

We May Know the Risen Christ

Luke Series #62

Luke 24:25-53

David Sunday

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As we've been traveling through Luke's Gospel together these last 18 months, I hope that your experience and the cry of your heart has been, "I want to be close—close to Your side, close to the great 'I AM,' close to the One Who reveals Himself so richly, powerfully and beautifully to us in His living Word."

We've come to the end of our journey in Luke's Gospel—a journey that we began in November 2012. The Lord has met us; let's pray that He'll do that once more today.

God, thank You for Your living, powerful Word. We pray that Your Spirit would make our hearts alive, attuned, believing, tender and transformed through Your Word. I pray for Your help, Holy Spirit, that You would anoint my lips and heart; fill me with Your love, vigor and passion for Your people and to proclaim this Word in a way that causes it to burn in all of our hearts. We ask this in the name of the living Christ. Amen.

As we come to the end of this Gospel, I think it's fitting for us to remember Luke's purpose. Remember that this Gospel was written to a man, Theophilus, "lover of God" or "one who is loved by God." Luke 1:1-4 states this purpose:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Theophilus was wavering on the fence in his faith. He was doubting; he was insecure. There was a mosquito buzzing around his faith—a mosquito of doubt. Luke wrote this Gospel for those who are pestered by that mosquito of doubt—people who are not sure of what they believe. He wrote for those of us who wrestle with doubts or feel insecure or know someone who is insecure—not sure of their faith in Christ.

Luke wrote to dispel our doubts—to give us assurance. The key words in Luke 1:4 that describe the purpose of this Gospel are "that you may know"—*that you may know the certainty*

of the things you have been taught [concerning Jesus Christ].” That you may know the risen Christ. That’s why Luke wrote this Gospel—to give us assurance that the things spoken and written of Jesus are the truth.

Now, if Luke was a historian and wrote an orderly account for a certain individual with a specific purpose in mind, would we not expect him to have driven his purpose to a conclusion in the final chapter—to have made a closing argument? That was the question in my mind as I approached this final segment of Luke’s Gospel. As I read the words over and over again, I was delighted to find that I believe Luke did just that. He brought this to a conclusion, showing us the following three things in this final section through the experience of the disciples on the day of Christ’s resurrection and in the days before His ascension:

1. We can know the risen Christ.
2. How we can know the risen Christ.
3. How we can know that we know the risen Christ.

We Can Know the Risen Christ

We have two stories in this account. Both happen on the same day—the first Easter, the day Jesus rose from the dead. One is with the disciples on the Emmaus Road. The other is with Jesus and those same disciples, the Eleven, and others in Jerusalem on Resurrection Sunday night.

Then later in verses 50-53 we have the account of the ascension, which, by the way, Luke knew did not happen on Easter Sunday, because Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 1, we are told that 40 days elapsed between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension. If you read Luke 24, you could come to the conclusion that it all happened on the same day but it didn’t. Luke gave us a condensed, selective account in Luke 24.

In these two main stories, both of which happened on Easter Sunday, we see a similar pattern. They’re both reflecting the same truth: disciples on a journey in their faith in the risen Christ. They moved in this journey from a place of doubt and uncertainty to a place of great assurance, moving forward in the mission God gave them. In both stories they went from doubt and uncertainty to assurance going forth in mission.

- First, the disciples started these stories in a state of disorientation and confusion.
- Second, there was revelation; God revealed Himself through Christ. There was illumination; the lights went on.
- Finally, there was a reorientation as they got clarity and confidence about the risen Christ.

Let's trace this pattern in these two stories. First, with the disciples on the Emmaus Road, we see disorientation and confusion in verse 17 as Jesus approached them on the road to Emmaus. They did not yet know Who Jesus was. They did not recognize Him. In fact, their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. God kept them from realizing Who Jesus was at that moment. Verse 16 clearly states, "*But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*"

There were doubts in their hearts. There was sadness. Jesus later said to them that they were foolish (verse 25). So "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," but Jesus will also tell me sometimes I'm foolish. Those two things aren't contradictory. "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe...*" There was dullness and unbelief in their hearts.

