***Where Am I Looking?***

**Luke 24:1-12 Resurrection Sunday, April 17, 2022**

***‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He is not here; he is risen!”*Luke 24:6**

**The story was starting to sound familiar . . . .**

*54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.*

*55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

Luke 23:54-56

1. The women are demoralized, but they still are doing what needs to be done

2. They think they know where to look for Jesus, but don’t know how they will overcome the obstacles

**. . . but then something unbelievable happens**

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” 8 Then they remembered his words.*

*9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up 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.*

Luke 24

1. We are together in this “wondering” moment

2. This is the first time the disciples “disbelieve for joy” (Luke 24:40-41)

**The first witnesses of resurrection: the women at the empty tomb**

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb . . . .*

Luke 24:1-2

1. The step of faith precedes

2. The empty tomb is only the SECOND evidence for the resurrection – remember comes first

**The most important “angels” are the women!**

*4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” 8 Then they remembered his words.   
 9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense . . . .*

Luke 24

1. There is power in remembering

2. The women couldn’t keep the news to themselves! (see Acts 2:22-36, 4:20, 4:33, 17:18)

3. We are still answering the “nonsense” response to the resurrection (see 1 Timothy 1:15)

**Peter is running toward the cemetery**

12 *Peter, however, got up 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.*

Luke 24:12

1. Doug’s question: Why did Peter run if he didn’t believe the women?

2. No one needed it to be true more than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (almost put Peter’s name there)

**Looking for Jesus in all the wrong places**

1) Jesus is going to find you!

*4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2

2) Necessity of resurrection (sorry, John Lennon)

*12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

1 Corinthians 15

2) Power

7 *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Philippians 3

*33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.*

Acts 4:33

**Resources for studying Luke**

*Bible.org* has some wonderful resources at [*https://bible.org/book/Luke*](https://bible.org/book/Luke)

I. Howard Marshall’s Greek commentary is my go to help (Eerdmans, 1978)

I relied heavily on Gresham Machem wonderful resurrection commentary at [*https://web.archive.org/web/20031019001131/http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/jgmresurrection.htm*](https://web.archive.org/web/20031019001131/http:/homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/jgmresurrection.htm)

J. C. Ryle has an interesting commentary at [*https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm*](https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm)

Bob Deffinbaugh has a very interesting sermon on Luke at [*https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles*](https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles)*.*

If you want to equip yourself to explain why we believe in resurrection, Michael Horton has a wonderful, if a bit heavy, article at [*https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/*](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/)

The great evangelist George Whitefield has a wonderful resurrection sermon at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/whitefield/gw053.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/whitefield/gw053.htm)

D. A. Carson has a interesting paper on the resurrection at [*https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/2010\_resurrection.pdf*](https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/2010_resurrection.pdf)

Tim Keller has wonderful summary of the gospel at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/)

Diagram, schematic

Description automatically generated



**Luke’s chronology**

Graphical user interface, application, table

Description automatically generated

**J.C. Ryle’s commentary on Luke 24 at** [***https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm***](https://gracegems.org/Ryle/l24.htm)

**Section 140. The Resurrection, Luke 24:1-12**

*Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, And returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.*

The *resurrection* of Christ is one of the great foundation-stones of the Christian religion. In practical importance, it is second only to the crucifixion. The chapter we have now begun, directs our mind to the evidence of the resurrection. It contains unanswerable proof that Jesus not only died, but rose again.

**We see, in the verses before us — the reality of Christ's resurrection**. We read, that upon "the first day of the week" certain women came to the tomb in which the body of Jesus had been laid, in order to anoint Him. But when they came to the place, "they found the stone rolled away. When they entered in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

This simple fact is the starting-point in the history of the resurrection of Christ. On Friday morning His body was safe in the tomb. On Sunday morning His body was gone. By whose hands had it been taken away? Who had removed it? Not surely the priests and scribes and other enemies of Christ! If they had had Christ's body to show in disproof of His resurrection — then they would gladly have shown it. Not the apostles and other disciples of our Lord! They were far too much frightened and dispirited to attempt such an action, and the more so when they had nothing to gain by it.

One explanation, and one only, can meet the circumstance of the case. That explanation is the one supplied by the angels in the verse before us. Christ "had risen" from the grave. To seek Him in the sepulcher was seeking "the living among the dead." He had arisen, and was soon seen alive and conversing, by many credible witnesses.

The fact of our Lord's resurrection rests on evidence which no infidel can ever explain away. It is confirmed by testimony of every kind, sort, and description. The plain unvarnished story which the Gospel writers tell about it — is one which cannot be overthrown. The more the account they give is examined — the more inexplicable will the event appear, unless we accept it as true. If we choose to deny the truth of their account — then we may deny everything in the world. It is not as certain that Julius Caesar once lived — as it is that Christ rose again.

Let us cling firmly to the resurrection of Christ, as one of the pillars of the Gospel. It ought to produce in our minds, a settled conviction of the truth of Christianity. Our faith does not depend merely on a set of texts and doctrines. It is founded on a mighty historical fact which the skeptic has never been able to overturn.

It ought to assure us of the certainty of the resurrection of our own bodies after death. If our Master has risen from the grave — then we need not doubt that His disciples shall rise again at the last day.

Above all, it ought to fill our hearts with a joyful sense of the fullness of Gospel salvation. Who can condemn us? Our Great Surety has not only died for us, but risen again. (Romans 8:34.) He has died as an atoning sacrifice for our sins — and then arose triumphantly. The payment He made for us, has been accepted. The work of satisfaction has been perfectly accomplished. No wonder that Peter exclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3.)

**We see, secondly, in the verses before us — how dull the memory of the disciples was about some of our Lord's teachings**. We are told that the angels who appeared to the women, reminded them of their Master's words in Galilee, foretelling His own crucifixion and resurrection. And then we read, "They remembered his words." They had *heard* them — but made no *use* of them. Now after many days, they call them to mind.

This dullness of memory, is a common spiritual disease among believers. It prevails as widely now, as it did in the days of the first disciples. It is one among many proofs of our fallen and corrupt condition. Even after men have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, their readiness to forget the promises and precepts of the Gospel is continually bringing them into trouble. They hear many things which they ought to store up in their hearts — but they seem to forget as fast as they hear. And then, perhaps after many days, affliction brings them up before their recollection — and at once it flashes across their minds that they heard them long ago! They find that they had heard, but heard in vain.

The true cure for a dull memory in religion, is to get deeper love toward Christ, and affections more thoroughly set on things above. We do not readily forget the things we love — and the objects which we keep continually under our eyes. The names of our parents and children are always remembered. The face of the husband or wife we love is engraved on the tablets of our hearts. The more our affections are engaged in Christ's service — the more easy shall we find it to remember Christ's words. The words of the apostle ought to be carefully pondered, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Hebrews 2:1.)

**We see, lastly — how *slow of belief* the first disciples were on the subject of Christ's resurrection**. We read that when the women returned from the sepulcher and told the things they had heard from the angels to the eleven apostles, "their words seemed to them idle tales, and they did not believe the women." In spite of the plainest declarations from their Master's own lips, that He would rise again the third day — in spite of the distinct testimony of five or six credible witnesses that the sepulcher was empty, and that angels had told them He was risen — in spite of the manifest impossibility of accounting for the empty tomb on any other supposition than that of a miraculous resurrection — in spite of all this, these eleven faithless ones would not believe!

Perhaps we marvel at their unbelief. No doubt it seems at first sight most unreasonable and unaccountable. But shall we not do well to look at home?

Do we not see around us in the Christian Churches, a mass of unbelief far more unreasonable and far more blameworthy than that of the apostles? Do we not see, after eighteen centuries of additional proofs that Christ has risen from the dead — a general lack of faith which is truly deplorable? Do we not see myriads of professing Christians who seem not to believe that Jesus died and rose again, and is coming to judge the world? These are painful questions. Strong faith is indeed a rare thing. No wonder that our Lord said, "When the Son of man comes — shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8.)

**Finally — let us admire the wisdom of God, which can bring great good out of seeming evil.** The unbelief of the apostles is one of the strongest indirect evidences that Jesus rose from the dead. If the disciples were at first so backward to believe our Lord's resurrection, and were at last so thoroughly persuaded of its truth, that they preached it everywhere — then Christ must have risen indeed. The first preachers were men who were convinced, in spite of themselves, and in spite of determined, obstinate unwillingness to believe. If the apostles at last believed — then the resurrection must be true.

# "From Heartbreak to Heartburn" (Luke 23:54-24:35) Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435*](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435)

54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” 8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up 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.

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” 19 “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

### Introduction

It is at this time of year, unfortunately, that the people of Dallas are reminded of a very tragic event—the assassination of President John Kennedy. If you are like me (and old enough), you probably can vividly remember just where you were and what you were doing at the time of his death. What you and I were doing was probably not that important, but because it occurred in close proximity to this national disaster, it has been indelibly etched in our minds.

The Lord’s table, or Communion, is a similar occurrence, I believe. It was deliberately associated with a very warm and wonderful event—the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus it was etched in the hearts of the disciples of our Lord. The “last supper,” so-called, was a very significant event, but not an altogether pleasant memory. The disciples were very sad because Jesus was talking about His own death, and about one of them being His betrayer, and even about Peter’s denial. In addition to all of this, the disciples argued among themselves as to which of them was regarded to be the greatest. One would hardly wish to re-enact the “last supper,” for one of these was enough. While the Lord’s appearance to the two men on the road to Emmaus began on the road to this village, the realization that this man was Jesus did not come until the time when the Lord broke the bread at the table. It was this association of the realization of the Lord’s presence and the breaking of bread which created a very positive warmth to the breaking of bread, and specifically to the Lord’s table. We see in the Book of Acts that the breaking of bread was a daily experience in the early church (cf. [Acts 2:42, 46](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Tensions of the Text

The story of the two men on the road to Emmaus is one of the heart-warming accounts of our Lord’s appearances to men after His resurrection. By virtue of the length of this account, one can see that Luke places a great deal of importance on this incident. It takes up much of his account of our Lord’s post-resurrection appearances. And yet, in spite of the length of this text and the warm reception the account has historically received, there are several “tensions of the text” to be dealt with, several difficulties which need to be explained.

First, there is the fact that these two “disciples” are never mentioned, either before or after. Why is Luke’s spotlight on these two unknown disciples, (Cleopas, of course, is named, but not really known[139](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8203_2786128)), when he has little to say about the eleven? Where are the eleven disciples? Another difficulty is why these two men are on their way to Emmaus in the first place. One would expect them either to be on their way to Galilee, as Jesus and the angels had instructed the disciples ([Matthew 28:7, 10](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 16:7](javascript:%7b%7d)), or to remain in Jerusalem, at least until the “mystery” of the disappearance of Jesus’ body had been solved. Still another tension is this: Why did Jesus not reveal Himself to the disciples by simply appearing to them, rather than as He did here and elsewhere? How easy it would have been simply to appear, as He did later, and to show them His hands and side. Finally, I am puzzled by the sequence of events in this story. Why did Jesus not reveal Himself first, before He rebuked the two men,[140](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8204_2787064) rather than to reveal Himself after all He said and did, and simultaneously with His “disappearance” or vanishing from sight? Why did Jesus not give these men any time with Him as the Lord Jesus? These tensions will be addressed as we proceed with our study.

