are done - for Jesus has gone up into heaven to be with the Father. However, Jesus does appear several more times in the pages of Scripture. Most of these will be in the book of Acts.

Appearance #12

Turn over to Acts, chapter 7. This records the martyr's death of Stephen. Look, particularly at verse 55-56, "But being full of the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56).

Again, Jesus Christ appeared, in His post-resurrection form to Stephen. This time, He is in heaven with His glorified body.

Appearance #13

Turn to Acts, chapter 9. This is the appearance of Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus. Again, we won't read all of this section, but look at verse 4. Paul was blinded by the light that shone. "Saul fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you

persecuting Me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do'" (Acts 9:4-5).

It was clearly Jesus who manifested Himself to Paul, which was the catalyst to his conversion.

Appearance #14

The fourteenth appearance of Jesus is debatable. In Acts 20:24, Paul refers to "the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." Some postulate that Paul was referring to his time in Arabia (Gal. 1:17), where he said that he received instruction concerning the gospel "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). I mention this appearance only for completeness sake.

Appearance #15

Jesus did reveal Himself to Paul later, for a 15th appearance, as recorded in Acts 22, in which Jesus warned of the coming persecution.

"And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.' And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 22:17-21).

It says in verse 17 that Paul fell into a trance, similar to Peter's vision in Acts 10. However, in Acts 10, it is not clearly Jesus Christ who appeared to Peter. Here, it is clearly Jesus, who appeared to Paul. Notice that this wasn't merely a dream. It was an actual appearance of Jesus Christ, with dialogue back and forth.

Appearance #16

The final appearance (#16) of Jesus was to the apostle John, when he wrote his Revelation, which is nothing more than the revelation which Jesus Christ gave to him.

So, why did we go through all of the Post-resurrection appearances of Jesus? I wanted to show you how often Christ appeared to His followers. I also wanted you to note how the circumstances surrounding His appearances were all radically different, that they must be believed!

Let me illustrate it in this way. Suppose it's the middle of the night and my wife wakes me up and says, "Steve, I heard something outside." I sit up in bed and are real quiet, but you don't hear anything. I might go back to sleep thinking that my wife is crazy or something.

Suppose, however, the next day, I am talking to my neighbors, who say something like, "Hey, did you hear something outside last night? We sure did, but we don't know what it was." Now, doesn't it make my wife's story more credible?

Then, later in the day, suppose I talk with some of my other neighbors, and they heard this sound also. All of a sudden, that which you doubted becomes cemented in your head as fact to be believed and investigated!

So also with the Resurrection. The differing circumstances of the Resurrection go a long way to proving the fact that Jesus Himself rose from the dead and actually appeared to these people.

But here is my big question tonight. As clear as God made the resurrection, why didn't He make it clearer? He could have made it clearer. Why didn't Jesus walk with Mary back to the disciples to demonstrate that He was alive? He could have. Why didn't Jesus stay with the disciples between His appearances? He could have.

Or, to put it another way, ...turn back to Luke 24. We started with verse 31 tonight and I would like to end with verse 31 tonight. "And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:30-31).

My question, "why did He vanish from their sight?" Because God wants us to have to trust Him in faith.

"We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8-9). It takes faith to believe.

God has supplied to us ample proofs of the resurrection. I addressed one of those tonight -- the appearances of Jesus. There are many, many, many more proofs of the resurrection. Perhaps we will look at some of this in the years to come. We could look at ...

- ... the displaced stone
- ... the empty tomb as a witness to the resurrection of Christ.
- ... the undisturbed grave clothes
- ... the Evidence of the Missing Ossuary

- ... the character of the human witnesses to the resurrection.
- ... the transformed lives of the disciples after the resurrection.
- ... the disciples experience of divine power in the post-resurrection period.
- ... the evidence of the Day of Pentecost.
- ... the evidence in the custom of observing the first day of the week.
- ... the origin of the Christian church.

But listen, all of the proofs in the world will never make up for a lack of faith. You will never be able to prove the resurrection with scientific-like accuracy - demonstrable, repeatable, predictable. It simply won't be done. You need to believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead. I ask you tonight, do you believe? Are you convinced? The apostles were. They went out and changed the world with their confident preaching.

My challenge to you is this. Pray for opportunities this week to make known your faith in the resurrection of Jesus to a non-believer. Watch God provide for you the divine appointments, which He sets up and follow through and express your faith in Him.

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