

To Rise or Not to Rise From the Dead: That is the Question!

Luke 24:1-35

Key Verse: 32

“They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us, while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’”

What are you hoping for? A better job? Better health? A spouse? Success? Achievement? A new car? A house? A better figure? Respect? Rest? Something new and exciting? There’s nothing new under the sun. We’re often just chasing after the wind.

Consider another question: Why was Jesus so popular? I think it was because he offered people hope for something better. American presidential candidates are trying to convince voters that he or she has the best hope and vision for something better. Politics is often about who can make the most believable promises. Convince me and I’ll vote for you.

Luke the gospel writer carefully investigated the story of Jesus from the beginning to the end from eyewitnesses. It was to write down an orderly account with certainty the hope presented and proclaimed in the life and message of Jesus Christ. May this hope and certainty burn within us and make us also faithful and fruitful servants of the word.

I. An E.T. more incredible than an Extra-Terrestrial (1-12)

Do you believe in ETs, that is, extra-terrestrials? Once I was at a Bible conference and in the same facility there was a UFO conference going on. Some people are fanatics to learn about aliens. Some even go off the deep end and mix UFOs with religion, saying things like “Jesus was from another planet or galaxy.” In this Bible passage there is an even more astonishing ET.

Look at verses 1-3. **“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”**

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Jesus died on Friday and was buried by Joseph of Arimathea. The women and some others saw where Jesus' dead body was buried. It was a cave-like tomb with a stone across the entrance. Jesus' body was placed there and then the women and everyone went away to observe the Sabbath, which to the Jews was Saturday. Now it was Sunday morning. The third day. These faithful women went to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus' dead body. Kind of spooky.

They were surprised by something. In today's movies it would be a zombie that surprised them. But they saw the tombstone rolled away from the entrance. Probably, they expected foul play, that someone had raided Jesus' tomb to steal Jesus' body. When they entered the tomb, Jesus' dead body was nowhere to be found. Who stole Jesus?

Luke did not tell about the Roman guard that was posted, which would have made it virtually impossible to steal Jesus' body. The main fabricated story by Jesus' enemies was that the disciples came and stole the body. But as we shall see, the disciples had no idea what happened to Jesus' body.

Then what happened? Of course we already know. But let's go back to the women. **“While [the women] were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.”** Whoa! Where did you guys come from? Who are you? Naturally, they were afraid, a very realistic response. **“In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground... But the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ Then they remembered his words.”**

These gleaming men were angels, messengers from God, with the greatest news ever heard by human ears: **“He has risen!”** Jesus Christ rose from the dead!

Do you know that Christianity stands or falls on this one fact: Jesus rose from the dead. The entire New Testament bears this truth out. If the story of Jesus ended with his brutal, unjust, inhumane death, there would be no Christianity

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today. That I'm sure of. Who would want to follow or believe in a leader who was brutally killed and that was the end of the story? I wouldn't. I don't believe any of you would.

Moreover, who would volunteer to die as a follower of Him? Wait a minute! Many people have died gladly for Jesus Christ. In February, the world learned of 21 Egyptian Christians who were beheaded for their faith in Libya. The mother of one of them said, "I thank God that my son kept the faith and died for the cross." All they had to do to live was renounce their faith in Christ. But they did not. All 21 of them. Why not?

Because of their hope and promise in the resurrection of the dead. I want to say something about Peter. But wait. Let's finish this scene in the Bible.

Look at verses 9-11. **"When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."**

Stop for a second.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, another Mary and some others saw these gleaming men and the missing body, and heard their words "He has risen!", and told the Eleven apostles. And there was one more corroborating evidence: the words of Jesus. Jesus had prophesied at least three times in advance his death and resurrection.

For example, Luke 9:22 says, **"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."** That was the first time Jesus foretold it.

How about 18:31-33, with more details: Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by**

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the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”

So, there were many evidences that Jesus had risen from the dead. The women believed. I suppose seeing gleaming men, hearing their words, and remembering Jesus’ words convinced them. But the Eleven apostles were not convinced. They said, “Naww, no way. Nonsense.” Here’s where Peter comes in.

Look at verse 12. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. We’ll come back to Peter later.

So what is the E.T. more real than an extra-terrestrial? **The empty tomb.** The empty tomb of Jesus Christ, sets him apart from every human being. He did not stay buried. His body could not be found. It was not stolen. It was not destroyed. There’s only one real explanation.

II. A Walk, a Talk and a Meal with a Very Surprising Guest (13-35)

This next story is one of the longest accounts in the Bible of the Risen Christ spending time with anyone.

Look at verses 13 -16. **“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.”**

Why in the world did the Risen Jesus come to these guys and walk with them? I don’t know. But I’m not gonna argue with Jesus. If he wants to walk and talk with these guys, it’s all good.

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So what did Jesus say? “Hey guys, how’s it going? It’s me, Jesus!” No, he didn’t say that. Jesus said something that was typical of Jesus to say. He asked them questions. Jesus often asked questions: “What do you want? Who do you say I am? How do you read it?” He asked them, **“What are you discussing together as you walk along?”**

They stood still, their faces downcast. **“One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’”** It meant, “Dude, you’re not from around here are you? Haven’t you heard the news?”

