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**Day 323 - November 19**

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## **Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)**

### ***Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances***

### ***Final Instructions and Ascension***

**Readings: *Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-21:25; Acts 1:6-26***

### ***Reflections:***

- Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances: The earliest record of Jesus' resurrection and appearances is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 where Paul shares a list. This list was apparently something that was passed on to Paul by the other apostles and was something all Christ-followers memorized as a part of being able to communicate the Good News." For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers 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..." Paul adds his own story in verse 8 by writing, "And last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." What is interesting is that in this very early list the women are not mentioned. Women were not considered as accepted witnesses in the court of law and so possibly this was why they did not include them at this early point. The women are given full credit in the biographies of Jesus and so obviously when telling the story they were affirmed as the first witnesses. We should also note that although Peter's encounter with Christ is not described in the text, it is mentioned in the verses that speak of Cleopas meeting the resurrected Jesus (see Luke 24:33-35). Jesus later appears to Peter on the seashore in restoring him to his calling as recorded at the end of John. The point to note is that central to the message of Jesus is the fact that he was miraculously raised to life. He was not resuscitated to simply die again but was given a new resurrected body. This body is similar to the angels (as far as we can tell from the Scriptures). Jesus can appear and disappear. He can eat and be touched and yet also pass through walls. He can make his identity undistinguishable or distinguishable. Theologians have described this new resurrected body as trans-physical: a pure state of spiritual and physical union in harmony with God's power and presence. This is the kind of body we will receive at our resurrection.

- Stone rolled away: Again we see Matthew being dramatic in his telling of the story – earthquake, stone rolled away, the angels appear like lightening, guards passing out in fear. I guess seeing an angel can do this to a person. 😊
- Women come to the tomb: Women, particularly Mary Magdalene, are honored as the first to meet the resurrected Jesus. Their love and devotion position them to see him. This is a good reminder. Jesus doesn't reveal himself to those who are powerful leaders or most educated or most popular. Jesus reveals himself to those who seek him and love him with all their hearts.
- Resurrection announced: An angel that looks like a young man in white tells the women that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Peter is specifically mentioned as Jesus wants to encourage him that the story is not over. Jesus loves Peter even after his complete denial. We see again the grace of God.
- Women reminded of prophecy: Luke records the story in a slightly different way that suggests there were two angels and that they reminded the women of Jesus' own words. In Luke there is often two rather than one. This is a theme in Luke and underscores the idea that there are always two witnesses to confirm the truth.
- Women go away fearful: In Mark's original version of his biography, Mark concludes with the women leaving the empty tomb afraid and not telling anyone. Mark wrote this to be dramatic and to set up the public preaching that would follow the reading of the story. Luke, Matthew and John's biographies continue on with detailing what happens next.
- Peter and John told: The women do tell Peter and John and both run to the tomb. Peter and John go inside the tomb first, see with their own eyes and believe. Here we see that their worldview is starting to change and they are starting to believe the truth of Jesus. This is a good reminder that we don't naturally believe but rather it often takes time and a lot of journeying with God before we truly believe the truth at a deep level. Even though they start to believe, they still don't understand the full truth as outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures. They return to their homes unsure of what to do next.
- Jesus with Mary Magdalene: John records the story of Jesus' appearance to Mary. This account is very touching and beautiful. Mary doesn't recognize Jesus until he says her name. She wants to cling to him and never let him go. He encourages her that she must tell the others and release him for he is going away to the Father as a part of his continued mission. We see in Jesus' words deep love and oneness with Mary.
- Jesus appears to women: Matthew records a similar story but this includes all the women and is shorter.
- Chief priests cover up: Matthew captures a story about how the religious leaders, particularly the chief priests, devise a rumor to deny the resurrection. This rumor was apparently spread throughout the Jews to the time of Matthew writing his biography.