### Background (23:54–24:12)

54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” 8 Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up 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.

The women had no part in the burial of our Lord, which was done by Joseph of Arimathea (23:50-53), assisted by Nicodemus ([John 20:38-39](javascript:%7b%7d)). They did manage to watch the burial of the body of Jesus and to mark in their minds the exact place where Jesus was placed. This was more than just knowing the correct tomb; it was knowing where the body lay in that tomb.[141](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8211_2789456) In the providence of God, the women were not able to return to the tomb earlier than on the first day of the week, the “third day,” since the evening was rapidly approaching at the time of Jesus’ burial, and since the next day was the Sabbath. The women procured the necessary spices and had them on hand, but could do nothing with them until the day following the Sabbath. They waited until early in the morning, and then went out to the tomb. So that it could not be said that the women merely forgot the burial place of Jesus and went to the wrong tomb, Luke (along with the other gospel writers) reports that the angels informed the women that they had come to the right place, seeking Jesus, but that He was not there ([Luke 24:5-7](javascript:%7b%7d); cf. also [Matthew 28:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 16:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). Matthew tells us that one angel invited the women to see the place where He once lay (28:6).

The angels gently rebuked the women for seeking the body of Jesus on the third day, when He had told them while still in Galilee that He would be rejected, put to death, and rise again on the third day ([Luke 9:22](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus was alive. Why were they looking for the living among the dead? The angels’ words jogged the minds of the women, and they remembered that this was exactly what Jesus had told them, long before His death. They now saw that His death, as well as His resurrection, was a necessity, and also a prophecy which had to be fulfilled. For them to be seeking for His body was then an act of unbelief—a loving act of unbelief, but unbelief nonetheless.

In Matthew and Mark, the angels and Jesus both instructed the women to return to Jesus’ disciples to tell them that He was alive and that He would meet them in Galilee. Luke only tells us that they went to the disciples and when they told their story, the disciples refused to believe them, thinking that these “emotional women” were simply out of their heads, totally hysterical, and overcome with their grief. Peter did go out to the tomb (there seem to have been numerous trips to the tomb that day), and he found everything as the women had described it, but still he was not convinced. He simply went home puzzled.[142](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8214_2792227)

But the puzzling thing to me is that no disciple seems to have seen an angel in the tomb that day.[143](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8216_2792808) The women saw the angel(s), but not the disciples. Even the guards who were posted at the tomb saw the angel who rolled away the stone and were frightened nearly to death ([Matthew 28;2-4](javascript:%7b%7d)). But not so much as one disciple? Why not? Why did Jesus not make it easy for the disciples to believe He had risen from the dead? Why did He delay in revealing Himself to the men, when the women were privileged to see Him sooner? I believe the reason may be suggested by an earlier incident, which was the first realization of Jesus’ identity by His disciples at the time of His transfiguration. Jesus first asked His disciples who men thought Him to be. Then He asked them who they thought He was. Peter responded that He was the Christ, the Messiah, to which Jesus responded,

“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” ([Matthew 16:17](javascript:%7b%7d)b).

Jesus did not want to hurry the process, to rush the conclusion as to who He was. He wanted His disciples to be absolutely convinced of His identity. Fundamental to this was an understanding from the Scriptures that His own prophecies about His rejection, death, and resurrection were consistent with the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. Let us now turn to the account of the appearance of our Lord to the two men on the road to Emmaus to observe more closely the way in which Jesus revealed not only His resurrection, but His personal presence.

### The Risen Lord and Two Downcast Disciples (24:13-24)

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” 19 “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

In this section, the scene is set. The characters are Jesus and the two men, one of whom is named Cleopas. Let us look first at our Lord and then at the two men. The Lord appeared to these two men as a man. From His appearance one would have thought of Jesus as only a man. From Mark’s gospel (16:12) we learn that Jesus appeared to these two “in a different form.” This might only mean that Jesus appeared to the men in His resurrected body, but it seems to mean that He appeared to them in a body that was not immediately recognizable in appearance. Might this mean, for example, that the nail scars were not apparent, so that all the tell-tale indications of His identity would have been concealed?[144](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8223_2796695)

Not only did Jesus appear to these two as a man, He also appeared to them as one very much like them. He too was a traveler, it would have seemed. He was, like them, walking to Emmaus. To be more accurate, it appeared that He was walking further than Emmaus, for He acted as though He would go on when they stopped. Strangely, it would seem, Jesus even appeared as one slightly below those with whom He traveled. By this I mean that Jesus was perceived by these men either to be totally “unplugged,” totally aloof to what was going on, or somewhat slow on the uptake. The words of these two men to Jesus were a mild rebuke, as though as to say, “Come on, man, get with it!”

Now let us turn our attention to these two men. These men were disciples, men who were intimately acquainted with and associated with the eleven. Luke referred to them as “two of them” (verse 13), the “them” obviously referring back to the eleven apostles ([Luke 24:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)). From what they tell our Lord, they were privy to all that had taken place and to all that was reported to the apostles by the women. They were not numbered among the eleven, but they were closely associated with them. They were, in truth, disciples of our Lord.

These disciples were, however, very discouraged. They had, for all intents and purposes, given up all hope. Their faces were sad and downcast (verse 17). They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah (verse 21), but due to His death they had concluded that He was only a prophet—a true prophet of God, a powerful prophet, but only a prophet, who died like many of the other prophets of old.

These two men told Jesus of other data which they had chosen to ignore, reject, or misinterpret. It was, they said, the “third day” since He had died. This must be a reference to Jesus’ words that He would rise again on the third day. What was more, some of the women, they told Jesus, had gone out to the tomb and found it empty. They further claimed to have seen angels, but alas they did not see Jesus.[145](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8228_2799023) The very things which seemed to point to the resurrection of Jesus had no impact on these two men at all.

These men were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were “on their way to the country” ([Mark 16:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). We do not know the exact location of the small village of Emmaus, but only that it was approximately seven miles from Jerusalem. What we do know is this: they were not going to Galilee, as the angels and Jesus had given them instructions through the women. Both Matthew (28:7,10) and Mark (16:7) specifically state that the angels and Jesus told the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. Where then should all of Jesus’ disciples have been (or at least have been on their way to) if they had believed in the Lord’s resurrection and had obeyed His instructions? Peter “went home” ([Luke 24:12](javascript:%7b%7d)), which I understand to mean that he went back to the place where he was staying in Jerusalem. The two men on the road to Emmaus may have been doing similarly. If they did not live in Emmaus, they may have been staying there, in the suburbs as it were, for the Passover celebration. The huge influx of people may have necessitated finding accommodations outside the city. They did not even stay in Jerusalem, until the mystery of the disappearance of Jesus’ body was solved. They certainly did not leave for Galilee.[146](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8230_2800586)

I see these men as utterly unbelieving, utterly defeated, throwing in the towel and going home. In the face of much evidence to the contrary, these two disciples seem determined not to believe in the Lord’s resurrection. They have absolutely no hope. Had Jesus not sought them out, one wonders what would have become of them. And these two men, I believe, are typical of all the rest, especially of the eleven. The eleven seem to have stayed in Jerusalem, but in heart they are just as downcast, just as defeated, just as unbelieving. These men are a picture of complete defeat and despair. There was to them no hope left. It was all over.

### Jesus’ Correction and Instruction (24:25-27)

25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Jesus’ words to these two men were not flattering. They were a rebuke for their spiritual dullness and for their failure to believe all that the prophets had spoken. The word “all”[147](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8236_2802075) is an important one. It indicates that the belief of the disciples was selective. They believed part of the prophets’ revelation, but not all. Which part did they believe, and which part did they not believe? Our Lord’s words in verse 26 give us the answer. The message of the prophets concerning the coming Messiah was a blending of suffering and glory. The prophets spoke in what appeared to be a contradiction in terms. They spoke of Messiah’s rejection and suffering, as we see in [Isaiah 52](javascript:%7b%7d) and 53, yet they also spoke of His triumph and glory (cf. [Daniel 7:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d); [Zechariah 9](javascript:%7b%7d),14).

There is a difference in the way the prophets dealt with the tension of the two truths of Christ’s suffering and of His glory. The prophets accepted both aspects of prophecy, even though they did not understand how they could be compatible. They searched the Scriptures to understand how both could be true. This is what Peter has written in his first epistle:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow ([1 Peter 1:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The prophets accepted God’s word as it was revealed, even though they did not understand how it could be true. But most of the Israelites chose to reject the suffering side and only to focus on the glory dimension. They did this not only with respect to the Messiah, but also with respect to themselves. The false prophets were those who gave warm, reassuring, promises of peace and prosperity, while the true prophets spoke of suffering and of tribulation. Thus, the people were inclined to listen to the false prophets and to persecute those who spoke for God (cf. [Jeremiah 23](javascript:%7b%7d), 26,28,32,38).

The disciples of our Lord did not wish to hear of Jesus’ sufferings, but only of His triumph. Thus, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for speaking of His coming rejection and death ([Luke 9:22](javascript:%7b%7d); cp. [Matthew 16:21-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). All of the disciples, including these two men on the road to Emmaus had so rigorously held to a non-suffering Messiah, a triumphant King, but not a suffering Servant, that they concluded Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah because He had suffered and died. In spite of a mountain of evidence, all of which pointed to His resurrection, they were solidly convinced it was all over, and that He, alas, was only a prophet.

Jesus first rebuked these two men for their spiritual dullness, and then He went on to show them from the whole Old Testament, beginning with Moses[148](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8242_2804939) and culminating in the prophets, that the Messiah was prophesied to suffer and to be glorified. While it is not spelled out, I understand Jesus to be saying it was not enough to grant that Messiah’s suffering was somehow compatible with His glory; it was not enough to grant that suffering was a means to His glory; suffering was a part of His glory. Take careful note that the worship of the Messiah in Heaven is the worship of the One who was slain (cf. [Revelation 1:17-18; 5:1-14](javascript:%7b%7d), esp. vv. 6, 9, 12).

The passages which Jesus taught, and His interpretation of them, are not given to us. How wonderful it would have been to have had this message on tape or in print. Why, then, are we deprived of it? Let me suggest two possibilities. First, this presents us with the opportunity and the challenge to search the Scriptures for ourselves. We know from what Luke has told us, so to speak, that there is “gold in them thar’ hills,” that the Old Testament Scriptures are rich in prophecies pertaining to Christ, but it is for us to search it out. Second, we are given some helpful clues and some “starters” from the texts that the apostles used, as recorded in the Book of Acts. Thus, we have at least some of the passages revealed which Jesus must have brought to the attention of His disciples when He taught them.[149](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8244_2806517) Among the texts that Jesus must have referred to would be these: [Deut. 18:15-19](javascript:%7b%7d); [Psalm 2](javascript:%7b%7d); [Psalm 16](javascript:%7b%7d); [Psalm 22](javascript:%7b%7d); [Psalm 118:22](javascript:%7b%7d); Cf. [Exodus 20:11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ps. 146:6](javascript:%7b%7d); [Daniel 9:24](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.[150](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8245_2807129)

We are not told until later what impact this teaching had on the disciples, but when we get to verse 32 we overhear them saying to each other,

“Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

Here was the basis for the change, from “heartbreak” to “heartburn”: the Scriptures were taught and were “caught.” There was no more need for despair.