In verses 37-38, we see the same thing in the second story. As Jesus appeared to His disciples on that first Easter night, it says in verse 37 that "*...they were startled and frightened.*" I think most of us would be if the risen Christ appeared all of a sudden. "*But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And [Jesus] said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?'*"

In both situations, we see this disorientation—this confusion, trouble and doubt—but then there's revelation and illumination. Let's see how it happened in the first story. Verses 25-27 read:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus took them through the Bible, saying, "You've read this. Had you been reading with a believing heart rather than a dull mind and slow belief, you would have seen from the Old Testament Scriptures that it was necessary that Messiah must first suffer and then enter into His glory." It was revelation and illumination through the Word which continued for these disciples at the meal. Verse 30 says, "*When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.*"

Later on that night, when they went to Jerusalem to talk to the disciples in the room, they said, "The Lord has risen indeed!" Verse 35 says, "*Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.*" So through the Scriptures and through the breaking of the bread at this meal there was revelation. They saw Who Jesus is.

We see the same thing happen in the second story in verses 38-43. As Jesus asked them about their troubles and doubts, He said to them in verse 39, *“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.*”

Jesus was emphasizing that He has a resurrected body and was physically present in their midst. In verse 41, they needed further confirmation: *“And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’”* Jesus ate with His disciples.

“Do you want proof that I’m really alive in the body? Give me some food.” And Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish. He ate! The risen Christ ate fish on Easter night. That’s how physical this was. That’s how physically and bodily the resurrection is, and that’s how it will be for us, too, in our resurrection life. It will be a physical, bodily resurrection.

But Jesus kept vanishing from their sight and then showing up elsewhere. While they were huffing and puffing on the Emmaus Road—seven miles here and seven miles there—Jesus just disappeared and then there He was in Jerusalem. So there is something different about this resurrection body. He is definitely alive in the body, as will we be when we rise and when He calls our names.

The second story emphasizes Jesus revealing His physical resurrection, but then look where He goes after that in verses 44-45: back to the Bible. Listen, friends, Jesus keeps going where? He keeps going back to the Scriptures on Easter night. Verse 44 reads, *“Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’”*

This is the threefold division of the Hebrew Scriptures: Law, Prophets and Writings (or the Psalms). So Jesus said, “Everything in the whole Old Testament Scriptures is written about Me. In all of the Old Testament!”

Look at verse 45, *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”* They had been reading the Bible their whole lives but Jesus opened their minds to understand that the Scriptures were written about Him. They point to Him. They needed to be interpreted by Jesus. The disciples needed to see the Scriptures through the lens of Jesus. Oh, this would have been one of the most wonderful places in the entire Bible to be—with Jesus on Resurrection Day, hearing His exposition of the Word of God! How wonderful that would have been!

But there is a sense in which that experience is available to us today through the Spirit of Jesus as He opens the Word to us. I would have liked to have been there on Resurrection Day but He’s with us now. We can know Him now.

Notice the transformation that took place after this revelation and illumination. There was clarity. The clarity in the first story is seen in verse 32, as they said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us?” They were comparing sermon notes at the meal, saying, “Have you ever heard a sermon like that?!” This is a heartburn you want to have; this is good, holy heartburn. This is the kind of warming of the heart that we should all desire. Clarity. *“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

After they received this clarity, what did they want to do? They wanted to go tell others about it. They returned to Jerusalem and found the Eleven, and they were all saying, “The Lord has risen indeed!” Open minds in the Word lead to open mouths about the Savior.

The same happened in the second story, as Jesus thrust His disciples out on mission, empowered by the Spirit. When He left at the ascension, they worshiped Him with great joy. There was clarity, warmth, joy and life.

