
After the First Sunday: The Ministry of the Resurrection, 2

“To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (1 Corinthians 15:3–7).

The resurrection of Jesus ministers to us regardless of where we are on life’s journey. If one does not believe, the resurrection will provide the evidence that we need in order to believe. If one has just become a Christian, Jesus’ victory over death will impart assurance that he has made the right decision. If one is at the mid-point of his walk with Christ, he will be encouraged to grow and persevere as he studies how Jesus has the power to overcome the strongest of life’s forces. If one is near the sunset of life and is looking at death, the resurrection convinces him that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Let us continue to follow the resurrection story, observing the faithfulness of the resurrection to minister to our deepest needs.

The resurrection of Jesus ministers to our need for evidence. The sixth appearance of Jesus following His resurrection was His appearance to Thomas.

On the next Sunday after Jesus was resurrected, the disciples again were meeting. They had immediately recognized that Sunday would be the special meeting day for Christ’s followers. Because of its significance to Christians, this day would become known as the “Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10). Under divine guidance, it became the day on which Christians met and partook of the supper that Jesus instituted to

commemorate His death (Acts 20:7).

On this Sunday, the disciples were meeting in Jerusalem and Thomas was with them (John 20:26a). When Jesus had appeared in their assembly the Sunday evening of His resurrection, Thomas was not present. Perhaps He had been present but had left. Throughout the following week Thomas must have heard often about what he had missed. The disciples must have said to him, “Thomas, we have seen the Lord! He appeared to us shortly after you left. If you had only stayed around, you would have seen Him.” He would retort with, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). Perhaps Thomas was exaggerating, as we all do, but his basic thought was authentic: “I must witness the evidence myself or I will not believe.”

As the disciples met behind closed doors, Jesus appeared among them. His resurrected body was different. He could materialize whenever He chose. He thus appeared in their midst without using the door (John 20:26b).

Apparently, Jesus went straight to Thomas. We see again that Jesus always goes to the ones who need Him the most. Thomas was struggling and needed special help. Our Lord, knowing what Thomas had said, accommodated him and

said to him, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27).

A few years ago, shortly before Easter, an article about the resurrection appeared in a religious paper. On the opposite page was a picture of a painting by a famous artist depicting the scene of Thomas reaching out to touch the hand and side of Jesus. The Scriptures, however, nowhere tell us that Thomas actually accepted Jesus' invitation to feel His hands and side. The divine record simply says that Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). To Thomas, there could be no doubt now that Jesus was alive from the dead and that He was God's Son, both Lord and God. Thomas had seen the evidence for himself! Jesus reminded Thomas that many would believe who would not have the physical, tangible evidence that Thomas had: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29; see 1 Peter 1:8).

The resurrection ministers to our need for guidance. Jesus appeared to the apostles as they sat at supper (Mark 16:15–18).

This is the most difficult appearance of Jesus to place chronologically in the overall story of His resurrection. It may very well be that Jesus spoke these words on the occasion that He revealed Himself to Thomas (John 20:26–29). The Bible does not indicate clearly when this episode took place.

Mark says that He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at a table (Mark 16:14a). The special wording of Mark's preface to this appearance provides some warrant at least for viewing it as a separate appearance to only the apostles.

Jesus first rebuked them for their slowness to believe the reports of those who had seen Him after His resurrection: "And He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen" (Mark 16:14b). The apostles had been given personal testimony by Jesus Himself that He would rise on the third day (Matthew 17:22, 23). They should have been confident and assured of the resurrection before it occurred, but they were hesitant to believe

even the reports of His actual resurrection.

Second, Jesus gave them a concise version of His commission: He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The time was near for the fulfillment of God's purpose in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection: the preaching of the good news of salvation to all people.

Third, He said to them, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). He summarized the conditions upon which salvation was to be offered. His words unmistakably make salvation conditional, with conditions being faith (which includes repentance and confession of Jesus)¹ and baptism.

Fourth, He assured the apostles of His presence, protection, and authority as they carried out His commission: "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17, 18). This was a promise that would be enjoyed by only the apostles and the ones upon whom they laid their hands and imparted gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts records the fulfillment of all these promises except the fulfillment of the promise regarding drinking deadly poison: A case of casting out demons is mentioned in Acts 16:16–18; speaking in new languages is recorded in Acts 19:6; an incident of being bitten by a deadly serpent is found in Acts 28:3–5; and Acts 14:8–10 tells of the healing of a lame man. The Book of Acts does not relate every event in the lives of the inspired men. It contains only some acts of some of the apostles—mainly two, Peter and Paul. It does not give all the acts of all the apostles. This promise of deliverance from drinking deadly poison was surely fulfilled at some point in the miraculous age of the church, but no specific instance is recorded. We accept the fulfillment of the promise by faith.