### The Recognition of the Lord Jesus (24:28-35)

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Jesus acted as though He would go on. Why? I think it was to provide the two men with the opportunity to respond to what He had been teaching. Jesus had begun with a rebuke, and His teaching had cast a whole new light on the Old Testament prophecies. How would they respond? Did they wish to reject it? If so, they would gladly have let Him go on His way. But they urged Him to stay with them. They wanted more. They desired to be with Him, even though they did not yet realize who He was. Humanly speaking, had they not urged Him to stay, they would not have had their eyes open to recognize who He was. What joy lay ahead for those who would sup with the Savior.

I have come to the conclusion that there was no mysterious or mystical revelation of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. I am not sure these men saw the “nail-scarred hands.” They surely do not say so, nor does Luke. The reason they recognized Jesus was because “their eyes were opened,” their blindness was removed. It was not that which Jesus did in the breaking of the bread which was so convincing, but the work of the Spirit, who convinced the men of the meaning of the Scriptures and thus enabled them to see Christ for who He was. Jesus did take the lead in the breaking of the bread, which would seem to be unusual, but this, in and of itself, is not the key to the opening of the eyes of these two men.

It was during the breaking of the bread that the identity of this “stranger” was made known to the two men. Jesus immediately disappeared. They immediately returned to Jerusalem to report to the rest what they had experienced, only to be told that they already knew Jesus was alive, because He had appeared to Peter in the time of their absence.[151](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8255_2810468)

### Conclusion

As I understand our text, there are two major points of emphasis. These are: (1) the breaking of bread; and, (2) the Word of God. Let us consider each of these as we conclude the study of this text.

It was not some mystical, magical event which occurred here, as Jesus broke the bread, but rather the simple (but miraculous) opening of the eyes of these two men which enabled them to see Jesus as Jesus. The breaking of the bread was not the means of revealing Jesus, but rather the occasion for it. Thus, Luke tells us the means was the opening of their eyes (verse 31), something which I believe the Spirit of God did. And so too when the men looked back on the occasion, they spoke of the breaking of the bread with delight, but they also spoke of the “burning” in their hearts, produced by our Lord’s teaching of the Scriptures. The effect of linking the revelation of Christ with the breaking of bread was to create a very warm, a very positive attitude toward that institution which the church would regularly observe—the Lord’s table. It is no wonder the early Christians found such joy in daily breaking bread together.

There is a sense, I think, in which this breaking of bread with these two men was a prototype of heaven and of the joys which await the Christian. Jesus eagerly looked forward to the “last supper” even though it was a sad occasion in many respects ([Luke 22:15](javascript:%7b%7d)). He spoke of the kingdom in terms of a banquet meal ([Luke 22:24-30](javascript:%7b%7d)), at which time He would serve them ([Luke 12:37](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus said that He would not eat the Passover again until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God ([Luke 22:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). The fellowship which the two men would have wished to have must wait until the kingdom. The Lord’s supper looks back, as it also looks forward, to that banquet. Jesus disappeared because that great day was yet ahead when they would fellowship at His table in the kingdom. But this meal made the joy and anticipation of that occasion even greater.

The second area of emphasis is that of the Scriptures.[152](https://bible.org/seriespage/heartbreak-heartburn-luke-2354-2435#P8262_2812660) In the upper room discourse ([John 14-17](javascript:%7b%7d)), Jesus spoke a great deal about the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. He urged His disciples to abide in Him, which was linked with abiding in His Word ([John 15:7, 10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Those who loved Him, Jesus said, would keep His Word (14:23-24) and His commandments (15:10, 14). When Jesus departed, the Holy Spirit would come (14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7ff.). The Holy Spirit would bring the words of Jesus to the disciples’ remembrance and would teach them all things (14:26). Jesus prayed that His disciples would be sanctified, and that this would happen by His Word (17:17). As they proclaimed the Word, the Holy Spirit would empower their message, convicting men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (16:8-11).

The angels rebuked the women for looking for the living one among the dead, or for forgetting the words of Jesus which He spoke to them while still in Galilee, that He would be rejected, put to death, and then rise again. These words of Jesus were the “living Word,” the “Word of God.” They should have believed the Word of God.

The two men on the road to Emmaus were rebuked for being slow to believe all that God’s Word taught about the coming of Messiah. They failed to understand or to believe that the Savior must both suffer and be glorified. Their failure was with respect to the Word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures. And so too Jesus turned the attention of the eleven disciples to the Scriptures, which spoke of Him, of His suffering, death, and resurrection ([Luke 24:44-46](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The method which Jesus used was, at first, perplexing, but now it all makes sense. Why did Jesus simply not reveal Himself to the disciples as the risen Savior? Would that not have convinced them quickly and easily? Why did Jesus wait to reveal His identity until after He had rebuked and instructed the two men? Would they not have paid more attention to His words if they knew who it was who was speaking to them?

The first thing this text indicates to me is that the two disciples desperately needed the Word of God, just as all men need it. Apart from divine revelation, who would have ever conceived of God bringing about the salvation of man as He did, through the suffering of the Savior? Prophecy is needed by fallen and finite men because God’s ways are infinitely higher than ours, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. Thus, if God did not make His thoughts known to us, through the Word of God, we would never know them. The reason these two men (and the other disciples too) viewed their circumstances with despair was because they did not view them from God’s point of view. They did not judge their circumstances spiritually. When viewed biblically, everything that had happened was a part of God’s plan, which included not only the suffering and death of Messiah, but also His resurrection. Finite, fallen men need the Word of God if they are to recognize the hand of God in history.

Fallen and finite men need not only the Word of God; they need the Spirit of God. While men would not know God’s ways apart from His Word, they would not know God’s ways from His Word, unless it were rightly understood. These disciples had the Scriptures, but their understanding of them was warped by their sin, their presuppositions, and their ambitions. It was only when our Lord explained the Scriptures to them, and when the Holy Spirit opened their eyes, that they understood the mind of God. This is what Paul says in [1 Corinthians 2](javascript:%7b%7d). No wonder the upper room discourse focused so much on the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

I believe you and I fall into the very same trap into which the disciples fell. We read and study the Scriptures through the grid of our own sin, of our own desires, our own ambitions and preferences. We arrive at our own idea of what God should be like, and what His kingdom should be, and then we rearrange the Scriptures, over-emphasizing some, and ignoring others, so that we have nicely (but wrongly) proof-texted our own thinking. How often we do this in those areas of tension, where two seemingly contradictory things are somehow linked; for example, in the biblical truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or in the areas of suffering and glory (our own, I mean). We would rather have one of these areas (the pleasant, warm and fuzzy one, of course) and reject the other. This we cannot do. We may, like the prophets, have to hold two truths in tension, seeking and praying to understand their inter-relationship, but we dare not reject one and hold to the other exclusively. Let us give much thought to this.

Why did Jesus not reveal Himself to the disciples, rather than to teach them from the Old Testament? The reason has already been given in Luke. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man requested that Lazarus be sent to his Father’s house, to his five brothers, so that they can be warned (16:27-28). Jesus’ answer was that they had Moses and the prophets (16:29), to which the man protested that a warning from one who had risen from the grave would be more forceful, more convincing. To this Jesus replied,

“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead” ([Luke 16:31](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

There is a very important principle taught here, and it is this: THOSE WHO REJECT THE WORD OF GOD WILL NOT BE CONVINCED BY HIS WORKS.

Is this not patently clear throughout the gospels? The scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus’ teaching, and so too they rejected all of His works. Men who reject the Word of God will not be convinced by His works.

Jesus could have appeared to His disciples as the risen Lord. But He deliberately restrained Himself, finding it necessary first of all to turn them to the Word of God. Once these men were enabled to understand the Scriptures, they were then free to see that Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus would put first things first, and thus He laid the biblical foundation; He outlined the biblical necessity of His suffering, death, and resurrection, and then He revealed its fulfillment—in Him!

But wouldn’t Jesus’ words to these two men have been more forceful, would they not have had a greater impact, had the men known who was speaking to them? Strangely enough, I think the answer may be both “Yes” and “No.” Surely Jesus’ teaching would have had a great impact if they knew it was Jesus. On the other hand, the joy and emotion of knowing it was He would probably have distracted them from a serious consideration of the Old Testament passages.

There is a principle here which applied to Jesus’ teaching, just as it does to all teaching of the Scriptures. Consider it with me for a moment: THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES IS INDEPENDENT OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPEAKER.

God’s Word, as the writer to the Hebrews put it, has been communicated in various ways ([Hebrews 1:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). At times, God has spoken through pious, godly, faithful men. He has often spoken through less than godly men. Jonah, for example, was in rebellion, but God’s message, spoken by him, converted the entire city of Nineveh. Balaam spoke for God, and even his donkey did. Paul spoke of those who proclaimed the message of the gospel from false motives, and yet the gospel was advanced ([Philippians 1:12-18](javascript:%7b%7d)). It is not the proclaimer who gives power to the Word of God. The Word of God itself has power:

For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do ([Hebrews 4;12-13](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

Thus, when Paul taught, he avoided persuasive human techniques which would focus men’s attention on him, rather than on the Word of God itself. Paul did not seek to convince and persuade, but to speak in simplicity and clarity, looking to the Holy Spirit to convince men and to change them. Paul’s method of teaching was governed by his confidence in the Scriptures and the Spirit of God:

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” ([Acts 20:32](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God ([1 Corinthians 2:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God ([2 Corinthians 2:17](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB).

There are some versions of the Bible in which the words of our Lord are printed in red, as though they are more important than those other biblical words, spoken by prophets who were divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that all Scripture was inspired and thus profitable ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d)). In our text, Jesus’ actual words are not recorded. Our attention is turned to the Old Testament Scriptures and to its prophecies pertaining to Christ.

When you think about it, Jesus could have identified Himself as the Lord to these two men, and then proceeded to teach them on the basis of His authority. As it turns out, Jesus taught them on the basis of the authority of the Scriptures. Think of it, instead of teaching this lesson as the Christ, He taught this lesson about the Christ, but as a mere man, as a total stranger, even as a man who seemed poorly in tune and not in touch with what was going on. The two disciples rebuked Him for asking what things were going on in Jerusalem. They saw Him as one who was ill-informed, out of touch. And yet, as such, Jesus rebuked them and taught them the most marvelous survey of the Old Testament ever taught. The men later recognized the impact of Jesus’ teaching—it set their hearts afire, not just because Jesus taught them, but because the Scriptures were taught accurately, and thus with their own power and that of the Holy Spirit. It was the Scriptures, then, as explained by Jesus Himself and as illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that opened the eyes of the disciples so that they were ready and able (in God’s timing) to discover who it was who was with them.

