

The Gospel of John

Resurrection - The Cure for Unbelief

John 20:24-29

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most perplexing things about the death and resurrection of Jesus was that His own disciples just did not **get** it. They had traveled, studied, and even ministered under Jesus during his public ministry and had experienced His many miracles but yet they seemed remarkably confused, even after the resurrection, about what was happening.

Why did the disciples struggle to believe and understand? Had Jesus failed to warn them in advance about what was going to happen to him?

No. Actually, Jesus had been predicting his death and resurrection for some time before the actual events occurred. Sometimes he spoke in deliberately vague terms; it is perhaps understandable in these cases that the disciples would not have picked up on what Jesus meant without His help. For example, Jesus predicted his death and resurrection early in the gospel of John using a metaphor:

John 2:18-19 (NASB)

¹⁸ The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

But there were other times where Jesus speaks plainly and directly about his imminent arrest, death, and resurrection:

Matthew 20:17-19 (NASB)

¹⁷ As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the road He said to them, ¹⁸ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and they will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and flog and crucify, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

If they had been so specifically forewarned—and especially if they knew in advance that Jesus would rise from the dead—why were the disciples so confused and frightened when it actually happened?

Much of their confusion was simply the result of their being, well, *human*—like everyone else, they were prone to forgetfulness and misunderstanding. Consider that the teachings of Jesus profoundly challenged the religious assumptions they had grown up with. Perhaps, even though they had seen him work many life-giving miracles, the disciples could not bring themselves to believe the most dramatic claim of Jesus—that he would die and rise from the grave.

What changed? What would cause these people that knew Him best to move from unbelieving to believing?

The RESURRECTION happened!

There is something powerful about a man dying and coming back to life. This single event solidified for the followers of Jesus that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 20:24-29 (NASB)

²⁴ But Thomas, one of the twelve, who was called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ Eight days later His disciples were again inside, and Thomas *was* with them. Jesus **came*, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace *be* to you.”

²⁷ Then He **said* to Thomas, “Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but *be* a believer.”

²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹ Jesus **said* to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you *now* believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.”

Prayer

BODY:

I. UNDERSTANDING THE CONFUSION CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION.

It was not until Jesus appeared to His followers that they actually began to believe. In verses 24 and 25 of our text, Thomas is the last of the eleven disciples to actually experience seeing Jesus after the resurrection. He finally believed when he personally saw with his own eyes that Christ was physically alive. It is very important that this account is here, because it speaks to the fact that the disciples would never have manufactured a resurrection. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but they did not understand the purpose by which He was on earth. Even though Jesus had told them on many occasions that he was going to die and come back from the dead in three days, they just could not believe it possible. They could not even believe the credible testimony of those who came them claiming that they had seen Jesus alive.

So why was the resurrection so confusing to them? Mark pointed out that Peter, James, and John were confused when they experienced the transfiguration of Jesus.

Mark 9:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. ¹⁰ **They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.**

As believers, we are used to hearing about death and resurrection of Jesus. But remember, His followers are hearing these things for the **very first time**. Naturally, they struggled to understand the significance.

In this passage, the disciples are having a tough time wrapping their minds not just around the voluntary death of Jesus, but also His supernatural resurrection three days later. As verse 10 explains, Jesus' disciples do not fully comprehend what Jesus is talking about regarding this "**rising from the dead.**"

So what is keeping Peter, James, John, and the rest of the disciples from being able to understand and believe this prophecy of Jesus concerning His coming resurrection?

As first century Jews, they did believe in the resurrection of human bodies. As God-fearing Jews, they would believe the covenant that God made with his people since the beginning cannot be broken. That covenant was a promise from God that He would raise the righteous from the dead. And they had biblical precedence for it:

Isaiah 26:19 (NASB)

¹⁹ Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

Ezekiel 37:12-14 (NASB)

¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them, "This is what the Lord God says: "Behold, I am going to open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴ And I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord."

Daniel 12:1-2 (NASB)

12 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.

The Jews had pretty clear and simple reasons to believe in a bodily resurrection. What they did not understand was **when** they thought this resurrection would take place. As you can probably imagine, they thought it would come **at the end of time.**

It would be at the end of the world that God would raise his faithful people.

Daniel 12:3 (NASB)

³ And those who have insight will shine like the glow of the expanse of heaven, and **those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.**

It would be at the end of time that God would restore all things, it would be a wonderful time for those who have lived an **active** faith--"**those who lead the many to righteousness**".

So again, what is the problem? If Jesus is talking about resurrection, something his disciples believe in, why are they having trouble understanding?

Here it is:

If Jesus was, in fact, going to rise from the dead, His resurrection should happen at the **end of time** according to the understanding of the Jews. But according to Mark, Jesus is claiming to Peter, James, and John that **He will be raised while they are still alive** and that they then would have His permission to relate what they had seen to everyone around them.

Let's reread a larger portion of scripture from Mark concerning the transfiguration.

Mark 9:2-10 (NASB)

² And six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter, James, and John, and *brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; ³ and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ **Peter** responded and *said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ **For he did not know how to reply; for they became terrified.** ⁷ Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud: “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!” ⁸ And suddenly they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

⁹ As they were coming down from the mountain, **He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.** ¹⁰ They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

Based upon the scriptures above and others from the Old Testament, the typical Jew would think that Jesus believes he will be resurrected **at the wrong time!** This is also very confusing to Peter, James and John. This concept concerning His resurrection is entirely new to them.

