

The Risen Christ Plants Gospel Faith in His Disciples
Luke 24:36-53
Key Verse: 24:46-47

"He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was a most important event in human history. It revealed God's victory over sin and death. It gave rise to a new era of salvation for mankind. However, Jesus' resurrection was not announced to all people through mass media. Rather, the Risen Christ worked hard to plant gospel faith in a few people. Luke's gospel opens with Jesus' humble birth in a manger, which was quietly witnessed by a few prepared people. In the same way, Luke's gospel ends with the resurrection being revealed to a few prepared people. They did not believe it at first. The Risen Christ had to persuade them until they overcome inner doubt and fear and believe based on the Scriptures. Let's listen to the voice of the Risen Christ and ask him to speak faith into our hearts today.

I. The Risen Christ helped his disciples believe the facts (36-43)

The setting of this passage is a room in Jerusalem where the disciples had huddled together. It was a Sunday evening, just two days after Jesus had been falsely condemned, flogged, and crucified. Jesus' death was plotted by Jewish religious leaders who wanted to eradicate his person and teaching from Israel. But what they intended for harm, God used for good (Ac 2:23). Jesus had prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Immediately, God began to answer by saving a condemned criminal beside Jesus. Later, Jesus committed his spirit to his Father and died with a cry of victory. Jesus was buried. Early Sunday morning, some women went to anoint Jesus' body with spices. However, his tomb was empty. Angels met them and said, "He is not here; he has risen!" Later, Peter met the Risen Christ in person. Then two men on their way to the town of Emmaus met the Risen Christ. Now, they were all in Jerusalem. The women, Peter, and the two disciples were talking with the Eleven and others about their experiences. In this way, the Risen Christ prepared these people to meet him in person.

Look at verse 36. "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" Jesus did not sensationalize his appearance. Rather, he came humbly and in a friendly manner. He was gentle and considerate in his approach. He just stood among them while they were talking. Then he said to them, "Peace be with you." It was a familiar greeting. But it had a new power after his death and resurrection. Jesus offered them peace with God that restored their relationship with him and brought his abundant blessing upon them. Christ's blessing of peace reveals his great grace toward his disciples. The last time they had seen him was the night of his arrest. At that moment, they all ran away from him. But the Risen Christ did not say to them, "Why did you abandon me? Are you cowards?" He said, "Peace be with you." The Risen Christ was like a gentle mother bringing forgiveness and peace.

However, they did not respond well at first. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. It was not a delusion, for they all saw it at the same time. They concluded together that it was a ghost. A ghost is the spirit of a person who has died. This reveals that they were under the power of death. When the power of death rules one's heart, his mind misperceives reality. It is not just the result of faulty reason; it is caused by the devil, who makes men slaves to fear by tormenting them with the thought of death (Heb 2:15). God created man to be strong and courageous. But the devil influences men to be fearful cowards.

How did Jesus begin to help these men? Look at verse 38. "He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?'" Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts. They were very negative, expecting bad news and misfortune. They interpreted his appearance as trouble, though it was the best news for all mankind. And doubts began to rise in their minds. Doubt is a spiritual disease that enters people through the devil's lies. These lies oppose God's words of truth and lead men to confusion, weakness and fatal acts of disobedience. Many think it is normal to be full of doubt. Descartes is known for his words, "I think, therefore I am." However, what he really said was, "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore, I am." This became a basis for the thoroughgoing existentialism that shaped the western concept of man. But doubt is not normal in God's sight. God made man to live in a love relationship with

him. We must regard doubt as a spiritual sickness that needs to be healed. This is why Jesus gently rebuked his disciples as he would later rebuke Thomas: "Stop doubting and believe" (Jn 20:27).