This text sharply underscores the importance of the Scriptures. The Word of God is authoritative; it is powerful, and it is also of the highest priority. How are men to live today? How is God’s plan and purpose to be known to fallen, finite, men? By the Word of God. How can we know the will of God for our lives? How can we rightly interpret our own circumstances? Only through the Word of God, interpreted and applied by His Spirit. In the closing verses of the Gospel of Luke, we are emphatically reminded of the priority which the Scriptures should and must have in our lives.

This text should provide us with the motivation to make the Word of God a priority in our lives. It should also teach us a method by which to study the Word. We should first study the Word of God recognizing our own fallenness, our own inclination to twist and distort the Scriptures to proof-text our own preferences and preconceived ideas. We must come to the Scriptures looking for God to change our lives, suspecting our temptation to change God’s Word to conform to our lives. We must depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to understand the mind of God. And, we must read and study the Bible as a whole, not just in its parts. We must read and study the Bible in much bigger chunks, and not simply race through a couple of devotional thoughts on passages randomly selected. It is the whole counsel of God which we must learn. Our goal should be to learn all that God has taught us about Himself, ourselves, the gospel, and our mission, not just the parts we like to hear, that make us feel good. Let us go to the Word of God so that He can rearrange us, rather than to rearrange His Word.

In our text, God’s Word was being perfectly fulfilled, but these depressed disciples didn’t know it. God’s risen Son was walking with them, but they didn’t recognize Him. How often is that true of us? How do we think of Jesus as far away, when He is beside us, indeed, through His Spirit, is within us? The nearness of God, and the enjoyment of Him, comes from being immersed in His Word, and being illuminated by His Spirit.

139 There are a number of attempts to identify this man, but all of these lack proof, and thus all must be seen as highly speculative.

140 It has been pointed out that the wording of the text does not really demand that it be two men, but that it could conceivably be two people, even a husband and wife. I am nevertheless inclined to view it as two men.

141 Since the tomb was hewn out of the rock, there would have been no mound of fresh earth, as we might expect, to give away the location. It would also seem that this tomb was a “family tomb,” a burial place not just for Joseph, but for other family members as well. This would explain the statement that it was a tomb in which no one had yet been laid. It could have been a tomb where the bodies of others already lay. There must have been shelves carved out of the stone, so that the women observed the exact place where Jesus was laid. This was the place that was now empty, except for the burial cloths, still remaining.

142 John, you will recall ([John 20:2-10](javascript:%7b%7d)), accompanied Peter to the tomb. Unlike Peter, John was convinced by the evidence at the tomb alone (the way that the burial garments were found, perhaps?) that Jesus had risen, but without seeing this as a biblical, prophetic necessity. Since he did not yet understand the Scriptures to teach that Jesus must rise from the dead, he did not believe out of necessity, but out of the weight of the evidence and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

143 I take it from the account that the angels “appeared” to the women, that is, that they were not just sitting there waiting, nor that they walked up, but that they were there, unseen, and then, at the right time, revealed themselves to the women (cf. [Luke 24:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe the angels were also present when Peter (and John) arrived, but that they did not reveal their presence to them.

144 I have, in the past, held that the two men recognized Jesus as he was breaking the bread, because they saw the nail prints in His hands. The text does not tell us this. The text only tells us that the disciples recognized Jesus while He was breaking the bread, not necessarily that they recognized Him because He broke the bread.

145 We know that Jesus did appear to some of the women on their way home from the tomb ([Matthew 28:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d)), but this must have been on some later trip to the tomb. These men left the city of Jerusalem before this later report came in.

146 It is my personal opinion that had Jesus not sought out some of the men disciples in Jerusalem, none of them would have gone to Galilee to meet the Lord there. Jesus therefore appeared to Peter (cf. [Luke 24:34](javascript:%7b%7d)), causing the others to finally be convinced of the truth of the account given earlier by the women.

147 Note the two “all’s” in verse 27—”all the prophets,” and “all the Scriptures.” Jesus was very thorough in His exposition. He taught the “whole counsel of God pertaining to Messiah’s suffering and glory, and He did so from all the Old Testament.

148 I take it that “Moses” means “the books of Moses,” that is, the Pentateuch. In other words, Jesus led them through the Old Testament, from Genesis to Zechariah, showing them that suffering and glory could not be separated in the prophecies pertaining to Messiah.

149 I am inclined to think that Stephen’s message in [Acts 7](javascript:%7b%7d) is similar, in many ways, to Jesus’ teaching of the two on the road to Emmaus. Stephen emphasized the hardness of heart that kept the Jews from understanding that suffering was a part of God’s promise to give them a kingdom, and because of this, they rejected and persecuted the prophets, culminating in the crucifixion of Christ. Note how much suffering is a part of Stephen’s message.

150 Some of the passages in Acts which supply us with the preaching of the apostles and the texts to which they referred are: [Acts 2:22-36](javascript:%7b%7d) (The resurrection of Christ); [Acts 3:11-26](javascript:%7b%7d) (esp. v. 18); [Acts 7](javascript:%7b%7d)—Stephen’s sermon which summarized the history of Israel; [Acts 17:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 26:22-23](javascript:%7b%7d)

151 One almost gets the impression that Jesus was in more than one place at one time, as all of these appearances are compressed into a relatively short period of time.

152 There might well be a connection between the first area of emphasis—the breaking of the bread—and the second area—the Word of God. If the Scriptures are the “bread of life,” then it was in the breaking of the bread of God’s Word that the Lord made known to the two men. Is this not true for men today? Jesus is made known as the bread of His Word is broken.

**The Resurrection of Christ**

by J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

 at [*https://web.archive.org/web/20031019001131/http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/jgmresurrection.htm*](https://web.archive.org/web/20031019001131/http:/homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/jgmresurrection.htm)

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Some nineteen hundred years ago, in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire, there lived one who, to a casual observer might have seemed to be a remarkable man. Up to the age of about thirty years. He lived an obscure life in the midst of an humble family. Then He began a remarkable course of ethical and religious teaching, accompanied by a ministry of healing. At first He was very popular. Great crowds followed Him gladly, and the intellectual men of His people were interested in what He had to say. But His teaching presented revolutionary features, and He did not satisfy the political expectations of the populace. And so, before long, after some three years, He fell a victim to the jealousy of the leaders of His people and the cowardice of the Roman governor. He died the death of the criminals of those days, on the cross. At His death, the disciples whom He had gathered about Him were utterly discouraged. In Him had centered all their loftiest hopes. And now that He was taken from them by a shameful death, their hopes were shattered. They fled from Him in cowardly fear in the hour of His need, and an observer would have said that never was a movement more hopelessly dead. These followers of Jesus had evidently been far inferior to Him in spiritual discernment and in courage. They had not been able, even when He was with them, to understand the lofty teachings of their leader. How, then, could they understand Him when He was gone? The movement depended, one might have said, too much on one extraordinary man, and when He was taken away, then surely the movement was dead.

But then the astonishing thing happened. The plain fact, which no one doubts, is that those same weak, discouraged men who had just fled in the hour of their Master's need, and who were altogether hopeless on account of His death, suddenly began in Jerusalem, a very few days or weeks after their Master's death, what is certainly the most remarkable spiritual movement that the world has ever seen. At first, the movement thus begun remained within the limits of the Jewish people. But soon it broke the bands of Judaism, and began to be planted in all the great cities of the Roman world. Within three hundred years, the Empire itself had been conquered by the Christian faith.

But this movement was begun in those few decisive days after the death of Jesus. What was it which caused the striking change in those weak, discouraged disciples, which made them the spiritual conquerors of the world?

Historians of today are perfectly agreed that something must have happened, something decisive, after the death of Jesus, in order to begin this new movement. It was not just an ordinary continuation of the influence of Jesus' teaching. The modern historians are at least agreed that some striking change took place after the death of Jesus, and before the beginning of the Christian missionary movement. They are agreed, moreover, to some extent even about the question what the change was; they are agreed in holding that this new Christian movement was begun by the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of Jesus; they are agreed in holding that in the minds and hearts of the disciples there was formed the conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead. Of course, that was not formerly admitted by every one. It used to be maintained, in the early days of modern skepticism, that the disciples of Jesus only pretended that He had risen from the dead. Such hypotheses have long ago been placed in the limbo of discarded theories. The disciples of Jesus, the intimate friends of Jesus, it is now admitted, in a short time after His death came to be believe honestly that He had risen from the dead. The only difference of opinion comes when we ask what in turn produced this belief.

The New Testament answer to this question is perfectly plain. According to the New Testament, the disciples believed in the resurrection of Jesus because Jesus really, after His death, came out of the tomb, appeared to them, and held extended intercourse with them, so that their belief in the resurrection was simply based on fact.

Of course, this explanation is rejected by those modern men who are unwilling to recognize in the origin of Christianity an entrance of the creative power of God, in distinction from the laws which operate in nature. And so another explanation has been proposed. It is that the belief of the disciples in the resurrection was produced by certain hallucinations in which they thought they saw Jesus, their teacher, and heard perhaps words of His ringing in their ears. A hallucination is a phenomenon well known to students of pathology. In an hallucination, the optic nerve is affected, and the patient therefore does actually in one sense "see" someone or something. But this effect is produced, not by an external object, but by the pathological condition of the subject himself. That is the view of the "appearances" of the risen Christ which is held today by those who reject the miraculous in connection with the origin of Christianity.

It is also held, it is true, that what was decisive in the resurrection faith of the early disciples was the impression which they had received of Jesus' person. Without that impression, it is supposed, they could never have had those pathological experiences which they called appearances of the risen Christ, so that those pathological experiences were merely the necessary form in which the continued impression of Jesus' person made itself felt in the life of the first disciples. But after all, on this hypothesis, the resurrection faith of the disciples, upon which the Christian church is founded, was really based upon a pathological experience in which these men thought they saw Jesus, and heard perhaps a word or two of His ringing in their ears, when there was nothing in the external world to make them think that they were in His presence.

Formerly, it is true, there were other explanations. It used to be held sometimes that the disciples came to believe in the resurrection because Jesus was not really dead. When He was placed in the cool air of the tomb, He revived and came out, and the disciples thought that He had arisen. A noteworthy scholar of today is said to have revived this theory, because he is dissatisfied with the prevailing idea. But the great majority of scholars today believe that this faith of the disciples was caused by hallucinations, which are called "appearances" of the risen Lord.

But let us examine the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus, and of the related events. This account is contained particularly in six of the New Testament books. Of course, all the New Testament books presuppose the resurrection, and witness is borne to it in all of them. But there are six of these books, above all others, which provide the details of the Resurrection. These are the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

According to these six books, if their witness be put together, Jesus died on a Friday. His body was not allowed to remain and decompose on the cross, but was buried that same evening. He was placed in a grave chosen by a leader of the people, a member of the Sanhedrin. His burial was witnessed by certain women. He remained in the grave during the Sabbath. But on the morning of the first day of the week, He arose. Certain women who came to the grave found it empty, and saw angels who told them He had risen from the dead. He appeared to these women. The grave was visited that same morning by Peter and the beloved disciple. In the course of the day Jesus appeared to Peter. In the evening He appeared to two unnamed disciples who were walking to Emmaus-, and apparently later on the same evening He appeared to all the apostles save Thomas. Then a week later He appeared again to the apostles, Thomas being present. Then He appeared in Galilee, as we learn from Matthew 28. Paul is probably mentioning this same appearance when he says that "He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once," 1 Corinthians 15:6. It was probably then, also, that He appeared to the seven disciples on the sea of Galilee, John 21. Then He appeared in Jerusalem, and ascended from the Mount of Olives. Some time in the course of the appearances there was one to James, His own brother, I Corinthians 15:7. Later on He appeared to Paul. Such is the New Testament account of the resurrection appearances of our Lord.