The account of the commission which was given on the Sunday evening of Jesus' resurrection was concluded with the assurance that the promise of the Father would be given to the

¹See Luke 24:46, 47; Romans 10:10.

apostles within a short time (Luke 24:48, 49). The account of the commission which Jesus gave on a mount in Galilee included the promise, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). The Great Commission had a world-wide sweep to it, and understandably it could not be accomplished through human energy alone. Therefore, each account of it was accompanied by a special promise to the apostles or to all Christians who set out to fulfill it.

The resurrection ministers to our need for discipline. Sometime during the forty-day period which followed Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared to seven frustrated fisherman on the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1–23).

Peter was convinced that Jesus was alive from the dead, but he did not know what to do next. Consequently, he did what many men would do. He called some of his friends together and said, "I am going fishing" (John 21:3a). Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other disciples said, "We will go with you." They went out to the sea of Tiberias, also known as the sea of Galilee, pushed out in their boat, and began to fish with their nets.

They fished all night long and caught nothing. That night they had the success that many of us have when we go fishing. As morning began to break, someone standing on the shore, about a hundred yards away (John 21:8b), called across the water to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" (John 21:5a). They said, "No." The One on the shore said, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch" (John 21:6a). They did what the stranger told them, and they caught a big catch of fish. The catch was so large that the net was hard to manage.

John said, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7a). Peter, realizing it was Jesus, slipped some clothes on, jumped into the lake, and swam the one hundred yards to the shore. The other disciples remained in the boat and brought in the fish. When they reached the shore, they discovered that they had caught one hundred fifty-three large fish, but the net did not break at any place (John 21:11).

Jesus had a fire going, with fish and bread cooking on the fire (John 12:9). He said to them, "Come and have breakfast" (John 21:12a). Can

you imagine the experience of having breakfast with the resurrected Christ? As they ate with Him, they knew beyond all question that they were eating with Jesus. John says that this was the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after He was raised from the dead (John 21:14). This was the third time that He had appeared to His apostles or to the disciples as a group, the Sunday evening of the day of His resurrection (John 20:19–23) and the first Sunday after His resurrection (John 20:26–29) being the other two times.

After breakfast, Jesus and Peter had a personal and pointed conversation. Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love [*agapao*] Me more than these?" Peter said, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [*phileo*] You." Jesus said, "Tend My lambs" (John 21:15).

The Greek language uses four different words for love, each with a specific meaning. Two of those words were used in this exchange between Jesus and Peter. *Agapao*, the word for love that Jesus used in His question to Peter, indicates the highest kind of love, a love that desires to do what is best for the other person regardless of whether there is any emotional attachment involved. In Peter's response to Jesus, he used the word *phileo*, the kind of love one friend would have for another friend.

Jesus said to Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love [*agapao*] Me?" Peter said, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love [*phileo*] You." Jesus said, "Shepherd My sheep" (John 21:16). Jesus asked this question of Peter a third time, but this time He dropped down to Peter's word for love, *phileo*. He asked, "Do you love [*phileo*] Me?" Peter was somewhat irritated by the repeated questions, and he said, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love [*phileo*] You." Jesus said, "Tend My sheep" (John 21:17).

The night our Lord was arrested, Peter had said to Jesus, "These others may forsake you, but I will not. All may forsake You, but I will not" (see Matthew 26:33). Jesus had warned Peter, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matthew 26:34). Later, at the trial of Jesus, Peter denied Jesus three times. Perhaps, in the breakfast conversation, Jesus was reminding Peter of the danger of boasting. It was a gentle

rebuke for what he had done. It is obvious from the conversation that Peter had learned his lesson. He would not use the word *agapao*, the Greek word for the highest kind of love, as he expressed his love for Jesus.

Jesus indicated to Peter that he would be faithful to Him in the future and would die a death that would glorify God (John 21:18, 19). Jesus arose from the breakfast fire and said to Peter, "Follow Me!" John also followed them. Peter, turning around and looking at John, said, "What about John? What kind of death will He die?" Jesus said, "If I want him to live a long life, that would be My business, not yours" (see John 21:20–23).

The resurrection ministers to our need for encouragement. Sometime also during that forty day period of the post resurrection appearances, Jesus appeared to James. Paul wrote, "Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:7).

We do not know which James this was. Was it the James whose martyrdom is recorded in Acts 12:1, 2? Did Jesus appear to this James to strengthen him that he might be the first apostolic martyr?

Was this James, the Lord's brother? We are told that the brothers of Jesus earlier in His ministry did not believe in Him (John 7:5), but later James is a "pillar of the church" (see Acts 15:13) and the writer of the Book of James. Could it be that Jesus appeared to this James and thus prepared him for the leadership role he would have in the early church?