Do you see this pattern going on in these stories, moving from doubt, downcast and discouragement to revelation and illumination to clarity and mission? It happened in both stories.

What God is saying to us in this passage is that you can know Jesus. You can know the risen Christ with certainty and assurance, just like He led the disciples out of a state of doubt, darkness and confusion into a state of clarity, joy and witness. That same thing can happen to you. It could happen to Theophilus; it can happen to you. The Spirit of Jesus is alive today and the Scriptures are available to us today to know the risen Christ. You can have this assurance—this certainty. It’s happened throughout Christian history.

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematical genius. Now I don’t identify with him because I’ve never been able to identify with math and genius. But Pascal was far from God until one particular night at the age of 31 on November 23, 1654, at 10:30pm. You hear the specific timing of this? I’m saying Christ is alive and He appears—not physically right now but He’s really active—coming to people in the world today. In 1654 at 10:30p.m. Pascal met God—or God met Pascal—and he was profoundly converted to Jesus Christ.

What happened that night was so profound and unforgettable he wrote it down on a parchment and sowed it to the inside of his coat so that he would never forget what God did for him that night. He died eight years later at a young age and they found his coat and looked inside. Here is a portion of what it said:

The year of grace 1654,
Monday, 23 November, feast of St. Clement...
From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight,

FIRE.
GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob
not of the philosophers and scholars.
Certitude. [That you may know the risen Christ.]
Certitude. [That's what Pascal experienced that night.]
Certitude. Heartfelt joy. Peace.
GOD of Jesus Christ. GOD of Jesus Christ.
My God and your God...
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy...
Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ...
May I never be separated from Him.

You can know the risen Christ with certitude, with joy.

How We Can Know the Risen Christ

How can you know Him? Right now it's probably not going to happen physically. When He calls our names and we rise from the dead and are face to face with Jesus, then we will see Him physically. His resurrection is a publicly witnessed fact and Jesus came and went physically in this section of Luke, as well as during those 40 days between His resurrection and ascension. I think Jesus did this to train His disciples that, even though He may not be with them physically, they could experience His presence and have fellowship with Him in His absence.

Jesus taught them that they could enjoy fellowship with the risen Christ even when He wasn't physically present with them. How would they be able to do that? They did that through the Word. God mediates His presence to us through His living Word. This is unlike any other book. Jesus is alive, present, speaking and grabbing us through this Word. His Spirit is alive in this Word.

As we read and hear these Scriptures, we should prayerfully say, "God, open my eyes and open my mind, that I may behold wonderful things in Your Word." He's speaking. We are experiencing Him. As we read and hear the Scriptures methodically talking as Jesus did through the entire Bible—Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms and Writings—praying, "God, show Yourself to me," we will see Christ and experience His presence.

As we read and hear the Scriptures faithfully—not as in verse 25 with foolish, dull, unbelieving hearts—believing what God speaks to us as a child believes in his own father, He will encounter us in these words. We need to trust the God Who is revealing Himself in the Word and seek to expand our knowledge of Him.

As we read and hear the Scriptures with a focus not just on ourselves but on the mission that He's sending us forth into the world to do and seeking to know God so that we can make Him known to others, we will be experiencing the risen Christ. We read and hear the Scriptures Christologically, realizing that, though not every single verse is about Jesus, there is nothing in the Scriptures that can be understood properly without reference to Jesus and to the work He has done. As we seek to understand these Scriptures with the lens of Jesus, saying, "Okay, how does this point me toward Christ? How does this deepen my appreciation for what He has done? How is this revealing Christ to me as we read the Bible like this?" we will encounter the living Christ.

We read the Bible not simply to know more about the Bible, as important as this is. We read the Bible to know Him, to experience Him, to live unto Him and to be transformed by Him. And we experience His life in this Word.