- Women tell of appearance: The women report everything that has happened to the disciples and at first the disciples don't believe them. This seems to contradict the previous story in John where Peter and John start to believe. Yet, this may be a function of order of stories where John's account actually comes a bit later. It is difficult to sort out the exact timing between the three biographies.
- Jesus appears to Cleopas: Luke records a story of two travelers (again notice "two"). This is a bizarre story as Jesus at first travels with them, talks with them but they don't recognize him. Jesus explains to them the alignment between the prophecies in the Old Testament and the death and resurrection of Jesus but they still don't make the connection.
- Jesus' identity revealed: Only when Jesus breaks bread are they able to see Jesus' true identity. Was it the nail prints in his hands? Was it how we broke bread, a kind of signature method? Most likely Jesus did this miracle of hidden identity to demonstrate what was clearly happening. The breaking of bread symbolized his death and so prior to the breaking of bread they don't really know who he is even though he is explaining it clearly. Only after breaking the bread (his death) do they start to understand who he really is. As soon as they see Jesus for his true identity, he then miraculously disappears (parallel to the ascension). They sense afterwards that God was at work in their lives and they describe this as their hearts burning within them.
- Cleopas tells of appearance: We see here how afraid the disciples are as they hide out in the room with doors locked. We also see in this text that at some point along the way Jesus has appeared to Simon although it is not recorded by any of the writers.
- Jesus appears to disciples: Jesus now miraculously appears in the room. They are all scared and think at first it might be a ghost. Jesus seeks to calm them down, allow them to touch his body and he even eats with them to show that it truly was a physical resurrection even if his body can do things that only angels can do. Jesus underscores how his death fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. This is a key piece moving forward for the disciples and early church as Jesus' teaching, life, death and resurrection radically redefine what the Jewish people believed would be true of the Messiah.
- Apostles receive authority: John records Jesus giving the Holy Spirit and commissioning them earlier on in his record. Luke describes it as coming later. The important thing is that Jesus did send the Holy Spirit and the role of the Spirit is to change our lives from the inside out. As we are changed, we are sent to serve the world with his truth and love.
- Thomas doubts: Thomas represents the inner skeptic in all of us. Unless something becomes concrete to us, we find it hard to believe.
- Jesus appears to Thomas: Jesus loves Thomas and loves our inner skeptic. He appears to Thomas, responds to his request, and then calls all people to believe even without seeing. Here we see the love of Christ again not judging his struggling disciples but seeking to meet them and help them come to deep trust and faith. It is good to know that Jesus loves us and accepts us right where we are.

- Jesus appears to disciples: John records a very significant appearance of Jesus. This story carries much depth of meaning and significance. Here in this account we see a parallel experience to what is recorded in Luke 5:1-11. Here we see the following account: "One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him." Here we see how Peter wanted to run away from Jesus and yet Jesus still reached out to Peter and called him to be a disciple. Jesus replays these events and when Peter realizes that Jesus is there, this time he runs to Jesus. Jesus has prepared a whole meal and symbolically shows Peter that once again Jesus has taken care of everything and has come to meet his deepest needs.
- Peter reinstated: Peter has denied Jesus three times and Jesus reinstates Peter three times before the disciples. It is hard to translate the full meaning from the Greek but the account goes something like this. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you perfectly love me to the point of laying down your life? (agape love – the kind of love Peter had declared he had for Jesus prior to the denial)" Peter responds, "You know I love you as a friend (Phileo love)". Jesus says, "Feed my lamb or it is okay for you to teach those who are spiritually young and immature." Jesus asks this same question and Peter again gives this same answer but this second time Jesus upgrades him to "Take care of my sheep or be a pastor to the adult community but don't teach them." Peter is slowly being restored into his full calling. Lastly, Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me as a friend?" Peter is broken because Jesus is even testing him on his honest confession of only loving Jesus with a human imperfect love. Peter confesses, "Yes that is all I have to offer." Jesus then fully restates Peter and calls him to "Feed my sheep or teach and lead my community." We see Jesus' incredible grace to Peter in just accepting him exactly as he was. Jesus loves us the same way and accepts us right where we are. Our calling doesn't begin when we reach maturity but when we come to terms with the fullness of God's grace for us and for all others.
- Peter's death foretold: Jesus now gives Peter a promise that he will one day possess a love that will enable Peter to lay his life down for him. Although this sounds like something to be avoided, this was truly a high honor for Peter to receive.

