

The Resurrection

Luke 24: 1-12

Luke records that early in the morning on the first day of the week several of the women who had followed Jesus came to the tomb. They did not come to see an empty grave, but rather they came bringing spices in order to embalm the body of Jesus. It was with great perplexity that they came to a tomb with the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. While they contemplated what had happened to the body of Jesus two angels appeared to them and proclaimed the news they did not dare believe, "He is not here, but is risen!" And so it was that a group of women became the first evangelists of the gospel. They went and told the eleven remaining Apostles and the others that Jesus was risen from the dead. It is significant that no Apostle ventured to the tomb early that Sunday morning. They only went to the site after the trail had been blazed by Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James.

When the Apostles heard the news that the body of Jesus was gone and that angels had told the witnesses that Jesus was risen, several of them left in haste to go to the tomb. Not all of the Apostles dared believe that perhaps Jesus was alive again, "And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them" (Luke 24:11). Among the number who did go to the tomb was Peter, who stooped down and saw the linen clothes lying by themselves. Luke records that Peter marveled at what had happened.

In this day and age we should likewise marvel at the resurrection of Christ. Truly this fact is one of the basic truths of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection of Christ we would have no hope (1 Corinthians 15: 12-23). Let us hear the words of Jesus as He explained the resurrection and its message in Luke 24:36-49. In this passage Jesus

appeared in the midst of His disciples, causing them to think they had seen a ghost. In order to alleviate their fear and stir their faith Jesus showed them His hands and feet. These were the very hands and feet that bore the scars of Calvary! He subsequently shared a meal with His disciples and instructed them about the importance of what they were witnesses of.

Jesus said in verse 44 that all the things written and prophesied concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection. He specifically noted the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. These were the three main divisions of the Old Testament scriptures, and Jesus tells us that He fulfilled each of them. Then, in verse 46, Jesus summarizes the Gospel, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day". This is the same Gospel that Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and the same Gospel that Jesus commanded His disciples to preach to the whole world (Mark 16:15-16).

In verses 47-49 Jesus outlines some of the basic truths about His resurrection. It is because of His resurrection that repentance and remission of sins can be preached in His name, to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. He then commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they received the power from on high. Each of these truths is wonderfully fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost not many days after. In Acts chapter 2 we find the disciples in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and filled them with power. Peter then stood up, with the other disciples and began to preach to people from every nation. His message was simple: God sent Jesus; He was rejected, betrayed, crucified, buried, and resurrected. When the people heard that message they asked what they must do and Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Thus we find that repentance and remission of sins were preached in the name of Jesus beginning at Jerusalem. We also find that those who accepted this message were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of the resurrection of Christ! This same message is preached by faithful Christians today.

We recall that Jesus foretold His suffering and death on several occasions (Matthew 16: 21-23; 17: 22-23; 20: 17-19). On each of these occasions He not only prophesied of His death but also promised His resurrection upon the third day. The death was always linked with the resurrection. However, the disciples did not fully understand either the impending death of Jesus or the fact that He would be raised from the dead. In Mark 9:9-13 we find an excellent example of the misunderstanding by the disciples. In this passage Jesus had just returned from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. Jesus instructed them to tell no one what they had seen until after He had arisen from the dead. The bible says that the disciples questioned what the rising from the dead meant.

Their lack of comprehension is evident by their evident panic following the arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:50), by Peter's taking of the sword to defend Jesus (Mark 14:47), by the fact that they lived in fear of the authorities (John 20:19). The disciples, what few of them actually went to the cross, came back that day without hope. Their feelings can be summed up in the words of Cleopas, "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

These facts make all the more amazing the transformation that took place in the lives of the Apostles once they became convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. John 2:18-22 tells of Jesus giving the sign "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again". John records that after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples remembered the words of Jesus and believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had said.

The Apostles became full of zeal for Jesus because of the resurrection. Their preaching was very simple and direct. They proclaimed that God had raised up Jesus from the dead, that Jesus had been exalted at the right hand of God, that Jesus gave the gift of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus gave the power to heal and perform miracles, and that Jesus gave life. This was the message of the early Church and it the Church of the 21st Century will be blessed if it is preached.

The risen and glorified Christ became the center of everything, the center of their faith and the center of their Gospel. The disciples saw His Passion, but they also saw His victory. Paul faced the risen Christ on the Damascus road and it changed his life forever (Acts 9). Stephen, the first Christian martyr saw the glorified Christ standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). Jesus, through His resurrection became the center of everything.

One only has to peruse the gospel sermons recorded in the book of Acts to see that the glorified and risen Christ was the central theme of the preaching of the early church. The following scriptures give a sense of this: Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:31; 10:40; 13:30, 37; 17:31; 26:8, 23. In each of these sermons, preached in various localities and to diverse groups of people, the message was the same: Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again!

We should heed the words of the angel in Matthew 28:6, "He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay". And again in Luke 24:5, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The message of the resurrected Lord is the only message that will bring hope to a world full of darkness.