Think of John Wesley's experience on the evening of May 24, 1738, as he reluctantly went to that meeting in Aldersgate Street, London. He didn't really want to be there. Someone was reading from Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. They were talking about the righteousness that comes through faith. About 8:45 p.m., Wesley says, "While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation. And an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The hearts of these disciples were strangely warmed like Wesley's as Jesus revealed Himself in the Scriptures. As we dig into the Bible this way, by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives we can experience the same thing. But notice that it was in the exposition that their hearts were warmed. That's what they said in verse 32. "While He talked to us on the road and opened the Scriptures for us, we had this holy heartwarming."

But it was at the table—at the meal—where they finally recognized Who Jesus is. It was at the meal. Look at verse 30. It says, "*When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.*"

I don't think this is a sacramental meal in the sense that we're seeing the Lord's Supper precisely here, but I think the ESV Study Bible gets it right when it says, "There is striking similarity between this [Luke 24], the Last Supper [Luke 22] and the feeding of the 5,000 [Luke 9]." In all those instances, we hear this pattern: "... *He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.* [Verse 31] *And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.*" Later on, when they finally got to Jerusalem, they said in verse 35

what had happened to them on the road and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Now, I discovered something recently that I didn't know before. In Luke's Gospel, there are 19 meals. Thirteen of them are unique to Luke's Gospel, so if you like food Luke is the Gospel for you. He loves talking about meals. These meals become redemptive events. Kingdom realities are put on display in these meals. I think the Lord is saying to us through this sequence—this Scripture meal—that knowing Jesus is not merely cerebral. It's not just me and my Bible, studying and exegeting. Yes, it should be that, but it's not merely that. Knowing Jesus is not merely individual. It's not just me alone with my Bible. It happens in community; it happens in fellowship; it happens in the sharing of life together, which, at its best, that's what the Lord's Table is supposed to represent to us.

So it's this combination of the Word and the fellowship and the communion of saints that's working together here. Tim Gombos writes this:

Luke uses meals as a metaphor for church life. The patterns of life and the community dynamics that should characterize God's people are the things that take place at meals in the Gospel of Luke. And when the church gathers and shares life together, Jesus is present. Luke's meals put the question to contemporary churches: Do your church's corporate dynamics resemble a celebratory meal? When we get together, are we enjoying our life together and celebrating what God the Spirit has done to make us one. Do the habits and practices of your community bring about mutual refreshment and communal celebration? When your church gathers, do disciples recognize the presence of Jesus? He's here.

How can I know Him today? Through the Word and through the communion of saints, through fellowship and life together.

How We Can Know that We Know the Risen Christ

This is our last question. I'm going to just give you some suggestions to think about in this last section because I don't have time to delve into all of it. How can you know that you know the risen Christ?

I think there's a song out there—"I Know that My Redeemer Lives"—and the singer says, "I know that I know that I know. I know that I know that I know that I know that I know my Redeemer lives." She sings this over and over again. How can you really know that you know the risen Christ? Where's some of the evidence?

First, if you know the risen Christ, you have ardent longings to be with Him. Do you see that? Verse 28 says, "*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if*

he were going farther...” I don’t think He was tricking them here, but He wanted to be entreated. He wanted to be invited. Jesus likes His people to invite Him, to entreat Him.

They were starting to burn, as He shared the Word with them. So in verse 29, “... *but they urged him strongly...*” I can just picture them saying, “Please, don’t go! Stay with us. It’s almost night now. Come into our house.”

That’s what happens when you know the risen Christ. You want to be with Him. You want to know Him better. You cry out to Him in the words of A.W. Tozer:

Oh, God, I have tasted Thy goodness that has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed at my lack of desire. Oh, God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee. I long to be filled with longing. I thirst to be made thirsty still.

Ardent longings to be with Him are evidence that you know the risen Christ.

Second, His Word becomes like fire. “*Did not our hearts burn within us..?*” Jeremiah 20:9 says, “*If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*” Your Word is burning in me.