There are two features of this account to which great prominence has been given in recent discussions. These are, (1) the place, and (2) the character, of the appearances of Jesus.

According to the New Testament, the place was first Jerusalem, then Galilee, and then Jerusalem again. The appearances took place, not only in Galilee and in Jerusalem, but both in Jerusalem and in Galilee; and the first appearances took place in Jerusalem.

So much for the place of the appearances. As for the character of the appearances, they were, according to the New Testament, of a plain, physical kind. In the New Testament Jesus is represented even as holding table companionship with His disciples after His resurrection, and as engaging in rather extended intercourse with them. There is, it is true, something mysterious about this intercourse; it is not just a continuation of the old Galilean relationship. Jesus' body is independent of conditions of time and space in a way that appeared only rarely in His previous ministry. There was a change. But there is also continuity. The body of Jesus came out of the tomb and appeared to the disciples in such a way that a man could put his finger in the mark of the nails in His hands.

In two particulars, this account is contradicted by modern scholars. In the first place, the character of the appearances, is supposed to have been different. The disciples of Jesus, it is supposed, saw Him just for a moment In glory, and perhaps heard a word or two ringing in their ears. Of course this was not, according to the modern naturalistic historians, a real seeing and hearing, but an hallucination. But the point is, that those who regard these appearances as hallucinations are not able to take the New Testament account and prove from it that these appearances were hallucinations and were not founded upon the real presence of the body of Jesus; but are obliged first to reduce the New Testament account to manageable proportions. The reason is that there are limits to an hallucination. No sane men could think that they had had extended companionship with one who was not really present, or could believe that they had walked with Him and talked with Him after His death. You cannot enter upon the modern explanation of these happenings as genuine experiences but at the same time mere visions, until you modify the account that is given of the appearance themselves. And if this modified account be true, there must be a great deal in the New Testament account that is legendary. You must admit this, and you are going to explain these appearances as hallucinations. So there is a difference concerning the nature of the appearances, according to modern reconstruction, as over against the New Testament.

And there is a difference also concerning the place of the appearances. According to the customary modern view of naturalistic historians, the first appearances took place in Galilee, and not in Jerusalem. But what is the importance of that difference of opinion? It looks at first sight as though it were a mere matter of detail. But in reality it is profoundly important for the whole modern reconstruction. If you are going to explain these experiences as hallucinations, the necessary psychological conditions must have prevailed in order for the disciples to have had the experiences. Therefore modern historians are careful to allow time for the profound discouragement of the disciples to be gotten rid of — for the disciples to return to Galilee, and to live again in the scenes where they had lived with Jesus; to muse upon Him, and be ready to have these visions of Him. Time must be permitted, and the place must be favorable. And then there is another important element.

We come here to one of the most important things of all — the empty tomb. If the first appearances were in Jerusalem, why did not the disciples or the

enemies investigate the tomb, and refute this belief of finding the body of Jesus still there? This argument is thought to be refuted by the Galilean hypothesis regarding the first appearances. If the first appearances took place not till weeks afterward and in Galilee, this mystery is thought to be explained. There would be no opportunity to investigate the tomb until it was too late; and so the matter could have been allowed to pass, and the resurrection faith could have arisen. Of course, this explanation is not quite satisfactory, because one cannot see how the disciples would not have been stimulated to investigate the tomb, whenever and wherever the appearances took place. We have not quite explained the empty tomb even by this Galilean hypothesis. But you can understand the insistence of the modern writers that the first appearances took place in Galilee.

So there is a difference between the modern historian and the New Testament account in the matters of the manner and of the place of these experiences. Were they of a kind such that they could be explained as hallucinations or were they such that they could only be regarded as real appearances? Was the first appearance three days after Jesus' death, and near the tomb, or later on in Galilee?

Let us come now to the New Testament account. The first source that we should consider is the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. It is probably the earliest of the sources. But what is still more important — the authorship and date of this particular source of information have been agreed upon even by the opponents of Christianity. So this is not only a source of first-rate historical importance but it is a source of admitted importance. We have here a fixed starting-point in all controversy.

We must examine, then, this document with some care. It was probably written, roughly speaking, about 55 A.D., about twenty-five years after the death of Jesus, about as long after the death of Jesus as 1924 is after the SpanishAmerican War (1898). That is not such a very long period of time. And of course, there is one vital element in the testimony here, which does not prevail in the case of the Spanish War. Most people have forgotten many details of the Spanish-American War, because they have not had them continuously in mind.

But it would not be so in the case now under consideration. The resurrection of Jesus was the thing which formed the basis of all the thought of the early Christians, and so the memory of it when it was twenty-five years past was very much fresher than the memory of an event like the Spanish-American War of twenty-five years ago, which has passed out of our consciousness.

Let us turn, then, to I Corinthians 15, and read the first verses, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." "First of all," or "among the first things," may mean first in point of time, or first in point of importance. At any rate, this was a part of Paul's fundamental preaching in Corinth, in about the year 51 or 52. So we get back a little farther than the time when the Epistle was written. But these things were evidently also first and fundamental in Paul's preaching in other places, so that you are taken back an indefinite period in the ministry of Paul for this evidence. But then you are taken back by the next words farther still — "that which I also received." There is a common agreement as to the source from which Paul "received" this information; it is pretty generally agreed that he received it from the Jerusalem church. According to the Epistle to the Galatians, he had been in conference with Peter and James only three years after his conversion. That was the time for Paul to receive this tradition. Historians are usually willing to admit that this information is nothing less than the account which the primitive Church, including Peter and James, gave of the events which lay at the foundation of the Church. So you have here, even in the admission of modern men, a piece of historical information of priceless value.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Why does Paul mention the burial of Jesus? The impression which the mention of the burial produces upon every reader who comes to It as for the first time is that Paul means to say that the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb. The burial, in other words, implies the empty tomb. And yet a great many modern historians say that Paul "knows nothing" about the empty tomb! Surely such an assertion is quite

false. Paul does not indeed mention the empty tomb in so many words; he does not give a detailed description of it here. But that does not mean that he knew nothing about it. Those to whom he was writing believed in it already, and he is simply reviewing a previous argument in order to draw inferences from it with regard to the resurrection of Christians. To say that Paul knows nothing about the empty tomb ignores the fact that the mention of the burial is quite meaningless unless Paul had in mind the empty tomb. I do not see how any one can get any other impression. Moreover is not that what resurrection means, after all? Modern historians say that Paul was interested simply in the continued life of Jesus in a new body which had nothing to do with the body which lay in the tomb. That is rather strange in this connection. Paul is arguing, in this passage, not against men who denied the immortality of the soul, but against men who held the Greek view of the immortality of the soul without the body. The view that they were holding, would logically make of the resurrection of Jesus just the simple continuance of His personal life. There is no point at all, then, in what Paul says against them unless he is referring to the resurrection from the tomb. Unless he is referring to this, he is playing into the hands of his opponents. But many men nowadays have such a strangely unhistorical notion of what "resurrection" meant to the early disciples. They talk as though the resurrection faith meant that those disciples simply believed that Jesus continued to exist after His crucifixion. This is absurd. Those men believed in the continued existence after death of every man. There is not the slightest doubt about that. They were thoroughly imbued with this belief. They were not Sadducees. Even in those first three days after Jesus' crucifixion, they still believed that He was alive. If that is all that resurrection meant, there was nothing in it to cause joy. Conviction of the continued life of Jesus would not make Him any different from other men. But what changed sadness into joy and brought about the founding of the Church was the substitution, for a belief in the continued existence of Jesus, of a belief in the emergence of His body from the tomb. And Paul's words imply that as clear as day.

"And that he rose again the third day." Of all the important things that Paul says, this is perhaps the most important, from the point of view of modern discussion. There are few words in the New Testament that are more disconcerting to modern naturalistic historians than the words, "on the third day." We have just observed what the modern reconstruction is. The disciples went back to Galilee, it is supposed, and there, some time after the crucifixion, they came to believe that Jesus was alive. But if the first appearance took place on the third day, this explanation is not possible. The modern reconstruction disappears altogether if you believe that the first appearances were on the third day. If Paul's words are to be taken at their face value, the whole elaborate psychological reconstruction of the conditions in the disciples' minds, leading up to the hallucinations in Galilee, disappears.

Many men, it is true, have an answer ready. "Let us not," they say in effect, "go beyond what Paul actually says! Paul does not say that the first

appearance occurred on the third day, but only that Christ rose on that day. He might have risen some time before He first appeared to them; the resurrection might have occurred on the third day and yet the first appearance might have occurred some weeks after, in Galilee."

But why, if nothing in particular happened on the third day, and if the first appearance occurred some weeks after, did the disciples hit upon just the third day as the day of the supposed resurrection? Surely it was very strange for them to suppose that Jesus had really risen a considerable time before He appeared to them and had left them all that time in their despair. So strange a supposition on the part of the disciples surely requires an explanation. Why was it, if nothing happened on the third day, that the disciples ever came to suppose that the resurrection occurred on that day and not on some other day?

One proposed explanation is that the third day was hit upon as the day of the supposed resurrection because Scripture was thought to require it. Paul says, it will be remembered, that Jesus rose the third day according to the Scriptures. But where will you find in the Old Testament Scriptures any clear reference to the third day, as the day of the resurrection of Christ. No doubt there is the "sign of Jonah." and there is also Hosea 6-2. We are certainly not denying that these passages (at least the former) are true prophecies of the resurrection on the third day. But could they ever have been understood before the fulfillment had come? That is more than doubtful. Indeed it is not even quite clear whether Paul means the words "according to the Scriptures" to refer to the third day at all, and not merely to the central fact of the resurrection itself. At any rate the Scripture passages never could have suggested the third day to the disciples unless something had actually happened on that day to indicate that Christ had then risen.

But had not Jesus Himself predicted that He would rise on the third day, and might not this prediction have caused the disciples to suppose that He had risen on that day even if the first appearance did not occur till long afterwards? This is an obvious way out of the difficulty, but it is effectually closed to the modern naturalistic historian. For it would require us to suppose that Jesus' predictions of His resurrection, recorded in the Gospels, are historical. But the naturalistic historians are usually concerned with few things more than with the denial of the authenticity of these predictions. According to the ordinary "liberal" view," Jesus certainly could not have predicted that He would rise from the

dead in the manner recorded in the Gospels. So for the "liberal" historians this explanation of "the third day" becomes impossible. The explanation would perhaps explain "the third day" in the belief of the disciples, but it would also destroy the whole account of the "liberal Jesus."