- John's death questioned: Peter wonders if this will be true of John. We see again how Peter so easily loses his focus and is always looking around to see how he measures up. Jesus tells him to not worry about John but to stay focused on what he has been called to. In fact church history tells us that John was the only disciple not to die as a martyr. This is a good reminder that our own calling with God is ours to steward. We are not to compete or vie for first place. Our goal is to simply serve and when we are done simply to have done everything for Christ alone as a gift of love in response to the perfect love he has offered us.
- Note about Mark 16:9-20: The second ending of Mark is not found in any early manuscripts but was clearly a later edit to capture some of the resurrection appearances. Some of the content in that second ending is questionable as it refers to snake handling and drinking poison. Interestingly in Acts 28:1-5 it does refer to a snake biting Paul and Paul suffering no effects. Scholars affirm that this text is not original and so those troubled by these references can simply set them aside as later comments by editors wanting to give a more complete ending to Mark's biography.
- Final Instructions and Ascension: Here we see Jesus' parting words to his disciples before returning to the Father.
- Jesus commissions apostles: Jesus has all authority over every power. He has triumphed through the cross over every power of the enemy and over death and sin itself. As we go into the world, the calling is to make disciples of Christ, both through baptism (repentance and identification) and teaching. He promises his presence through the Spirit to be with us always. We are no longer insignificant as we have a new high calling. We are no longer lost as we now have a clear mission. We are no longer alone as we now have a constant companion and lover of our soul. We are no longer weak and God's power is now at work within us and enables us to do all he calls us to do, even if it seems impossible.
- Parting instructions: Jesus now through the Spirit opens their minds. One of the roles of the Spirit is to give us a wisdom and revelation in our growing knowledge of God and his truth (See Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1). As we come to understand the meaning of the meta-narrative of Scripture and are empowered by the Spirit, we can then be witnesses. The word in Greek for witness is the word we get martyr from. We can then live our lives without fear of death as we proclaim the truth. Jesus calls the disciples to wait until they have been clothed with divine power. All those who would serve Christ must wait in his presence until they are clothed with his Spirit, secured with his love and activated by his power.
- Jesus ascends: The disciples are still asking dumb questions and still don't get that the kingdom Jesus came to bring is a spiritual, relational kingdom rather than a national kingdom. Jesus ignores the question and simply tells them that they will receive the power of the Spirit and be sent to proclaim the message to their city (Jerusalem), their nation (Judea and Samaria), and their world (the ends of the earth). This set of concentric spheres of community and mission is how the book of Acts is structured as the disciples first target their own city, move out intentionally through their country and then finally move into the

whole world through the missionary efforts of Paul and Barnabas. Jesus is taken up to God and again we don't know exactly how this happened or what it looked like. The disciples are just left there bewildered and two angels appear to get them back on track. They reaffirm that Jesus will return the way he came and so they can now move into mission knowing that Christ will one day come again.

- Disciples return joyfully: The disciples are now overflowing with worship and joy. The eleven return with the women and Mary, Jesus' mother. No doubt they are all blown away by the experiences they have just had.
- Call for Judas' replacement: Peter takes the lead in finding a replacement for Judas. Luke records in Acts what happened to Judas and it is about as terrible a judgment as could have been described. They see God lead them by bringing Scripture to mind about replacing someone in leadership. They determine the right qualifications, narrow the possible candidates to a few and then draw lots trusting God to direct.
- Matthias chosen as apostle: There is a respected history in Israel of using the Urim and Thummin, a kind of spiritual dice, for discerning God's will. Matthias is chosen and is not mentioned again in Scripture. Some speculate that Paul's prominence and Matthias's disappearance from the text suggests that the disciples filled Judas' role prematurely. This is not suggested anywhere in the text. In fact, what is affirmed is that the Twelve are sent to the Jews and Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles. It is probably better understood that the symbolic number of twelve that would have been meaningful to the Jews was maintained as Judas is replaced and that this would have aided the leadership community seeking to reach out to the Jews.
- Jesus preached: Mark's final statement, although added later by editors, is a good conclusion to the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection: "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his work by the signs that accompanied."
- Conclusion to the Gospel accounts: John has two summary statements at the end of his biography that affirm that the purpose of his writing is so that people will believe Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God and that through believing they might receive life in his name. He also affirms that he left out many stories and that this is just a sampling. This supports the importance of having four biographies and points of view rather than just having one definitive text. These conclusions by John should encourage all Christ-followers to share the message of Jesus with a vision to see people truly experience life in his name and to realize that their point of view or own experience is all a part of how God reveals himself through people. The early disciples did not try to write a million books that told the story of Jesus. Rather they invested in other people so that they as disciples would become carriers of the message, in a sense living letters or books. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:2, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone." May

we carry this same message today and be living letters of God's truth and grace to a hurting and broken world.