Later in Jeremiah 23:29, God said, “*Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*” It’s not just some simple textbook. It’s not a “take it or leave it” book. This Word is fire. It shines brightly. It illuminates the dark spots of our lives. The reason we stay away from it is because we don’t want to have those areas revealed in us. The Word is dangerous.

The Word gets ahold of you, penetrates your being, shows what’s really in you. It refines you, purifies you and warms you. When you know the risen Christ, you want that burning fire in your life. You experience the Word like that.

Third, you know that you know the risen Christ when His Spirit empowers you to witness of Him. It’s beautiful to see that when their minds and hearts are open, their mouths are also opened. They want to tell. They want to speak of Him. Where does Jesus lead them as He opens the Scriptures to them in verses 46 and 46? To the mission. To the Great Commission.

He was saying, “If you know Me, you’re going to want to make Me known to all the nations of the world. You’re going to want to tell them that, in all the Scriptures, I am speaking, and the Scriptures are speaking of My sufferings and My resurrection. It’s telling the world that through Me, repentance and forgiveness of sins can be experienced in My name.”

This is for all the nations. This is for all the peoples of the world, Jews and Gentiles alike. “You, My apostles, are witnesses of these things. Now go, wait in Jerusalem, so you can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to take this message to all the world.”

We carry that commission on today. When we know the risen Christ, we might not leave our jobs and become pastors and missionaries but wherever we are and however God has equipped us, we’re saying, “This is what I want to be about. I want to be about making Christ known to the nations. I want to be about this mission right where God’s placed me. I want to share with all the church in making Him known to all the world.” It’s impossible to know Him and to want to keep Him to yourself.

Finally, you know that you know the risen Christ when His blessing moves you to worship Him with great joy. I love the first words out of Jesus’ mouth when He met the disciples in the Upper Room. We see it in verse 36. It was resurrection night. “*Jesus Himself stood among them, and said to them, ‘Peace to you!’*”

Peace! Not, “You bunch of losers! You all abandoned Me. You watched what I was going through and you ran away! You denied Me.” No, He said, “Peace to you, My people. I’ve done it all for you. Your righteousness is in Me alone. I have fully satisfied the curse of sin so God’s wrath does not fall on you.

Before He ascended to the Father, He did the same thing. In verse 50, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Verse 51 says, “*While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.*” Here’s the result: if you know the risen Christ, you will not be able to just stand there and be unmoved by it. It will move you to worship Him with great joy as they did in verses 52 and 53. They worshiped Him joyously because they saw Him and experienced His blessing. They knew Him and knew with assurance that the gospel is true. Their lives overflowed with joyful worship. They did it continually in the temple.

The temple is where the Gospel of Luke began—with Zechariah and Elizabeth—and it ends there, too. It ends with a completely new focus because the Lord God has visited and redeemed His people. He has rescued us from our foes. He has given light to those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death. He has guided our feet into the path of peace. We can know Him through His Scriptures by His Spirit.

I’m going to ask for the active presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit to be working in our hearts, making the risen Christ known to us. Would you join me in prayer?

Oh, God, we cannot make ourselves come to this knowledge of You. Left to ourselves, Lord, we may read the Scriptures—we probably won’t even open them—but left to ourselves, we’ll just be slow of heart to believe. We’ll be dull. We’ll be troubled, doubting and fearful. We

thank You that You have not left us to ourselves. We thank You that You have remained in the world through Your Spirit, Who is active in the lives of all Your people, here and in all the nations. We thank You that Your Spirit is alive to open the Scriptures to us and to cause our minds and hearts to embrace and love the risen Christ. And we pray that Your Spirit would be actively working in each heart and in our church as a whole, so we can be Your witnesses in the world; so we can worship You with joyful hearts and say with Blaise Pascal, “Certitude. Joy. Joy. Joy. For I have seen and known Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.”

Make Him known to us, Holy Spirit. We pray in His name. Amen.

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