

First Encounters with the Risen Jesus

What did Jesus do on the day of his resurrection? He showed himself alive to some of his followers. First the women, especially Mary Magdalene, then Peter and later in the day to two perplexed followers on the road to a neighboring village, and then that night to ten of his gathered disciples in a locked room in Jerusalem.

The day Jesus arose from the dead was an extremely busy one for his disciples. The importance of it is demonstrated in that an account is given in all four gospel narratives. All four disclose that the first appearance and words were to some of his women disciples. We are told in the summary ending of Mark 16: 9-11, “Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.”

John relates the details of Mary’s encounter with the risen Jesus. After first coming to the tomb early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. She immediately ran to tell the news that someone had removed his body. So John and Peter ran to the tomb to see. Mary arrived later and was alone in the garden, distraught over the turn of events.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “*Woman, why are you crying?*”

“*They have taken my Lord away,*” she said, “*and I don’t know where they have put him.*” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “***Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?***”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “***Mary.***”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “**Rabboni!**”

Evidently she grasped him as if to hold on to him and not let him go. But Jesus said, “**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**”

⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

The first words of Jesus when he was raised from the dead were questions posed in order to obtain a response, revealing the state of the witnesses’ minds.

In responding to Mary’s inquiry to him, who supposed him to be the gardener, he simply spoke her name - **Mary**. The sound of his familiar voice opened her eyes and she instantly saw that it was Jesus himself as she cried out, “**Rabboni!**”

What love and tenderness is revealed in our Lord’s first recorded resurrection words. His revealing himself to Mary in such a warm personal way is evidence that this man was the same Jesus she had known during his days of ministry.

In Mark’s abbreviated account of the women visiting the tomb, Jesus told them “to go and tell his disciples and Peter that he was risen.” We know from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 15, verse 5, that he was also seen by Cephas, that is, Peter. Although he first appeared to Peter among the apostles, there is no record of the visit or the private conversation. Since Peter had denied knowing Jesus while he was being interrogated and abused, we can infer from another recorded visit of Jesus with some of the apostles, that their first meeting involved repentance, sorrow and restoration.

In the afternoon on the day of his resurrection Jesus joined two disciples walking from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They were sad and downcast discussing the disappointing events of the prophet Jesus’ crucifixion. Luke gives us the details of this conversation.

Together they were discussing everything that had taken place. ¹⁵ And while they were discussing and arguing, Jesus Himself came near and began to walk along with them. ¹⁶ But they^[c] were prevented from recognizing Him.¹⁷ Then He asked them, “**What is this dispute that you’re having^[d] with each other as you are walking?**” And they stopped walking and looked discouraged.

¹⁸ The one named Cleopas answered Him, “Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn’t know the things that happened there in these days?”

¹⁹ ***“What things?”*** He asked them.

So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a Prophet powerful in action and speech before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified Him.²¹ But we were hoping that He was the One who was about to redeem Israel. Besides all this, it’s the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women from our group astounded us. They arrived early at the tomb, ²³ and when they didn’t find His body, they came and reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn’t see Him.”

²⁵ He said to them, ***“How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Didn’t the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?”*** ²⁷ ***Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.***

²⁸ They came near the village where they were going, and He gave the impression that He was going farther. ²⁹ But they urged Him: “Stay with us, because it’s almost evening, and now the day is almost over.” So He went in to stay with them.

³⁰ It was as He reclined at the table with them that He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, but He disappeared from their sight. ³² So they said to each other, ***“Weren’t our hearts ablaze within us while He was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?”*** ³³ That very hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem.

Notice again Jesus’ pattern of an inquiring question so that when they answered, the state of their mind and attitude was revealed. Their eyes had been prevented from recognizing him. His purpose was to open their understanding to the prophecies in the law, the writing and the prophets that predicted his sacrificial death and resurrection. He explained these scriptures to them. Afterward at their house when they sat at table to eat, he lifted the bread to give thanks. The voice, the gestures of his body triggered in them memories, and their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Why did Jesus take this approach? He wanted to establish their faith in him and his saving actions in the Scriptures themselves.

Now these two disciples rushed back to Jerusalem where ten of the apostles were gathered and reported what had happened to them. Suddenly Jesus stood among them

and greeted them with “Peace.” They had heard of the appearance to Jesus to the women and now the two who had come to them. Jesus began with his question,

“Why are you troubled?” He asked them. **“And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself! Touch Me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.”** Having said this, He showed them His hands and feet. But while they still were amazed and unbelieving because of their joy, He asked them, **“Do you have anything here to eat?”** So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and He took it and ate in their presence.

Then He told 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, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”** Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Jesus challenges them because of their slowness to believe the reports of others who had seen him alive from the dead. He proceeded to show them the reality of his bodily resurrection by letting them view the scars of his crucifixion, and he invited them to touch his body of flesh and bone. To prove even more his physical resurrection in the same body in which he had suffered for them, he asked if they had food and he ate it before them. Then commenced a great Bible study of the Old Testament so they could see he was the fulfillment of all the prophets.

He demonstrated that he was actually risen from the dead in a real physical body. But the body had been transformed into an immortal state incapable of ever dying again and fit for the eternal dwellings.

All of these resurrection day appearances together testify to the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. He appeared to two individuals and three groups under different circumstances and at various locations and times. He is truly risen from the dead and he has been demonstrated to be the Son of God in power. Jesus is Lord! Deliverance from our state of sin and lostness is found only in the Lord Jesus. Belief in his sufferings for our sins and his bodily resurrection is necessary for our acceptance by God, the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life. Paul writes in Romans 4 that righteousness is credited to us who believed in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 4:24-25; 10:9-10)

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