The resurrection ministers to our need for purpose. Jesus undoubtedly appeared to a multitude on a mount in Galilee, an appearance which was to His apostles and to more than five hundred brethren, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Matthew 28:16–20; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

Jesus had promised before His death, "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). The angels at the tomb on resurrection morning had also said to the women, "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you" (Matthew 28:7). Thus, the account of this appearance is prefaced by Matthew with the remark,

"But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated" (Matthew 28:16).

When Jesus appeared to this multitude on the mount, Matthew says that they worshiped Him, but some were doubtful (28:17). Perhaps some in the assembly had not seen Him after the resurrection before His appearance on the mount, and they were so overwhelmed by His presence that it was unbelievably to them or maybe He was so far away from them that they could not see Him clearly and doubted that it was really Jesus. As Jesus came near them, all of those present became believers, so much so that Paul would use the entire multitude as evidence in his discussion of the validity of the Lord's resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

It was on this occasion that Jesus gave one of the more familiar accounts of His Great Commission. He said,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18–20).

Jesus declared that He had been given absolute authority from God. He instructed them to make disciples or learners of all the nations. He told them to baptize those who had been taught. He told them further to teach those who had been baptized to observe all of the teachings of Christ. He assured them of His presence with them as they implemented His commission. This account of His commission expressly indicates that He was inaugurating a new period of Bible history, a period which would extend from the Day of Pentecost to the end of time.

The resurrection ministers to our need for closure. The last appearance of Jesus during the forty-day period was to the apostles on the day of His ascension.

His ascension is not mentioned in Matthew or John. It is briefly mentioned in Mark: "So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:19, 20). Luke

only briefly described it as well: "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:50–52). The most detailed account, however, is found in Acts 1:6–12.

Sometime shortly before His ascension, in an assembly with them, Jesus gave His apostles instructions for the immediate future. First, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem (Acts 1:4a). Second, He informed them that in just a few days they were to receive the promise of the Father which He had previously discussed with them (Acts 1:4b). Just as John had baptized in water, they were going to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). This baptism which they were going to receive would obviously be administered by Jesus Himself (Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49).

Then, on the day of the ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Maybe they still had misunderstandings about the coming kingdom, thinking it was going to be a physical kingdom like Israel of old. Or, maybe they saw the kingdom as a fulfillment of physical Israel, as a spiritual Israel which Jesus was going to set up. Jesus responded to their question but telling them that "times" and "epochs" belonged to God's domain, not theirs. He did, however, reveal to them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. When that power which resulted from the baptism of the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were to be His witnesses, declaring His life, ministry, death, and resurrection, in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and on out to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7, 8).

After saying these things to them, at a mount called Olivet (see Acts 1:12), He went up into the sky while the apostles watched. Soon the clouds obscured His ascension. It was as if the clouds bore Him away to heaven. Two men in white clothing, no doubt angels, stood beside them. They said to them, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven,

will come in just the same as you have watched Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9–11).

Following this historic event, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, where other disciples were waiting in the upper room, and they began the waiting which Jesus had commanded. As they waited, the disciples were of one mind, and were continually devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:12–14).

Why did the Holy Spirit go into such detail to tell us of the appearances of Jesus following His resurrection? Some appearances were brief and were not occasions where Jesus announced His Great Commission so far as we know, such as His appearance to the women, to Peter, and to James. Nothing happened of earth-shattering consequence at those appearances except that He revealed Himself as alive from the dead. Why, then, were these appearances mentioned? What other reason could be given except to say that the Holy Spirit wanted to convey to us that Jesus really rose from the dead? Some appearances of Jesus were detailed and explicit, such as His appearance to Mary Magdalene, to the two on the road to Emmaus, to the assembly on Sunday evening, to the assembly one week after His resurrection, to the seven fisherman, to the multitude on the mount, and to the apostles on the day of His ascension. Why? There can be only one answer: He wanted you to see the details of His resurrection, the life-story of it, the drama and impact of it. The New Testament clearly and with absolute certainty relates Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

If you have never been to Sidney, Australia, how do you know Sidney exists? You obviously know it exists through reliable sources of information which document the existence of Sidney. Likewise, we are given the details of Jesus' resurrection through the most reliable source of information in the world, God's Book, the Bible.

The tangible, touchable resurrected Jesus provided evidence that we need. The resurrection is a firm base upon which we can build our lives. Let us never allow this great message to slip from our minds.

Eddie Cloer



The credibility of the resurrection hinges on the credibility of the Bible. If the Bible is trustworthy, the resurrection is a fact that is established forever

and cannot be denied. The only way anyone can get rid of the resurrection is to first destroy the integrity and veracity of the Bible. No one can accept the Bible as the truth of God and not accept the resurrection of Jesus.