

“JESUS’ RESURRECTION APPEARANCES”
Mark 16:9-18, I Corinthians 15:3-11, John 20:30-31
April 13 & 14, 2024

In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 1995), Philip Yancey gives us an excellent look at the season we are in. He says, “The other two days have earned names on the church calendar: Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Yet in a real sense we live on Saturday, the day with no name. What the disciples experienced in small scale—three days in grief over one man who had died on a cross—we now live through on a cosmic scale. Human history grinds on, between the time of promise and its fulfillment. Can we trust that God can make something holy and beautiful and good out of a world that includes [Ukraine] and [Gaza] and inner-city ghettos and jammed prisons in the richest nation on earth? It's Saturday on planet earth. Will Sunday ever come?

“That dark, Golgothan Friday can only be called “Good” because of what happened on Easter Sunday, a day which gives a tantalizing clue to the riddle of the universe. Easter opened up a crack in a universe winding down toward entropy and decay, sealing the promise that someday God will enlarge the miracle of Easter to a cosmic scale.

“It is a good thing to remember that in the cosmic drama, we live out our days on Saturday, the in-between day with no name.” Yancey says, “I know a woman whose grandmother lies buried under 150-year-old live oak trees in the cemetery of an Episcopal church in rural Louisiana. In accordance with the grandmother's instructions, only one word is carved on the tombstone: ‘Waiting.’

“Though Jesus cast a vision for a better kingdom now and in the future, as long as it is Saturday, the fulfillment of that vision still awaits until Sunday dawns.”¹ And we must all keep waiting.

Now, in order to give us the courage to live our lives here in this “Saturday” season, God gave us the very best example of what is yet to come. On Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead, and then revealed Himself to His disciples so that they might not constantly be in fear, and sorrow, and torment, and anguish. Jesus appeared to His followers to help them to find the assurance that this world is not all

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 245-246)

there is, that there is life beyond the here and now living on in a continuous “Saturday” mindset. While we await the final resurrection for all those who follow Him, we can have the hope of new life in Christ Jesus. And that hope comes as we remember the many times that Jesus appeared to His disciples.

The first lesson today of Mark 16:9-18 tells us a few of those appearances. “*He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had driven seven demons*” (Mark 16:9). He appeared to her when she and the other women had gone to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices in order to complete the burial process. They had found the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and they saw the angel sitting on the stone (inside and outside the tomb). And while following the angel’s directions to go tell the other disciples, Jesus presented Himself to them so that they could really see that He was alive. With fear and great joy, the women worshiped Jesus, and then went to tell the other disciples. Even though the disciples did not believe the report of the women, it did not discount their seeing Jesus alive and in the flesh.

Then, “*afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country*” (Mark 16:12). These were the two who were headed to Emmaus, who asked Jesus to tell them about the Christ. And Jesus explained to them from the Scriptures all that had to take place for the Christ to fulfill His ministry of reconciliation of humanity back to the Lord God Almighty (see Luke 24:13-35). At the evening meal, they recognized Jesus as He broke the bread for supper. Their trip back to Jerusalem took far less time than it did to get to Emmaus.

But upon returning to the other disciples, there was great uncertainty about their encounter with Jesus. Though they were told that Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter, there was still uneasiness about a man rising from the dead. They still didn’t know what to believe. Could it really be true?

But Mark continues: “*Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; He rebuked them for their lack of faith and the stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen*” (Mark 16:14). The disciples didn’t believe the women’s report, they balked at Simon’s and the two disciples’ report when they were going to Emmaus. Now Jesus shows up in a locked room with all of

the eleven disciples in order to put to rest their skepticism and doubt (See John 20:19-23). Jesus wanted each of these folks to fully understand the reason for His crucifixion and resurrection, that He had paid the price for the sins of the world, and that He was providing an eternal hope in His presence.

Imagine their great joy as the light comes on in their understanding of what had to happen for the salvation of the world! Though all the other religions of the world reject the Suffering of Jesus as the Savior for the world, the sacrifice of blood had to be made so that the sins of the world could be atoned. There was no other way for the penalty of our sins to be paid, than for a perfect sacrifice to be made for us. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, paid the ultimate sacrifice so that all those who believe in Him might be saved from the penalty of sin, which is death.

The apostle Paul supports the Gospel accounts as he recounts these appearances and also gives others. He says “*After that, [Jesus] appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born*” (1 Corinthians 15:6-8).

If the people of Israel, as well as the people of the world, were to find hope for life beyond this life, the disciples had to believe that Jesus was alive so that they could tell others with confidence that Jesus was and is the Savior of the world. But it took many times hearing, and other times actually seeing Jesus, to truly convince them that He was alive, and that He had truly fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the One who would save us from our sins. If other people were to be able to believe for themselves that Jesus is the Savior, then His followers had to believe first. Only then could they accomplish Jesus’ mission of bringing salvation to the whole world.