Then Jesus gave convincing proofs that he had risen. Look at verses 39-40a. "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see..." Jesus offered his hands and feet as proof that it was truly him. Contemporary people are often identified by birthdate, height, weight, and eye color. This is what is on our drivers licenses. But Jesus did not offer these things. He offered his hands and feet. Why? It is because they had particular distinguishing marks: the prints of the nails that had pierced him upon his crucifixion. These marks testified that the One before them was the very One who had died on the cross. This Christ Jesus had borne the full measure of God's wrath that our sins deserved. Christ had died as the Lamb of God. Now Christ had risen! The Risen Christ triumphed over sin and death. The Risen Christ had crushed the devil's head with a fatal blow. The Risen Christ solves all of our spiritual problems from the root. Now he stood among them in his resurrected body. He was not subject to limits of time and space. Still, the nail marks remained in his hands and feet. They testify that God loves us. God allowed Jesus to die and raised him again because God loves us! Jesus loves us; he willingly gave his life for us! When we accept this love, it drives fear and doubt from our hearts (1 Jn 4:18). This love gives us new life and strength. Charles Wesley perceived this love and wrote, "Arise, my soul, Arise!" He serve God powerfully. Let's accept God's love through the nail-pierced hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

Jesus also said, "...a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." This proves that Jesus' resurrection actually happened in time and space. It is not myth or legend, but it is fact that is supported by eyewitnesses who saw and touched him. In a court of law, eyewitness testimony is most credible. Later these eyewitnesses gave their lives to testify that Christ had risen. Furthermore, we can learn that the power of Jesus' resurrection transforms the physical and material, as well as the spiritual. So we Christians believe in the redemption of all creation. Gospel faith does not make us like gnostics who escape the material world through dualistic spiritualism. Gospel faith leads us to participate in the redemption of the world as good citizens of communities and nations.

Jesus' audiovisual demonstration was wonderful and meaningful. However, the disciples still had trouble believing (41). Luke says it was because of joy and amazement. The disciples were making progress. They had lost their doubt and fear. But they could not fully believe the good news; it seemed too good to be true. In order to help them, Jesus gave them further tangible evidence. He asked for something to eat. When they gave him a piece of broiled fish, he took it and ate it in their presence (42). Many pairs of eyes watched with intent focus as the piece of fish entered his mouth, and as he chewed it. They especially observed the wiggle of his throat that signaled he had swallowed the fish. Then they could believe it. It was really Jesus; he had risen from the dead! This indicates that eating fellowship may be important in learning gospel faith. In this way, Jesus finished stage one in planting gospel faith in their hearts. We learn here that to have gospel faith we must accept the facts of Christ's resurrection and believe the love of God. This heals our hearts from doubt and fear.

II. The Risen Christ helped them believe the Scriptures (44-53)

When the disciples recognized that it was really Jesus who was among them, he began to remind them of his teachings. Look at verse 44. "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'" Before his death, Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly that he must suffer, die and rise again. The first time was right after Peter made his confession of Christ. Jesus told them, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Lk 9:22). The disciples did not like Jesus' words and rejected them. They did not want Jesus to die, and they did not want to die. Still, Jesus taught his death and resurrection again and again (Lk 9:44; 18:31-33), and each time they rejected or ignored it. Through the Last Supper, Jesus taught the meaning of his death through the new covenant in his blood (Lk 22:20). Shortly afterward, the disciples argued about who was the greatest. In brief, the disciples had rejected Jesus' repeated teaching that he would suffer, die and rise again. It was because their desire to live in this world and enjoy its glory was too strong. This was not an intellectual problem, but a problem of the heart.

Though they refused to accept it, Jesus had in fact suffered, died and risen again just as he said. Jesus' words had come true, and he reminded them of this fact. Jesus wanted them to know that his word was eternal truth. Jesus had said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Lk 21:33). Eventually, Peter got the point. Later he wrote, "For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass

withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever" (1 Pe 1:24-25a). As long as we cling to this world and seek its honor and glory, we cannot accept gospel faith. We must honestly acknowledge the reality of death, and admit that this world is transitory in nature. We must recognize the emptiness of worldly hopes and dreams. Then we can begin to open our hearts to God's eternal hope, given to us in the Scriptures. This hope will not disappoint us, for the word of God stands forever.