“What things?” Jesus asked.

“‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.’”

Why did Luke spend so much time recounting what the men had said? To be sure, he had interviewed them, for only Luke tells us this story. Also, there words describe the dashed hopes of so many followers of Jesus. They knew Jesus was a prophet from God, with mighty words and deeds. To all their shock and dismay, Jesus was crucified. But they had hoped he was the one who would rescue and save Israel. They were hoping Jesus would deliver much like Moses delivered them from slavery in Egypt. The words, “we had hoped” poignantly express their hopelessness and despair. They lost hope.

They are an accurate picture of all hope in this world. Their hope was in Jesus to establish some kind of earthly messianic kingdom. When Jesus died, their

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hope died with him. All worldly hopes are dying hopes. There is no real, lasting, eternal hope in this world, because everything eventually perishes, spoils or fades away some day.

Now it was Jesus' turn to speak. Look at verse 25. **“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”**

Risen Jesus called them “foolish” and “slow to believe.” Some translations say “slow of heart,” which is closer to the Greek. The Bible says we should be quick to listen and slow to speak, but not slow of heart. Slow of heart means “dull.” It’s a nicer way than saying, “You dummies!” Even in his rebuke, Jesus asks a question, **“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”**

Risen Jesus explained to them that it was all part of God’s perfect plan to save the world. Remember the angel’s words on the night of Jesus’ birth, **“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”**

Jesus then had a 1 to 2 Bible study with them. He was the teacher and they were the students. Jesus showed them in the Old Testament promises and prophecies about the Messiah. Jesus must’ve reminded them of Genesis 12:3, **“And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”** That happened through Abraham’s descendant, the Messiah. Isaiah foretold “a light to the Gentiles,” that is, the whole world (Isa 42:6; 49:6). Isaiah 53 foretold the meaning of his death, **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** Jesus must’ve showed them the hope and promise of his resurrection in Psalm 16:10, **“...nor will you let your faithful one see decay.”** We have many of these Old Testament promises and prophecies explained as fulfilled in the New

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Testament, in the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's letters like Romans.

Jesus did not randomly appear and speak and act randomly. He fulfilled hundreds of promises and prophecies that were given to the Jews in the Hebrews Scriptures, the Tanakh, which is an acronym T, N, K for Torah (Law), Neviim (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings/Psalms). Whenever we study the Bible, even the Old Testament, written long before Christ, we can find Jesus alluded to or hinted at or prophesied about. Bible study should lead us to Jesus, to put our hope and faith and trust in him and his eternal kingdom.

“As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.”

Notice here that Jesus doesn't force his presence upon us. He wants to know if our desire is urgent and strong for him to teach us, to guide us, to stay with us. Do you want Jesus to leave, or stay with you? Let's ask him, no plead with him, to stay.

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.”

Just as they were kept from recognizing him during their long walk and talk, so their eyes were opened to recognize him at the table. Maybe it was the way Jesus blessed and broke the bread, like at the Last Supper, or when he fed the 5000. It was at the moment that they recognized Jesus, that he vanished. Risen Jesus' mission was accomplished. He wanted them to believe based on the Bible.

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“They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” Risen Jesus gave them a burning Bible study, a burning heart Bible study. Have you ever had a burning heart Bible study? That’s when God’s word comes alive in your heart and gives great joy, peace and hope. This hope burns away our complaints and despair. It empowers us to get up and do something.

“They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”

Notice that Simon is mentioned in verse 34. This is a reference to Simon Peter. Remember Peter denied Jesus three times to save himself. Then he wept when Jesus looked straight at him and he remembered Jesus’ prediction of his denials. Peter went to the tomb and saw the linens. Now he saw the Risen Christ. Luke doesn’t give us any details. What is astonishing is the change that took place in Peter after meeting the Risen Jesus and the Holy Spirit coming upon him. He became a bold proclaimer of Jesus. He even urged Christians to rejoice to suffer for Jesus. That is quite a different person from before. It shows that Peter’s hope was changed from earth to heaven.

Peter called this hope the living hope in 1 Peter 1:3-4, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you...”**

32 years ago at Easter time I was a college freshman. I attended my first Easter Bible conference. It was one year after my dad had died from a heart attack. My dad’s death stung me with the meaninglessness of life. I wasn’t sure what to live for. I was in hot pursuit of money and pleasure. At that Bible conference, the

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living hope dawned on me. I realized: There is no hope in this world, because everything dies. The only living hope is Jesus Christ, because he rose from the dead. That hope has stayed with me to keep me following and living for Jesus Christ.

From time to time, daily actually, I lose hold of this hope and become petty, proud, impatient, worldly. By God's grace, I've been helped by burning Bible studies again and again to restore my excitement, my first love in Jesus, for Jesus, from Jesus. May the living hope of Jesus' resurrection fill you and revive many, many, hearts in our nation and throughout the world.