

April 15, 2007
Easter 2

"Look at the Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection"

LUKE 24:36-49

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence. 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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

When I was a child we enjoyed watching a television show called "Dragnet." It was the weekly story of a detective named Sergeant Joe Friday who looked for evidence at crime scenes. He would gather his witnesses and take down notes in his trusty note pad. If the witnesses became too excited, or started adding their own spin to the story, Sergeant Friday would deliver his classic line, "Just the facts, ma'm, just the facts!"

In these words just read to you we see our Lord Jesus providing his beloved disciples with powerful, life-changing facts about his bodily resurrection from the dead. He showed them his hands and feet. They still held the nail marks from the cross. He let them touch him to be sure he was real. He even ate food with them. Then to add even more evidence to the facts of his death and resurrection, Jesus provided them with a review of the Old Testament Scriptures that helped them see his death and resurrection from numerous predictions or prophecies that came true.

How do you know what is true and real, especially these days when truth is treated like Jello that can be poured into whatever mold you happen to prefer? The bodily resurrection of Jesus takes us out of the realm of speculation and feelings and places our trust in the physical, tangible proof we need to be sure of what is true. This is no wild leap of faith on a bungee cord that will snap or stretch too far. Nor is this a blind leap of faith into the uncertain world of feelings and emotions. Like the mountain climber whose rope is secured firmly in a solid rock, our faith and hope is secure in Christ and his bodily resurrection from the dead.

Look at the evidence in the body of Jesus

Jesus disciples were huddled together for fear of being captured by the Jewish leaders and put to death just as Jesus was. The women came running with the reports of an empty tomb and the angel who said, "He has risen!" Peter and John came running with their report that the tomb was empty and the grave clothes left behind neatly folded. Then the two disciples on the way to Emmaus came running and told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them. And just as they are taking all of this in and processing it, suddenly it says, "Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be to you.'"

The Hebrew words for this are so beautiful: "Shalom Lechem." Let's say them together: "Shalom Lechem." This was and still is a familiar form of greeting among Jewish people. It has the meaning of "I hope all is well with you and you have peace in your life." When Jesus speaks these words they take on a whole new dimension. Jesus provides the ultimate peace of knowing what is going to happen to us when we die, and the peace of knowing how much we are loved by our heavenly Father whatever problems and troubles life may bring to us. Jesus said it is a peace that this world cannot give.

How did they react to Jesus sudden appearance in their midst? "They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost." Where did they ever get the idea this might be some ghost, some spirit taking on the form and appearance of Jesus? If someone you loved came back from the dead and suddenly appeared to you, you might wonder if it was real, or just a dream, or maybe even an evil spirit impersonating the person you loved. The disciples, you see, were not anticipating Jesus appearing to them, even though he promised them he would rise from the dead and see them again. We cannot be too hard on these disciples. How often do we live our lives with full confidence and trust in Jesus' resurrection? Every time we grumble and complain we act as if Jesus did not really rise and his resurrection is just a sham or an illusion or even a ghost. If only we could live every day as if Christ rose from the dead yesterday, is with us today, and is coming again tomorrow! Think of how radically different our lives would be.

Jesus loved his disciples. He confronts their worries and weakness of faith by saying to them, "Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in you minds?" Imagine this morning that Jesus is asking this question to you personally: "Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your minds?" Why are you so worried about what your future holds? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! He has the whole world in his hands, including your life.

Then Jesus did something very special for them. He said to them, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see, a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." What a glorious and gracious invitation from the lips of Jesus for disciples of every age. Look at me. Touch me. Put your fingers into the nail prints if you wish, or even stick your hand into the large gaping wound still there in the side of Jesus. When Jesus offered this blessing to Thomas and told him to stop doubting and believe, Thomas responded by saying, "My Lord and my God." John never forgot what a privilege it was to actually see with his own eyes and examine the evidence that Jesus was alive. He begins his first letter with these words, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." Seeing. Examining the evidence. The Greek word used by John and also here in Luke has the thought of looking at something and carefully examining the evidence.

Think of how often you use your skills like a detective to analyze and draw conclusions from what you see. This past week my wife and I had an opportunity to drive north and do some camping near Fort Hunter Liggett. The large oak trees and rocks in the area were beautiful. We even found two places that had special holes in the rocks placed there many years before by Native Americans. As we examined these grinding holes we envisioned what it must have been like to live in a village near these rocks many years ago.

What can happen to people if they take the time to examine the historical evidence in the New Testament for Jesus' resurrection? Take the example of Simon Greenleaf, a law professor who helped establish the Harvard School of Law in the 1700's. He grew up in a Jewish home and excelled at law, especially the disciplined process of gathering evidence. He used his legal expertise to examine the New Testament claims for Jesus' bodily resurrection. Instead of finding evidence to discredit the Christian faith, he found evidence that the resurrection did happen and he became a believer.

Look again at the nail marks in the hands of Jesus and the large wound from the spear that pierced his side. These wounds on Jesus are evidence of the fact that he loves you and he loves me. They are also evidence that the work of paying for our sin was accomplished in his body by his perfect life and his perfect sacrifice. I cannot begin to find peace with God and be accepted by God with what I produce in my body with my life. If I look at my life honestly, I realize that a heart controls this body that Jeremiah the prophet described as "deceitful above all things." Anger, greed, lack of love, lust, selfishness and pride are all there. All of these ugly sinful things find their way into my life and yours. And no amount of effort on our part or anything we can produce in bodies and with our lives can remove or eradicate even one misdeed. That is why the body of Jesus that appeared to the disciples brings us such peace and joy. 2 Peter 2 tells us, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Listen to the testimony of Scripture

Jesus does even more to strengthen the faith of his disciples and make them sure of his resurrection from the dead. He points back to the testimonies of his suffering and death found in the Old Testament Scriptures. He says 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." I am holding in my hand the recent issue of our magazine, *Forward in Christ*. On the front cover you see a lamb. Inside there is an article that emphasizes how the concept of Jesus suffering and death were pictured by the lambs that were used for Passover and other sacrifices. When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" he was telling us to look at the way thousands of sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the great sacrifice of Christ. How exciting it is to show people the words of Isaiah 53 and lead them to see Jesus as the Lamb of God who was wounded for our sin and bruised for our iniquity.

It says that Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." That word for "opened" is the same word used to describe how Jesus opened up the hearts and minds of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus so they could understand the Scriptures as well. It is used in Acts 16 to describe how the Lord opened the heart of a woman named Lydia when Paul spoke to her about Jesus. When we look into the Old Testament and see

the many predictions about Jesus death and resurrection, each prediction is like a witness at a crime scene. The more witnesses you have the easier it is to establish what actually happened. If Sergeant Joe Friday investigated a crime scene and interviewed dozens of witnesses independently, it would not take long to get a good idea of what actually happened. If my wife and I found numerous places where native people once ground their acorns in the rocks, we might draw the conclusion this was a major village at one time. The numerous predictions in the Old Testament provide us with the evidence we need to believe that everything told us about Jesus life, his death and his resurrection are true.

Then Jesus told the disciples that they would be witnesses of these things to other people and he would send them the Holy Spirit from the Father. "And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Today it is our job to do for people what Jesus did for the disciples that night. It is our job to point to the evidence for Jesus' resurrection in the nail prints found in his hands. It is our job to lead people into the prophecies of the Old Testament so the Lord can open their hearts to believe. That is why we are still here. It is my hope and prayer that we will never grow tired and weary of having Jesus show us his hands and side and joyfully proclaim to us how he has risen from the dead, just as he said. Amen.