Accordingly it becomes necessary to seek explanations farther afield. Some have appealed to a supposed belief in antiquity to the effect that the soul of a dead person hovered around the body for three days and then departed. This belief, it is said, might have seemed to the disciples to make it necessary to put the supposed resurrection not later than the third day. But how far did this belief prevail in Palestine in the first century? The question is perhaps not capable of satisfactory answer. Moreover, it is highly dangerous from the point of view of the modern naturalistic historians to appeal to this belief, since it would show that some interest was taken in the body of Jesus; and yet that is what these modern historians are most concerned to deny. For if interest was taken in the body, the old question arises again why the tomb was not investigated. And the whole vision hypothesis breaks down.

Since these explanations have proved unsatisfactory, some modern scholars have had recourse to a fourth explanation. There was in ancient times, they say, a pagan belief about a god who died and rose again. On the first day the worshiper of the god were to mourn, but on the third day they were to rejoice, because of the resurrection of the god. So it is thought that the disciples

may have been influenced by this pagan belief. But surely this is a desperate expedient. It is only a very few students of the history of religions who would be quite so bold as to believe that in Palestine, in the time of Christ, there was any prevalence of this pagan belief with its dying and rising god. Indeed the importance and clearness of this belief have been enormously exaggerated in recent works — particularly as regards the rising of the god on the third day.

The truth is that the third day in the primitive account of the resurrection of Christ remains, and that there is no satisfactory means of explaining it away. Indeed some naturalistic historians are actually coming back to the view that perhaps we cannot explain this third day away, and that perhaps something did happen on the third day to produce the faith of the disciples. But if this conclusion be reached, then the whole psychological reconstruction disappears, and particularly the modern hypothesis about the place of the appearances. Something must have happened to produce the disciples' belief in the resurrection not far off in Galilee but near to the tomb in Jerusalem. But if so, there would be no time for the elaborate psychological process which is supposed to have produced the visions, and there would be ample opportunity for the investigation of the tomb.

It is therefore a fact of enormous importance that it is just Paul in the passage where he is admittedly reproducing the tradition of the primitive Jerusalem Church, who mentions the third day.

Then, after mentioning the third day, Paul gives a detailed account which is not quite complete, of the resurrection appearances. He leaves out the account of the appearances to the women, because he is merely giving the official list of the appearances to the leaders in the Jerusalem church.

So much for the testimony of Paul. This testimony is sufficient of itself to refute the modern naturalistic reconstruction. But it is time to glance briefly at the testimony in the Gospels.

If you take the shortest Gospel, the Gospel according to Mark, you will find, first, that Mark gives an account of the burial, which is of great importance. Modern historians cannot deny that Jesus was buried, because that is attested by the universally accepted source of information, I Corinthians 15. Mark is here confirmed by the Jerusalem tradition as preserved by Paul. But the account of the burial in Mark is followed by the account of the empty tomb, and the two things are indissolubly connected. If one is historical, it is difficult to reject the other. Modern naturalistic historians are in a divided condition about this matter of the empty tomb. Some admit that the tomb was empty. Others deny that it ever was. Some say what we have just outlined — that the tomb was never investigated at all until it was too late, and that then the account of the empty tomb grew up as a legend in the Church. But other historians are clear-sighted enough to see that you cannot get rid of the empty tomb in any such fashion.

But if the tomb was empty, why was it empty? The New Testament says that it was empty because the body of Jesus had been raised out of it. But if this be not the case, then why was the tomb empty? Some say that the enemies of Jesus took the body away. If so, they have done the greatest possible service to the resurrection faith which they so much hated. Others have said that the disciples stole the body away to make the people believe that Jesus was risen. But no one holds that view now. Others have said that Joseph of Arimathea changed the place of burial. That is difficult to understand, because if such were the case, why should Joseph of Arimathea have kept silence when the

resurrection faith arose? Other explanations, no doubt, have been proposed. But it cannot be said that these hypotheses have altogether satisfied even those historians who have proposed them. The empty tomb has never been successfully explained away.

We might go on to consider the other accounts. But I think we have pointed out some of the most important parts of the evidence. The resurrection was of a bodily kind, and appears in connection with the empty tomb. It is quite a misrepresentation of the state of affairs when people talk about "Interpreting" the New Testament in accordance with the modern view of natural law as operating in connection with the origin of Christianity. What is really being engaged in is not an interpretation of the New Testament but a complete contradiction of the New Testament at its central point. In order to explain the resurrection faith of the disciples as caused by hallucinations, you must first pick and choose in the sources of information, and reconstruct a statement of the case for which you have no historical information. You must first reconstruct this account, different from that which is given in the only sources of information, before you can even begin to explain the appearances as hallucinations. And even then you are really no better off. It is after all quite preposterous to explain the origin of the Christian Church as being due to pathological experiences of weak-minded men. So mighty a building was not founded upon so small a pin- point.

So the witness of the whole New Testament has not been put out of the way. It alone explains the origin of the Church, and the change of the disciples from weak men into the spiritual conquerors of the world.

Why is it, then, if the evidence be so strong, that so many modern men refuse to accept the New Testament testimony to the resurrection of Christ? The answer is perfectly plain. The resurrection, if it be a fact, is a stupendous miracle and against the miraculous or the supernatural there is a tremendous opposition in the modern mind.

But is the opposition well grounded? It would perhaps be well-grounded if the direct evidence for the resurrection stood absolutely alone — If it were simply a question whether a man of the first century, otherwise unknown, really rose from the dead. There would in that case be a strong burden of proof against the belief in the resurrection. But as a matter of fact the question Is not whether any ordinary man rose from the dead, but whether Jesus rose from the dead. We know something of Jesus from the Gospels, and as thus made known He is certainly different from all other men. A man who comes into contact with His tremendous personality will say to himself, "It is impossible that Jesus could ever have been hoiden [held] of death." Thus when the extraordinary testimony to the resurrection faith which has been outlined above comes to us, we add to this our tremendous impression of Jesus' Person, gained from the reading of the Gospels, and we accept this strange belief which comes to us and fills us with joy, that the Redeemer really triumphed over death and the grave and sin.

And if He be living, we come to Him today. And thus finally we add to the direct historical evidence our own Christian experience. If He be a living Saviour, we come to Him for salvation today, and we add to the evidence from the New Testament documents an immediacy of conviction which delivers us from fear. The Christian man should indeed never say, as men often say, "Because of my experience of Christ in my soul I am independent of the basic facts of Christianity; I am independent of the question whether Jesus rose from the grave or not." But Christian experience, though it cannot make us Christians whether Jesus rose or not, still can add to the direct historical evidence a confirming witness that, as a matter of fact, Christ did really rise from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures. The "witness of the Spirit" is not, as it is often quite falsely represented today, independent of the Bible; on the contrary it is a witness by the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the Bible, to the fact that the Bible is true.

# Risen Indeed!

Michael Horton at [*https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/*](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/)

Every Easter affords fresh opportunities for national news magazines to take up the question of Jesus’s resurrection. It’s difficult to point with any firmness to a “consensus” in Jesus scholarship any more than in other studies. Nevertheless, even liberals recognize (and lament) a trend in New Testament scholarship away from many of the “assured results” assumed by their predecessors only a generation ago.

Many factors have contributed to this more conservative trend, but two are worth mentioning. First, there has been a trend toward earlier dating of the Gospel accounts, which undermines the critical presupposition that the most obvious reports of Jesus’s bodily resurrection and deity are later interpolations. Second, especially since the last 40 years or so, there has been a trend toward placing Jesus in his Jewish milieu and this has led—generally speaking—to greater suspicion of the quite Gentile (Greek) biases that have dominated higher-critical (i.e., liberal) scholarship.

It’s helpful for us to return to the “facts of the case.” Here, speculation is useless. It does not matter what we thought reality was like: whether we believed in thirty gods or none. It doesn’t matter what we find helpful, meaningful, or fulfilling. This is not about spirituality or moral uplift. Something has happened in history and we cannot wish it away. It either happened or it didn’t happen, but the claim itself is hardly meaningless or beyond investigation.

**The Facts of the Case**

The earliest Christians testified to the following elements of the resurrection claim, even to the point of martyrdom:

1. Jesus Christ lived, died, and was buried.

Even Marcus Borg, co-founder of the sceptical “Jesus Seminar,” concedes that Christ’s death by Roman crucifixion is “the most certain fact about the historical Jesus.”[1](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote1) There are numerous attestations to these facts from ancient Jewish and Roman sources. According to the Babylonian Talmud, “Yeshua” was a false prophet hanged on Passover eve for sorcery and blasphemy. No less a towering Jewish scholar than Joseph Klausner identifies the following references to Jesus in the Talmud: Jesus was a rabbi whose mother, Mary (Miriam), was married to a carpenter who was nevertheless not the natural father of Jesus. Jesus went with his family to Egypt, returned to Judea and made disciples, performed miraculous signs by sorcery, led Israel astray, and was deserted at his trial without any defenders. On Passover eve he was crucified.[2](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote2)

Suetonius (75-130 AD), a Roman official and historian, recorded the explusion of Jews from Rome in 48 AD because of controversy erupting over “a certain Chrestus” (Claudius 25.4). Late in the first century, Tacitus—the greatest Roman historian—referred to the crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate (Annals 15.44). In a letter to the Emperor Trajan around the year 110, Pliny the Younger, imperial governor of what is now Turkey, reported that Christians gathered on Sunday to pray to Jesus “as to a god,” to hear the letters of his appointed officers read and expounded, and to receive a meal at which they believed Christ himself presided (Epistle 10.96).  
  
We know also from ancient sources how successful the Romans were at crucifixions. The description in the Gospels of the spear thrust into Christ’s side and the ensuing flow of blood and water fit with both routine accounts of crucifixion from Roman military historians as well as with modern medical examinations of the report.[3](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote3) The so-called “swoon theory” speculates that Jesus did not really die, but was nursed back to health to live out his days and die a natural death. Yet, as Doug Powell observes, in addition to surviving the spear piercing his heart and one of his lungs, Jesus “would have had to control how much blood flowed out of the wound by sheer willpower.”[4](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote4)  
  
In Surah 4:157, Islam’s Qur’an teaches that the Romans “never killed him,” but “were made to think that they did.” No supporting argument for this conjecture is offered and the obvious question arises: Are we really to believe that the Roman government and military officers as well as the Jewish leaders and the people of Jerusalem “were made to think that” they had crucified Jesus when in fact they did not do so? Furthermore, why should a document written six centuries after the events in question have any credence when we have first-century Christian, Jewish, and Roman documents that attest to Christ’s death and burial? Roman officers in charge of crucifixions knew when their victims were dead. Even the liberal New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson concluded that the burial of Jesus in the tomb is “one of the earliest and best attested facts about Jesus.”[5](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote5)

The burial of Jesus in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four Gospels (Mt 27:57; Mk 15:43; Lk 23:50; Jn 19:38-39). This is a specific detail that lends credibility to the account. Furthermore, it’s an embarasssing detail that the disciples would not likely have forged. After all, according to the Gospels, the disciples fled and Peter had even denied knowing Jesus. Yet here is a wealthy and powerful member of the ruling Jewish Council (Sanhedrin), coming to Pilate to ask for permission to bury Jesus in his own tomb. Adding to the embarassment, according to John 19:38-42, Joseph was assisted in the burial by another leader of the Pharisees, Nicodemus (who met with Jesus secretly in John 3). Joseph was of such a stature that Pilate conceded to deliver the body over to him, but only after confirming with the centurion that Jesus was in fact dead (Mk 15:44-45).