But there has been such obstinance in so many people that they refuse to believe the resurrection of Jesus. They come up with all kinds of foolish and indignant reasons why the disciples and other followers of Jesus really didn’t see Jesus alive. Some of the reasons are 1) that the followers of Jesus were so heartbroken and grief stricken over Jesus’ crucifixion that they allowed themselves to be led

into delusions of seeing Jesus arisen, 2) that it was a case of mass hysteria affecting them, and 3) that it was just all a hoax - storytelling to propagate the “lie” of Jesus rising from the dead. Sadly, these feeble reasons have convinced many that the reports of Jesus rising from the dead really are not true.

But in their book, *Through the Windows of Heaven* (Broadman & Holman, 1999), Walter Martin and Jill Martin Rische make this great statement about these appearances. They say, “Science says if there is any such thing as infallible proof, it is the repetition of the same experiment. (So let’s put the resurrection to the test.)

“Jesus rose from the dead, and Mary Magdalene encountered Him--experiment one. The women encountered Him--experiment two. [He appeared to Simon Peter--experiment three. He appeared to and walked with the two travelers from Emmaus--experiment four.] The disciples encountered Him (twice in 1 week - without Thomas and then with Thomas)--experiment five and six. [The apostles encountered Him at the Sea of Galilee--experiment seven.] Five hundred people saw Him after the Resurrection--experiment eight. [He appeared to James--experiment nine. And finally He appeared to Saul while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there--experiment ten.]

“Each one of these is the repetition of the same experiment. They all encountered the same phenomenon. What was it? Jesus was alive! That’s what changed the history of the world.”²

Over a forty day period, Jesus appeared to His followers to encourage them and support them and empower them to continue His work of reconciling the world back to God the Father. R. J. Campbell says, “When the Master stood before Thomas and his friends in that little upper room so long ago, and held out His wounded hands to them, it was a call to war. A divine enthusiasm was kindled in their souls, an enthusiasm for Him, a willingness to dare anything and everything in the cause for which He had suffered and died. The appearance of Jesus on the inner side of those closed doors meant that before long they were flung wide open, that a dauntless band of warriors might go forth to do battle in His invincible Name. The very things they had been afraid of before He came, they were afraid of no

² (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 240)

longer - neither shame, nor scorn, nor loss of friends and worldly goods, nor bonds and stripes, nor poverty and starvation, nor death itself in whatsoever guise it might come.”³

That’s what kick-started the Christian movement all over the earth, for these men and women were willing to confess their seeing Jesus even up to the moment of their death. They did not shrink from their faith in Jesus being the Messiah, and their lives transformed Israel, Judea and Samaria, and into the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). They wanted everyone to know that Jesus beat death, that in His resurrection from the dead, He brings life to all who will believe. When we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we have no fear of death, because we put our trust in His resurrection bringing us to be with Him in His Father’s house (John 14).

And we are the result of that same experiment, for we are here today praising God and rejoicing in the belief that Jesus really rose from the dead, just as the Scriptures foretold, because of our own faith in what the followers of Jesus attested to - their personal interaction with Jesus after He had risen from the grave. We know He lives beyond the grave because we trust in the reports of those who actually saw Him during those forty days before His ascension. That’s what gives us great hope for this life.

So our life is in the Lord Jesus, our hope is in the Lord Jesus, and our strength is in our Lord Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior! He is the One who enables us to endure the things of this world AND to live with such joy that those around us are so astounded.

The disciples were recognized as those who had been with Jesus. When Peter and John stood before the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law after they had brought healing to a lame man, they were seen differently than others. Acts 4:13 tells us, “*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*”

The difference in Peter and John, as well as with all the other followers of Jesus, was that they had been with Jesus, and that they had seen Jesus alive after His resurrection. Even though they had not

³ (Charles L. Wallis, editor, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1961] pg. 166-167, #350)

been formally trained by the church, even though they were ordinary people, there was now a boldness within them that went way beyond themselves. They were eye witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, and they were empowered to stand up to the false teachings that were around them. They were believers in Jesus and they began to do great works in the Name of Jesus for the benefit of the people.

Now, that is encouragement for each one of us. Not many of us have had formal training to be preachers and teachers. Not many have had the chance to be leaders within the church. But it is hoped that others see you differently than those around you, because you have Jesus with you! Jesus makes a difference in us when we come to understand that He is our Messiah, Lord and Savior. Jesus transforms our hearts and minds when we believe in His atoning sacrifice made on our behalf. Jesus empowers us to be His witnesses to all the world as we trust in Him and let Him use us to tell our own stories of how Jesus saved us from eternal death and brought us into life.