They do not understand that Jesus’ resurrection would be his Father’s acknowledgement and approval of Jesus’ death—that His sacrifice for His people would be accepted by God as full payment for the sins of all of His people. The disciples still believe that Jesus has come as a general to take Jerusalem and Rome by force. They did not understand the concept that He would be king of a spiritual kingdom even though they had heard Him preach many times concerning the kingdom of God. He would not be an earthly savior but rather a spiritual savior to mankind. He would pay the price required by His Father for all of our sins and remove our fear of death and the grave.

Romans 5:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ The Law came in so that the offense would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, so also grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul tells us here that “**Sin reigned in death.**” Because of the law, mankind will realize that they are sinners and incapable of keeping the entire law perfectly. But **what if...Jesus...through His death and resurrection, HAS actually **defeated sin and death?****

That is what Jesus is beginning to reveal to the apostles as they grow in their understanding of the significance of His words and actions.

II. SEEING IS BELIEVING.

John 20:26-28 (NASB)

²⁶ Eight days later His disciples were again inside, and Thomas *was* with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace *be* to you.”
²⁷ Then He *said to Thomas, “Place your finger here, and see My hands; and take your hand and put it into My side; and do not continue in disbelief, but *be* a believer.”
²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

When Thomas got to see and touch the hands and side of Jesus, He said, "**My Lord and my God!**". He finally believed. That was the final evidence he needed of a literal resurrection.

So it was the appearances of Jesus before His disciples and the explanation of the scriptures to them that caused the disciples to finally believe that Jesus had been physically resurrected to immortality.

This was a very un-Jewish thing to believe. In first century Israel virtually no one believed such a thing was possible. The accepted view was that no human being would be raised from the dead **to immortality** until the end of the world. Only at the end of the world would anyone experience such a resurrection. But—shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion— we find the disciples proclaiming, “The standard Jewish belief was wrong! Someone has been raised **to immortality BEFORE** the end of the world.”

In the minds of the typical Jew there would only be **ONE** resurrection event, and that would be when everybody who has ever lived in this world is resurrected for the final judgment at the end of time. The idea that Jesus, all by himself, could be raised from the dead sounded outlandish to them. It sounded about as outlandish as the flat-earth theory sounds to us.

ILLUSTRATION:

Now, to get a sense of why this odd and un-Jewish belief of the disciples is evidence for the resurrection, consider the topic I just mentioned: belief in a flat-earth. Suppose that tomorrow a group of your most intelligent friends all shared with you that they have become utterly convinced that the earth is flat. “Yeah, I know it sounds crazy, but we have all come to this conclusion. We are absolutely convinced that modern science is wrong and that the earth really is flat!”

What would go through your mind? I will tell you what would go through mine: “What has happened to these folks? This is absolutely crazy. These are intelligent, normal, well-balanced people! Why would they suddenly come to hold this belief?” In other words, and do not miss this, it would **cry out for an explanation**.

And that is exactly why this new belief of the disciples is considered evidence. **It is considered evidence because it cries out for an explanation.**

The reaction they got from their fellow Jews was harsh: “What? You believe in the resurrection of someone before the end of the world? Only one individual? That is weird enough. And you have the gall to tell me that this man who shamefully died like a common criminal is the Messiah? **Are you really Jewish? Are you really sane?**”

Historians, of course, have no difficulty whatsoever speaking about the belief in the resurrection of Jesus’, since this is a matter of public record. **For it is a historical fact that some of the followers of Jesus came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution.**

The question remains: Why? Why did the disciples come to believe something so incredibly un-Jewish? And how would they have so much certainty about this belief that they willingly died for it?

IT WAS BECAUSE THEY HAD EXPERIENCED THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS FROM THE DEAD!

Their certainty, and their zeal, is what led to the explosive growth of Christianity in the first century. Thus, this historical fact is a serious piece of evidence, and no one has been able to provide an adequate explanation for it, apart from admitting the resurrection of Jesus is true.

III. BELIEVING WITHOUT SEEING.

But not everyone will be able to physically see the risen Christ. So how can **we** believe if we do not have the opportunity to see?

Romans 10:17 (NASB)

***17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

Jesus set the example on how we are to search the scriptures for truth. Remember on the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to the two disciples the scriptures concerning the Messiah and how Jesus (they had not recognized Him yet) had fulfilled all of them. He did the same thing later that evening in the locked room with His followers.

This might seem strange: Jesus is right there, so why does He turn to Scripture to demonstrate who He is? The answer is twofold. First, as we just read, "**faith comes by hearing**" It is not a function of sight. In order to see Jesus with the 'eyes of faith' the disciples needed the lens of Scripture. Secondly, the emphasis on Scripture makes these encounters accessible to us. If Scripture is the key to seeing Christ then we too can see Him since we certainly have the Scriptures.

CONCLUSION:

1 Peter 1:8-9 (NASB)

***8** and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **9** obtaining as the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

We believe in the one we have not seen. Why do we believe? Because we believe in the record of Scripture. Why do we believe the Bible? We believe the Bible, because the Spirit of God has given us not only faith in Christ, but listen, ...faith in Scripture. We were not argued into believing the Bible, we were led by divine power into believing the Bible. "**For we walk**" – says Paul in II Corinthians 5:7 – "**by faith, not by sight.**" I do not need to see the risen Christ to love Him. I do not need Him to appear to me.

We believe in a risen Christ whom we love and serve. He has transformed us so that our lives are different by a supernatural miracle called the "new birth". We have been commissioned with the help of the Holy Spirit to confront the world with repentance and forgiveness as an escape from eternal judgment. That is why we are here.

He is Lord!