

He Has Risen

Sunday school lesson for the week of April 1, 2018

By Dr. Hal Brady

Spring Quarter: Acknowledging God

Unit 2: All Glory and Honor

Lesson Scripture: Luke 24:1-12, 30-35

Lesson Aims

1. Restate the mystery of Jesus' missing body and the resolution of that mystery.
2. Explain why the women's preparation was unnecessary.
3. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving that God keeps his promises.

On this joyful Easter Sunday, we are full of hope! In many worship services today, that hope will be expressed by a worship leader who declares, "He is risen," to which the congregation responds, "He is risen indeed."

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. It is clear that Jesus was crucified and buried on Preparation Day, which is the day before the Sabbath (Luke 23:54). The writer of Luke further indicates that the women prepared "spices and perfumes" on Preparation Day so as not to violate the Sabbath. As we probably know, the spices were used for anointing Jesus' body, following the Jewish burial custom of wrapping a body in strips of linen and spices. For sure, this was not an easy task, at least in the case of Jesus, as John 19:39 reveals the use of approximately 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes.

Witness of the Women (Luke 24:1-12)

Scholars inform us that the focus in Luke 24, on the witness of certain women, has Luke 23:50-56 as its point of departure. What follows presupposes that the women knew the location of the tomb, and they did (compare Matthew 27:61). However, the same is not said of the remaining 11 apostles, although at least two of them certainly did – Peter and the other apostle whom Jesus loved.

Now, the first day of the week is Sunday; the Preparation Day (Friday) and the Sabbath (Saturday) are past. These women who arrived early in the morning at the tomb were totally astounded at what they found. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. Archaeologists have uncovered hundreds of tombs within three miles of Jerusalem. We are informed that many have stones that can be rolled away like the one mentioned here. But Mark 16:4 records that the stone over Jesus' tomb was "very large." And since limestone weights

about 170 pounds per cubic foot, even a stone of moderate size means substantial weight. According to scholars, a stone four feet across would weigh over a ton. No wonder these women were surprised.

Verse 3 states that when the women entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Thus, the missing body of Jesus is the central, dramatic element of Luke 24. Luke makes this clear as he builds to the climax of his Gospel that there is a reason for Jesus' body to be missing.

Moving forward, the women's confusion about the missing body doesn't last long, as it quickly gives way to fear. The two men who caused the fear are identified as angels (Luke 24:23). And while John also mentions two angels, Matthew and Mark only mention one, likely because the focus is on the speaker only.

As scholars note, fear at the appearance of an angel is apparent in the writings of Luke (1:11,12,29;2-9). However, in other appearances, angels tell people not to fear. But here there is no such admonition. The women's response of bowing appears to be instinctual. Bowing also seems to be a common act of respect for authority in the ancient near East, as noted in Genesis 33:3;42:6; and Ruth 2:10.

The angels' concluding question in verse 5, "why do you look for the living among the dead?" is valid but not understandable to these women. These women have not yet seen Jesus alive and they do not expect to. Even so, there is a hint to the mystery of the missing body in the angels' question.

Next, in verse 6, the angels state the most important fact in all history when they declare the reason for the absence of Jesus' body – that "He has risen." The verse reads, "He isn't here but has been raised." The implication is clearly that God is responsible for Jesus' return to life. God has intervened just as Jesus promised. "Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again" (24:6,7). This remark is both a call to remember and a rebuke. Here, we are reminded that God often says things we fail to understand because we have trouble accepting them.

According to scholars, the remark in verse 6-7 is important for another reason. The reference to the necessity of the Son of Man going through these events emphasizes divine design. These things must happen. God's plan for Jesus had three steps: betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. And the angels' remark leads the women to recall Jesus' remarks. If we want to find the fulfillment of God's promises, we must look to Jesus.

What happens next is that the women leave the tomb and journey back to where the disciples and others are gathered and share their incredible story. Luke indicates that there are at least five

women involved with three being named, Mary Magdalene (she was delivered from demon possession by Jesus, Luke 8:2); Joanna (wife of an official in Herod's household, Luke 8:3); and Mary (the mother of James and Joseph, Matthew 27:56). There is some scholarly debate as to whether this Mary is the mother of Jesus. At any rate, all these women are followers of Jesus. But despite these numerous female witnesses, their story is not viewed as credible. Instead those gathered (including the Apostles) dismiss their story as "nonsense." We can only imagine the disappointment and hurt these faithful women must feel at not being believed.

Luke tells us in verse 11, "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." Their words seemed to them ... take your pick ... "as an idle tale," "empty talk," "a foolish yarn," "utter nonsense." For a moment, let's focus on several possible reasons why the resurrection might not be believed even today.

First, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because it seems "an idle tale." Someone has described the Easter story using the analogy of a baseball game. At the bottom half of the ninth inning with your team behind 20-0, you decide to go home and avoid the rush in the parking lot. However, in the next day's newspaper, you find that somehow your team won! Second, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because of fear. Reading further in our Lukan text we find these revealing words, "But they were startled and frightened..." (Luke 24:37). This was the disciples' reaction to the supernatural. They thought they had seen a ghost. These disciples were simply afraid to believe. And, in reality, isn't that true of some moderns today? If the resurrection is true, then life will make sense alright, but only on God's terms and not on ours.

Third, the resurrection is sometimes disbelieved because it is simply too good to be true! Where there seems to be a period in life, God often puts a comma. Maybe for some people the news of the resurrection is just too good to be true, too good to assimilate all at once.

But we take heart in that Peter got up after hearing from the women 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" (2:12). The fact that Peter is wondering to himself indicates that Peter needs a reminder of Jesus' words just as much as the women did.

Epiphany at Emmaus (Luke 24:30-35)

As the two disciples walk along the road and discuss the despairing happenings of the previous days, we are informed that Jesus draws near and begins to walk with them. But unfortunately, they don't recognize him. However, the nature of the conversation and the going down of the sun impels the two to invite the incognito Jesus to remain with them. Especially, they invite him to share a meal.

Now Luke 24:13-29 sets the stage for our text (Luke 24:30-35) which begins with the happenings of that shared meal.

Verses 30 and 31 read: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.” It is no accident that Jesus is revealed as he sits having table fellowship with the two disciples. The table was the place for fellowship in the ancient world. Luke has underscored the importance of meal scenes throughout his Gospel (examples: Luke 5:27-39; 7:36-50). The table or mealtime was a place where Jesus was heard and where his presence came across most intimately. This fact suggests that Jesus reveals himself in the midst of the basic moments of life. He is at home in the center of our everyday happenings.

Concerning the situation at hand, the drama has been building since 24:13 with the climax now unfolding.

Scholars point out that the similarity between Jesus’ actions in this verse and the earlier action in Luke 22:19 are intriguing. There Jesus “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them” in instituting the Lord’s supper. The question is, does Jesus intend the current situation to be a reminder of the previous?

The scholars go on to point out that three factors suggest the answer is no. First, Jesus has said that he “will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Second, no cup is mentioned (compare 22:17,20). Third, the blessing and breaking of the bread was not something unique to the last supper (Matthew 14:19).

As William Barclay put it: “It was at an ordinary meal in an ordinary house, when an ordinary loaf was being divided, that these men recognized Jesus ... It is not only at the communion table we can be with Christ; we can be with Him at the dinner table too.”

Up to this point in Luke 24, Jesus’ body has been missing or otherwise kept from being recognized. This is the point, however, in Luke’s resurrection account where that changes.

Here, it is thought that interplay of physical and spiritual blindness may also be intended by Luke. Jesus’ two hosts for the meal are men who “were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). At this same time, they had been rebuked by Jesus: “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (24:25)! The suggested connection is that the lifting of their spiritual blindness (24:32) had to happen before they were able to recognize Jesus physically.

The phrase “hearts burning within us” (v.32) refers to a sense of longing or excitement that comes while learning truth. Scholars note the sequence: (1) the correction of deficient understanding of the Scripture while on the road to Emmaus was accompanied by burning hearts;

(2) that correction in turn has led to the ability to recognize Jesus; and now (3) the two disciples comprehend the connection between (1) and (2).

Verse 33ff tells us how these two disciples, when they received their own joy, could not wait to share it. Immediately, they hastened back to Jerusalem, as the good news was too good to keep to themselves. As we know or should know, “the Christian message is never fully ours until we have shared it with someone else.

These two disciples return to Jerusalem only to hear from the Eleven and the others what they now already believe and have experienced, that “the Lord has risen.” This is the focus of all accounts in Luke 24 and the central idea of what is commonly called Easter today.

Those gathered also confirm that the “Lord has appeared to Simon.” Of course, this is Peter’s other name as well as Cephas (Luke 6:14; John 1:42). So why is this described here about Simon? When Peter last appears in Luke 24:12, the Lord has not appeared to him. Now we read that he has.

And then verse 35 actually serves as a transition to Jesus’ appearance in verse 36. The same verse also summarized all that has happened to the two men from Luke 24:13 until now. As we are minded, Jesus’ body was missing from the tomb, but found when he was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The joyful point of Luke 24 is that “He is risen!” And this should be remembered not just at Easter, but every day. Why? Because the resurrection of Christ has daily implications in terms of blessings and responsibilities for all believers. Hallelujah! Christ is risen! Thanks be to God!

Action Plan

1. How can we ensure we relate to Jesus as living Lord and not as a long-dead historical figure?
2. How do lives focused on the resurrection differ from those that are not?
3. How can we encourage each other in our faith in the risen Lord?

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