After much training, the disciples were now ready to listen. Jesus' words of truth could be inscribed on their hearts. Then Jesus did something marvelous for them. "...he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (45). It was a miracle that enabled them to hear God's word speak through the Scriptures. No longer did the Scriptures seem like ancient teachings, that is, mere history. The Scriptures came alive as the living and active word of God (Heb 4:12). Through the Scriptures, God told them what he was doing in their time, and how it related to them. Here we learn that we need Jesus' help when we study the Bible. So we must often pray, "Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me...."

Jesus summarized for his disciples the essence of what the Scriptures taught about him. Look at verses 46-47. "He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'" Let's note three things here.

First, Christ died and rose according to the Scriptures. Jesus had foretold his suffering, death and resurrection based on what was written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Recorded hundreds of years earlier, these Scriptures foretold what the Christ would do in detail. In Genesis 3:15, God prophesied that an offspring of the woman would crush the head of Satan; he is Jesus Christ. God told Abraham that all nations on earth would be blessed through him; it referred to the forgiveness of sins through Christ (Gal 3:8). Job looked forward to meeting his Redeemer who would stand on the earth one day (Job 19:25-27). He is Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied that the Christ would be pierced, suffer silently, be numbered with the transgressors, be buried with the rich, and rise again to save us sin and death. Psalms 2, 16, 22, 69, 72, 110, and 118 particularly foretell that Christ would vindicate God's honor and save men from sin and death. These are just a few examples. Apostle Paul summarizes this in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 as follows: "...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...." This tells us that the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection came from God. It is based on God's eternal plan, unconditional love, almighty power, pure justice and absolute faithfulness. The gospel is trustworthy. Christ wants our faith to be based on the Scriptures, not just on our own personal experiences. Then our gospel faith will be unshakable. Further, our salvation is not a mere personal matter. It is part of the universal salvation plan of God. Its purpose is to bring glory to the Father and the Son (Jn 15:8).

Second, the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. Christ suffered and died for our sins. Sin is the root problem of all misery and suffering for mankind. But many people do not take sin seriously. Recently, Phil Knight, owner of Nike, retained Tiger Woods to endorse his products, stating that Tiger's adulterous behavior enhanced his public appeal. But the Bible treats sin seriously. Romans 6:23a says, "For the wages of sin is death...." Hebrews 9:27 says, "...man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment." And Revelation 21:8 tells us that judgment results in eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the destiny of all men, because "...all have sinned..." (Ro 3:23). We cannot solve this sin problem with money, technology, community service, or self-torture. However, God had mercy on mankind. God sent Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood (Ro 3:25). Jesus' blood has great power in it. Jesus was not only the perfect man, but also the perfect God. So his blood has infinite value. Christ's one sacrifice can cleanse the sins of all men. Jesus' blood saves us from all the consequences of sin and enables us to serve the living God (Heb 9:14). Moreover, Jesus' death was not the end. On the third day God raised Jesus from the dead. God made Jesus the firstfruits of eternal life. All who believe in him will be raised in power and glory like him (1 Cor 15:44-49). Through Jesus' resurrection, God restores all creation to glorious perfection. It gives us new birth into a living hope in the kingdom of God (1 Pe 1:3,4). Christ wants us to believe this good news based on the word of God in the Bible. Then we can stand firm in any trials and also be his witnesses to others.

Third, repentance and forgiveness will be preached to all nations (47-53). Jesus had given the disciples everything they needed to have solid gospel faith. Then Jesus boldly foretold in verse 47, "...and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Jesus was sure that his disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit, would preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to the ends of the earth (48,49). Jesus' words again proved true. Peter became a fiery preacher who challenged all Israel to repent and accept Christ's

forgiveness. In one day 3,000 people repented and the first megachurch was born. A strict Pharisee, Saul, met the Risen Christ and was changed into St. Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles. He spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire, and within 300 years it became Christendom. Time does not permit telling of innumerable others preched the gospel to the ends of the earth.

After planting gospel faith in the disciples, the Risen Christ blessed them and was taken up into heaven. They worshiped him as the Son of God and Savior of the world. They lived the rest of their lives as his witnesses. Like them, we must believe the facts of his resurrection and accept the love of God. We must believe the Scriptures, even one word of God. We must study the Bible diligently to better understand the gospel message. Then we can stand firm and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.