Is your faith in Jesus living in you? Are you living your faith in Jesus on a daily basis, allowing the joy of His resurrection to fill you so much that you can't wait to tell another about His great love for all of us? If you were arrested on the grounds of being called a Christian, would there be enough evidence against you to convict you?

The people who witnessed Jesus after His resurrection did not remain the same as before they saw Jesus. NO! They were filled with exuberant joy that filled their whole lives, and they took Jesus with them wherever they went, working powerfully in His Name.

But so many of those who call themselves Christians today seem afraid to live their faith before others. Yes, we live in a society that tells us to keep our faith to ourselves, but imagine what this world would have looked like if the disciples and followers of Jesus had done that after His resurrection? How will the world know of Jesus' victory over death unless we tell them? How will the people of this world find hope beyond their own strength and knowledge to endure the things of this world unless we first have the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ in us so that they can see the difference He makes when we believe in Him? If we keep our faith in Jesus a secret, then one could truly question us as to whether we have

actually believed in Jesus and really received Him into our lives as Savior and Lord. Our faith must be lived on the outside of us so that everyone can see the difference that Jesus makes when we have Him as our Risen Savior.

And that's the purpose of John's words to us today found in John 20:30-31. These two verses give us the challenge we need for today. Listen carefully to these words. (READ John 20:30-31)

John invites us to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that "*we may have life in His Name*" (John 20:31). Where else can we find abundant life? Where else can we put our hope and trust beyond this life? We don't need to earn eternal life. We can't buy eternal life. We don't merit eternal life by being good or by doing good works. Eternal life comes to us only through our belief in Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, having purchased our salvation through His crucifixion, death and resurrection.

I like very much what William Robertson Nicoll says about the importance of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to His followers. It produced the living church. He says, "The proof of the Resurrection is the living church of Jesus Christ. The life of the Church proves the life of the Savior. When Jesus Christ died, His disciples, as might be expected, were plunged in profound despair. When the Shepherd was smitten, the flock was scattered abroad. But no long time had passed before a great revolution took place. They were at first in despair in spite of all that He had said. His enemies were quicker to discern the meaning of His prophecies than His disciples, and their fears were stronger than His disciples' hopes. No collapse could be imagined more complete than that which took place at the entombment of the Savior; but in a little time all was changed. The men who before had been cowards, slow of heart to believe, were completely transformed.

"They became brave and strong, and full of the most resolved faith. It was not that their outward circumstances had changed. They were sheep in the midst of wolves, and the beginning of their conflict with the world might have been expected to disappoint rather than encourage them; but instead of that, they have a new faith in the power of Jesus Christ - a faith which transforms them and makes them men.

What explains this: Something must have happened in the interval to account for so marvelous a transformation. Nothing can explain it, save the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That resurrection breathed into them new faith, and hope, and strength, by virtue of which they faced fearlessly the most formidable odds, and the most determined enemies.

“That is the explanation of Paul. It has never been denied, even by the extremest skepticism, that the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written within thirty-five years after the death of Christ. In that Epistle the whole gospel is built on the risen Christ. Jesus had broken the fetters of the tomb - the Lord had risen indeed; and in the strength of that risen Lord His disciples were henceforth to fight.”⁴

The followers of Jesus were empowered to live for Jesus as they witnessed Him in His many appearances to them during the forty days after His resurrection. It gave them purpose, it gave them stamina, it gave them wisdom beyond their own intelligence, and it gave them a heart for the people around them. And as they shared their faith with those around them, the world was turned up-side-down for Christ Jesus.

That is my hope for us today, that we catch this same empowerment as we put our faith into action and live our lives for Jesus every day, willing to endure whatever we might be forced to face, so that even the persecutors might come to know Jesus Christ. Let the joy of Jesus’ resurrection fill your hearts and drive you to live lives that reflect that joy. Let’s pray:

Father, thank You for Jesus’ resurrection! Thank You for the reports of those who saw Him, and touched Him, and worshipped Him, and followed Him to the end of their life. Lord, give us that same resolve, to believe in Jesus’ resurrection, to rejoice in Him each day, and to let Him so move in our hearts and minds that we radiate His love and boldly proclaim His Word. Empower us to steady ourselves to be brave and strong and bold as we witness our faith in Jesus. Then, let us show love to all those around us, so that they might worship passionately with us of all that You have done. Thank You for the transformed lives given to us through Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior and Lord. Amen.

⁴ (Charles L. Wallis, editor, *Lenten-Easter Sourcebook*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1961] pg.172-173, #359)