2. Jesus Christ’s tomb was empty after three days.

Not even this claim should be controversial today, since it was acknowledged by Romans and Jews as well as by the first Christians. Of course, there were widely divergent explanations, but there was a remarkable consensus on this point. The Jewish leaders claimed that the body was stolen by the disciples (Matthew 28:11-15). The very fact that they sought alternative explanations for the resurrection demonstrates that the empty tomb was a historical fact.

**Looking for the Best Explanation**

Now we finally reach the point at which the gospel provokes debate, scandal, belief and unbelief. An empty tomb is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a resurrection. Nevertheless, the following arguments are crucial.

1. The Disciples Stole His Body and Jesus Died a Natural Death Sometime Later

The Gospels themselves reveal an unflattering portrait of the disciples. They flee the scene after Jesus’s arrest, Peter even denying Jesus three times. It is the women who were the first eye-witnesses of the resurrected Lord and even then the men responded with incredulity. Nor were they in any position to steal the body of the most famous (or infamous) figure in Jerusalem. Luke reports that the Jewish leaders gathered before Pilate. Informing him of Jesus’s claim that he would rise again after three days, they warned that his disciples might steal his body to stage a resurrection. Therefore, Pilate sent a Roman guard (the temple security force) to secure the tomb (Mat 27:62-66).

Even more implausible is the idea that Jesus did not in fact die (as observed above, victims did not survive Roman crucifixions) or that he could have been nursed back to health, lived, and died a natural death without any notice. Jesus was charged by the Jewish Council with blasphemy and was intent on maintaining his equality with God to the end. It is unlikely that such a person would have changed course after a failed crucifixion. Nor could he have kept his whereabouts unknown to friends, neighbors, and former followers as well as enemies. Would Peter, who repeatedly denied knowing Jesus, have committed his life to the cause of proclaiming his resurrection—even to the point of martyrdom—if he knew all along that Jesus was living out (or had lived out) his days somewhere in Palestine or beyond? Would the other apostles have done so, as well as the thousands who formed the nucleus of the mother church in Jerusalem? What about the 500 eye-witnesses Paul mentions, many of whom were still living? It is one thing to give your life for a cause that you believe in, but would so many embrace persecution and death for a hoax? What could they possibly have gained? Even if the disciples could have found sufficient motivation to remove the body and claim he had been raised, they did not have the means or the opportunity.

2. The “Easter Experience” was a spiritual vision, not a literal appearance of Jesus bodily raised.

Basically, when liberals use the language of faith but empty it of its content, the resurrection turns out to be little more than mass hallucination. Of course, it’s not usually put that baldly, at least when they are engaged in their public ministry. Rather, they typically speak of the impact that the “Easter experience” had on their lives—just as it continues to have on us today if we will open ourselves to its beauty. Years after Jesus’s crucifixion, it is suggested (with no explanation of the empty tomb), the disciples got together and recalled their sojourn with Jesus. In the process, they experienced again—in a very real way—the God of love they had encountered in Jesus. As a result, they could speak of his appearances to them in vivid terms. Regardless of how pious this may sound, it is just another way of saying—with many critics throughout the ages—that the disciples experienced a mass hallucination.

Does this really work as a plausible explanation?

First, hallucination or wish-fulfillment may explain one person’s experience of a resurrected friend. Perhaps Peter, still remorseful over his cowardly disavowal of Jesus, conjured a vision of what he thought was his risen Lord. But does this explain the thousands of eye-witnesses, the tumult throughout Jerusalem, and the willingness of so many to give their lives for the claim? Not all of the witnesses saw Jesus at the same time or in the same place, so it was not a phenomenon of crowd psychology.

Second, regardless of what contemporary scholars think happened, it is indisputable that the first Christians testified to a physical resurrection. The myriad details, especially in the Gospel reports, are unmistakably historical. The circumstances and references to specific times, places, and inviduals are too specific to imagine that the writer was merely conveying timeless eternal truths or expressing existential truths in mythological or allegorical language.

Neither for Jews nor for Christians did “raised from the dead” mean anything other than coming to physical life in the age to come. It is not a claim that Jesus was merely resuscitated; rather, he was raised by the Father, in the power of the Spirit, as the beginning of the new creation. Nor is it a claim that Jesus lived on in the hearts and experience of his followers. His post-resurrection appearances cannot be construed as psychological projections by grieving disciples. Thomas only believed after he inspected Jesus’ hands and side, but there was a Jesus to inspect before Thomas believed! His faith clearly did not create the experience of the risen Christ, but vice versa. Paul emphasized that Christ’s resurrection now past, like ours in the future, is bodily. It is not mere resuscitation, but a glorified body, and yet it is the same body that is transformed. “This mortal flesh must put on immortality” in the resurrection, he says, rather than, in the words of Shakespeare, “Let us slough off this mortal coil” at death.

Again it is worth pointing out that only Gentiles could find something salvagable in a non-literal, non-physical resurrection. Visions of loved ones are always proof that they are dead—communicating to us from another realm. However, this is far from what Jews meant by the resurrection of the dead—and far from the references in the Gospels to encountering the risen Christ in this world, even eating and drinking with his disciples.  
  
In Jewish eschatology, the resurrection of the dead was the great sign that the age to come had in fact arrived. In this widely held view, there is no trace of any allegorical, spiritual, or psychological interpretation: the resurrection meant nothing less than the raising of bodies in indestructible life.[6](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote6) One might have expected Greek Gentiles to have spiritualized the resurrection (as indeed the Gnostics did), but for Jews there was either a literal, bodily resurrection (according to the Pharisees) or no resurrection at all (according to the Sadducees). Harvard University’s distinguished professor of Judaism, Jon D. Levenson, marshalls overwhelming evidence that belief in the soul’s re-embodiment in the resurrection of the dead was a widely and deeply held Jewish hope.[7](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote7) This is one of the reasons that Jewish scholars like Pinchas Lapide conclude that Jesus rose from the dead. Quite apart from the question as to whether Jesus rose from the dead, his resurrection is consistent with first-century Jewish expectations; it is not imported from a Gentile (specifically Greek) milieu.

In 1982, noted Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide surprised many (especially liberal Protestants) with his book, The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective, in which, after careful evaluation, he concludes that Jesus was raised by God from the dead after three days. Unsatisfied by alternative explanations (mass halucination, a mere vision of a spiritually risen Christ, the disciples’ theft of the body from the tomb, etc.), Lapide challenges liberal theologians:

I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection. Their varying attempts at dehistoricizing the Easter experience which give the lie to all four evangelists are simply not understandable to me in any other way. Indeed, the four authors of the Gospels definitely compete with one another in illustrating the tangible, substantial dimension of this resurrection explicitly.

For Jews, as well as for Christians, Lapide argues, God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises is inextricable from history. One has to read Gentile philosophical categories (spirit versus matter, symbolic or existential truth versus historical fact) into Jewish texts like the Gospels in order to make them say what liberals require. “However, for the first Christians who though, believed, and hoped in a Jewish manner, the immediate historicity was not only a part of that happening but the indispensable precondition for the recognition of its significance for salvation.”[8](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote8)

Therefore, belief in a “resurrection” that is short of literal and physical was not even an option for Jewish disciples of Jesus. In fact, a mystical, symbolic, or allegorical interpretation would have been a dead give-away that the claim was influenced by Greek thought. Therefore, it is not the early Christians, but liberal Protestants, who turn the deeply Jewish understanding of resurrection on its head. The spiritualization of the resurrection evidently arose in a Gentile Christian milieu and it is this interpretation, indistinguishable from the liberal view, that Paul refutes with the earliest Christian confession.

There is no consolation prize if Jesus was not raised bodily, no symbolic “Easter experience.” Paul was unwilling to entertain the possibility that a subjective interpretation could count as faith in the resurrected Lord. He would not have sung, “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.” Rather, Paul says in a rather straightforward way,

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised…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 pepole most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:12-19).

3. The resurrection became exaggerated with time and distance from the original events.

We’re all familiar with “big fish stories.” Starting out as a modest four-inch trout witnessed by friends who were there grows larger in the telling. Long ago, David Hume used this argument in his critique of miracles. The furthest from the original scene, both in time and place, the more fabulous the claim. Undoubtedly, this strikes us intuitively as accurate in most cases of reported miracles. However, it doesn’t take due account of the facts of this particular case.  
  
The conviction that Jesus had been raised mushroomed within the precincts of Jerusalem, in the immediate aftermath of the report of the empty tomb. Most New Testament scholars agree that the resurrection claim is early; even Gerd Lüdemann, noted for his anti-resurrection polemic, concedes that the tradition of the formula “Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to his disciples” dates within two years after the crucifixion.[9](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote9) They also agree that the claim is widespread, with multiple sources available to us today. William Lane Craig repeats the observation of Greco-Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White that “even two generations are too short a span to allow legendary tendencies to prevail over the hard historic core of oral tradition.”[10](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote10)

The maximal claim, “Jesus is risen, just as he said!”, was the earliest. So in this case, at least, the “fish” didn’t get bigger with each telling, far away from those who could dispute it. The resurrection claim began not in the Hellenized parts of the Jewish diaspora, but in Jerusalem itself where the authorities had the means, the motive, and the opportunity to disprove it. Paul made a similar argument before the court consisting of the Roman governor Festus as well as Jewish leaders and King Agrippa II. After hearing Paul’s testimony to Christ, Agrippa exclaimed, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great leaerning is driving you out of your mind.” “But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.’” Agrippa said to Festus, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment” (Ac 26:24-32, emphasis added).  
  
Hume’s argument reveals a recurring modern Western hubris that consigns all other cultures to superstition and ignorance. N. T. Wright reminds us, “Proposing that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead was just as controversial nineteen hundred years ago as it is today. The discovery that dead people stayed dead was not first made by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.”[11](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote11) Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) argued that religious claims that depend on history must submit to the canons of historical research. Among these canons is what he called the criterion of analogy: that is, that historical events are similar to each other. If resurrections do not occur ordinarily in history, then they do not happen. Besides ruling out historical events like the detonation of the first atomic bomb, this criterion determines from the outset that there can be no miracles in history. One need not actually evaluate the historical arguments and evidence in order to dismiss any claim to supernatural intervention. Yet again Wright cautions against such an a-historical method: “Ruling out as historical that to which we do not have direct access is actually a way of not doing history at all.”[12](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote12) Wolfhart Pannenberg answers Troeltsch’s criterion by saying that “the ultimate verification of the resurrection of Jesus Christ will eventually be provided through the final resurrection of those in Christ, which will constitute the required analogy.” But this gives away too much to Troeltsch, notes Wright. “We did not have to wait for the second space flight before being able to talk, as historians, about the first one.”[13](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote13) Historians do not have to wait for analogies; their only question should be, what happened?.[14](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote14)  
  
There is good reason to treat the New Testament documents as historically reliable testimony. In fact, historians rely on source documents that are far weaker with respect to a host of widely established events: sources that are at far greater remove from the original time and place than these texts. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, written within twenty-five years of the crucifixion, reflects early Christian teaching, and Paul says that he is handing on what he had received—namely, that Christ died, was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. Jewish scholar Geza Vermes concludes that these verses record a creedal formula that Paul received at or soon after his conversion—one to three years after the resurrection.[15](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote15) Paul also includes hymns and creedal formulas that confess Jesus as the God who became flesh, suffered for our sins, and was raised bodily (Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20).  
  
Hence, the gap is closed between the Jesus of history (who actually lived) and the Christ of faith (confessed in the creeds). Just as there is not enough geographical distance from the location of the original events, there is not enough time to invent inflated Jesus-myths. There certainly is no space for any Gentile (Greek) influence in creating a so-called “Redeemer Myth.” Even liberal scholar John P. Meier allows, “The earliest fights about the person of Jesus that raged between ordinary Jews and Christian Jews after Easter centered on the Christian claims that a crucified criminal was the Messiah, that God had raised him from the dead.”[16](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote16) Larry Hurtado, a New Testament scholar at the University of Edinburgh, supplies the building blocks of earliest Christian belief, attested not only by Christians themselves but by Jewish critics and Roman civil authorities. There simply is no evidence of a layer of Christian tradition between the crucifixion and the creeds where Jesus was not regarded as God who became incarnate, died, and was raised for our salvation.[17](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/#Footnote17)

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Sephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15:3-8). Writing this in the mid-50s—only 13-16 years after the reported events, Paul treats as public knowledge the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the earliest Christian belief. Some of the eye-witnesses are still alive, Paul says, in case anyone wants to interview them. Moreover, Paul now has to defend this truth to a largely Gentile church. This suggests that belief in Christ’s bodily resurrection was standard in the earliest (mostly Jewish) church and was only challenged or “demythologized” by Gentiles who wanted to make the faith more compatible with their Greco-Roman culture. This is exactly the reverse of what critics, from David Hume to John Spong, have argued: namely, that the resurrection claim became a “big fish story” over time and especially (according to Rudolf Bultmann and others) by merging with Greco-Roman mystery religions.

Trained by Gamaliel II—the greatest Jewish scholar of the day, Saul had a promising career as a Pharisee before him. So zealous was he for the traditions of the elders that he speerheaded many of the early persecutions of believers. Yet he was converted and, renamed Paul, became the Apostle to the Gentiles, convinced that the ascended Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Enduring well-documented persecutions, Paul ended his mission as a martyr in Rome, testifying to Christ’s resurrection to the very last—before Jewish and Roman rulers.

What could account for his conversion from persecutor of the church to the missionary-apostle who so decisively shaped the early church? How do we account for the rapid spread of Christianity, without a single shot fired in its defense, until within a few centuries it had conquered the Roman Empire that sought to extinguish it?

The religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Roman government set about immediately to eradicate the upstart sect of Jesus-followers. They proposed no public policies, led not a single march, and submitted to martyrdom. They eschewed all use of violence to support their cause, even in self-defense. And yet, as documented by Roman officials like the Bythinian governor Pliny and the Jewish historian Josephus, Roman and Jewish authorities considered the group a national security threat.

What would the disciples have to gain by proclaiming Christ’s resurrection, even in the face of martyrdom? Was there any incentive to lying about something that did not happen and could not therefore have any impact on their destiny, especially when it would cost them their own life? Mass hysteria or hallucinations simply are not plausible explanations of the rapid, immediate, and widespread growth of the resurrection message from Jerusalem to as far-flung regions as India, Turkey, and Spain. It is true that people often get caught up in political, religious, and cultural movements, but fervor wears off quickly when adherents are threatened with execution for their claim.

There are several things that a community would not do if it wanted to fabricate a new religion. First, its leaders would not represent themselves as having misunderstood their Lord’s mission, especially his repeated propecy that he would die and be raised on the third day. They would not paint unflattering portraits of their own cowardice and despair. Second, they would not have invented a story in which women were the first to witness the resurrected Lord, since the testimony of women was not considered legally reliable in first-century Jewish and Roman courts. Nor certainly would they have represented themselves as so reluctant to embrace the news that the women reported. Finally, as the gap between the original events and the New Testament reports—or the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of faith”—closes in contemporary scholarship, there is simply no other way of explaining the explosive rise of Christianity and expansion of the gospel, even in the face of often dramatic persecution.

4. Could Jesus Have Been Raised without Having Been the Messiah?

Viewing the risen Christ as a “preparation for the Messiah,” Pinchas Lapide does not believe that Jesus was the one for whom Israel had hoped. Nevertheless, he contends that God’s act of raising Jesus from the dead carried the nucleus of Israel’s faith to the whole world in anticipation of the Messiah’s kingdom. What leads Lapide to reject Jesus’ messianic claim, though affirming his resurrection, is the fact that this event did not coincide with the resurrection of all the righteous, the cosmic “end of the age” and last judgment.

However, Jesus himself taught that his resurrection would be the first—guaranteeing the resurrection unto life of those united to him at the end of the age. In between the resurrection of the Head and that of his members is the proclamation of the gospel, securing a remnant from Israel and the nations to participate in this general resurrection of the dead. If the last judgment had occurred immediately in Christ’s earthly ministry, there would have been no space in history for the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth. There would have been no ingathering of the remnant from the nations who would inherit that blessing promised to Abraham through his seed in Genesis 15. No repentance, no faith, no “day of salvation,” but a sudden judgment that would have led to the condemnation of Jews and Gentiles together in one heap. Like Old Testament prophecy, the New Testament eschatology often employs a “telescoping” effect, where some events in a single series are immediately fulfilled while others await fuller realization. With Jesus’s resurrection, the end-time resurrection of the dead has already begun. The age to come has dawned, glorifying our Head, securing the glorification of his body. The Spirit has been sent to bring sinners to Christ for the end-time feast through the gospel. The kingdom is here indeed, yet, following Jesus’s own career, it expands now under the humiliation of the cross, awaiting its exaltation with Jesus in glory.

Before Agrippa, Paul recalled his pedigree as a Pharisee. “And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God rtaises the dead? I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persuected them even to foreign cities.” Paul then recalled his vision of the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road and Christ’s commission. “To this day I have the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testeifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses ssaid would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (Ac 26:4-23).

**So What Now?**

Speaking to the philosophers in Athens, Paul proclaimed Christ’s resurrection: “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 assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Ac 17:30-31). Having heard the report, we are all faced with a decision. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (vv 32-34).

Today, like every day since the first Easter, some mock, others express openness to further discussion, while still others embrace the Risen Christ, exclaiming with Thomas, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28). When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, he promised Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” “Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’” Though she answered correctly, Martha may have thought it was an odd moment for a theological quiz. Yet there was something more. Jesus was pressing Martha not only to assent to the doctrine, but to put her faith in him: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world’” (Jn 11:23-27, emphasis added). It was not the last day. Jesus had not yet been crucified for Lazarus’s sins and raised for his justification as the firstfruits of the harvest. Lazarus’s resurrection was only temporary, not the glorification beyond the reach of sin and death that could only follow in Christ’s wake. One day, Martha’s brother—and Martha herself—would become ill and die, but likely not before they received word (perhaps were themselves witnesses) concerning the advent of the age to come with the resurrection of the Son of God. Through faith in him, who is the resurrection and the life, you too will be raised with Martha and Lazarus on that festive day.

Do you believe this?

He is risen indeed!  
  
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[3](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From3) See, for example, William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” Journal of the American Medical Association 255 (1986). See also the extensive bibliography on this point in Gary R. Habermas, “The Core Resurrection Data,” in Tough-Minded Christianity, ed. William Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 401 fn 10-11.  
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[5](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From5) John A. T. Robinson, The Human Face of God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 131.  
[6](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From6) N. T. Wright provides overwhelming evidence from Jewish sources on this point in Resurrection of the Son of God (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 108-206.  
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[12](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From12) Ibid., 16.  
[13](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From13) Ibid., 17.  
[14](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From14) Ibid., 18.  
[15](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From15) Geza Vermes, The Resurrection (London: Penguin, 2008), 121-122.  
[16](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From16) John Meier, A Marginal Jew, 2:150.  
[17](https://whitehorseinn.org/resource-library/articles/risen-indeed-2/" \l "From17) Larry Hurtado, How on Earth Did Jesus Become God? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell [below](https://www.definitions.net/definition/below) us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the [people](https://www.definitions.net/definition/people) living for today

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no [religion](https://www.definitions.net/definition/religion) too

Imagine all the [people](https://www.definitions.net/definition/people) living life in peace, you

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the [world](https://www.definitions.net/definition/world) will be as one

Imagine no possessions

I [wonder](https://www.definitions.net/definition/wonder) if you can

No need for [greed](https://www.definitions.net/definition/greed) or hunger

A [brotherhood](https://www.definitions.net/definition/brotherhood) of man

Imagine all the [people](https://www.definitions.net/definition/people) sharing all the world, you

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the [world](https://www.definitions.net/definition/world) will be as one

Songwriters: John Winston Lennon

Imagine lyrics © Downtown Music Publishing

λῆρος

*lēros*, **delirium, babbling**

***lēros***, S 3026; *EDNT* 2.351; MM 374–375; L&N 33.380; BAGD 473

This noun, practically unknown in the papyri, is a technical term in the medical vocabulary for the delirium caused by a fever, especially in the clinical observations of Hippocrates: Python, “first day; acute fever, delirious” (*pyretos oxys, lēros*, Hippocrates, *3 Epid.* 1.1; first patient); Chaerion, “fifth day, generally worse, delirious” (*panta parōxynthē, lēros*, ibid. 1.2; fifth patient); Herophon, “sixth day, raving,” etc. This meaning seems too strong as a description of the remarks of the holy women to the effect that they had found the tomb empty on Easter morning. According to Luke 24:11, their words appeared to the apostles to be *hōsei lēros*, “drivel, and they did not believe them.” Here the word is understood in its sense from familiar, sarcastic conversation. A good example is supplied by Aristophanes, who, having compared tragedy to a woman (*Ran.* 95, 939ff.), declares “what before you was tragic trumpery” (1005), playing on the two senses of the word *lēros:* prattle, and baubles or trinkets, women’s cheap jewelry. Similarly Menander: “Sostratus, see how embarrassed I am before these women—You are babbling” (*Dysk.* 872). Antiochus to Eleazar, when the latter refuses to eat pork: “Will you not wake up from the foolishness (*apo tou phlyarou*) that your philosophy produces? Will you not abandon your ravings (*ton lēron*)?” (4 Macc 5:11). Philo describes the mythological tales of paganism as empty babbling (*mythikon lēron*, *Post. Cain* 165; *Prelim. Stud.* 62); and Josephus: “If these words are nothing more than the vain babbling (*lēros*) of someone who is trying to turn aside the storm that he has stirred up” (*War* 3.405).[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Spicq, C., & Ernest, J. D. (1994). [*Theological lexicon of the New Testament*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tlnt?ref=VolumePage.V+2%2c+p+386&off=718&ctx=halmo%CC%84n+autou+ta+leuko%CC%84mata%2c+Tob+11:12).~) (Vol. 2, pp. 386–388). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)