

Crazy Talk! **Luke 24:1-53**

Luke's primary focus in this chapter is on the disciples' struggle first to accept, and then to understand, the resurrection of Jesus. No one in the first-century conceived either that the Messiah would be captured, executed, and then would resurrect. Some Jews believed that there would be a resurrection of all people at the end of time; others rejected any notion of resurrection (see Acts 23:6-10). But no one expected a resurrection of a single individual in this age. Not even if that individual had claimed to be the Messiah. Especially if that individual had claimed to be Messiah, but was then captured and executed.

So Luke sets out the factors that compelled the disciples, against their basic instincts, to conclude that Jesus resurrected from the dead. Clearly he is telling their story for the sake of future readers. As the gospel spreads outside Palestine to the furthest reaches of the Roman empire, and as the decades and generations pass, those who hear the Gospel for the first time are going to have the same question: "What kind of nonsense is this? People do not resurrect from the dead." That is exactly what Jesus' original followers thought, Luke notes, until something – or many things – changed their minds. This, Luke writes, is what happened.

Day 1: Luke 24:1 Did Jesus' followers go to the wrong tomb?

The resurrection narrative begins with several women going to the tomb to perform burial customs because there was no time for niceties when Jesus was first buried. The involvement of these women answers a possible objection, heard even in our own time: "Maybe Jesus did not actually rise ... maybe his disciples were simply confused about where he was buried, went to the wrong tomb, found it empty, and hysterically drew the bizarre conclusion that he had risen from the dead."

Luke precludes such an inference. The crucifixion account ends with the three-part note that: "[a] the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. [b] Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. [c] But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the command" (Luke 23:55-56). The resurrection narrative begins by recalling all three, in reverse (chiastic) order: "[c] On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, [b] the women took the spices they had prepared and [a] went to the tomb" (Luke 24:1). Luke underscores this connection to make his point: these women who saw where Jesus was buried went back a day later. This was obviously the right tomb.

Day 2: Luke 24:1-8 What does it take to convince the women that Jesus rose?

First the women find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. This provides the first hint of what has happened. The alternative explanation of grave-robbing makes little sense, given that first-century culture did not bury people with wealth. Someone moving the body also makes little sense, as there was neither need nor point in doing so. But resurrection is so far from anyone's expectation that an empty tomb leads only to puzzlement. That is, until these witnesses receive a second, more explicit, clue: two angels appear and announce that Jesus has risen. The angels also provide a third clue, reminding the women that Jesus himself earlier predicted both his death and his resurrection. Of course, resurrection was unprecedented, and so the prediction defied comprehension before the fact. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, they remember what he said, and, for the first time, understand what he meant.

Day 3: Luke 24:9-11,33-34 What does it take to convince the men?

That women were the first witnesses of the resurrection is notable for a secondary reason. Women were generally subordinate – often even subjugated – in the first century. If anyone were going to invent a story of resurrection, they would not choose women to be its first witnesses. This chauvinism itself speaks to the truthfulness of this account.

Luke, however, does not suffer from chauvinism. Throughout his Gospel, he gives special attention to Jesus' prioritization of the disenfranchised: women, the poor, the foreigner, etc. So it is entirely consistent with Jesus' ministry, and with this Gospel's emphases, that women would be the first to learn of the resurrection. The honor is also entirely deserved: apart from Joseph of Arimathea, they were the only ones to stick with Jesus throughout his ordeal.

Their report is discounted by the eleven and 'all the others'. Is this chauvinism. Or, to give them all more credit, is the claim simply too outlandish to be credible, whoever makes it? Either way, the apostles dismiss the report as crazy talk.

The apostles come to endorse the resurrection a little later. What convinces them? Jesus appears to Peter, who then reports it to the others. Is this confirmation of chauvinism? Or do they give credence to Peter because, as leader of the disciples, he outranks earlier witnesses? Either is possible, though we want to be hesitant to disparage them based on implication or inference, when a third, more respectful explanation may exist. For important court cases, the Old Testament requires two or three witnesses (a theme that Jesus develops in John 8:12-18). Additionally, Jesus actually appears to Peter, which is arguably more persuasive than second-hand testimony deriving from the appearance – or a vision – of angels.

Either way, Luke's basic point remains the same: the apostles and other disciples do not expect Jesus to rise, much less invent his resurrection out of some disappointment. Just the opposite: they resist the notion until finally it is forced on them by the preponderance of evidence.

Day 4: Luke 24:13-32 What does it take to convince two hikers?

While all that is going on, Jesus takes time out to walk with two discouraged followers on the road back home from the city of Jerusalem, through the village of Emmaus. This account appears only in Luke, which raises the question: Why does he consider it important enough to include, and to develop at such length, especially since the other Gospels do not? One thing is certain: Luke does not tell the story simply because it happened. After all, he also informs the reader that Jesus appeared to Peter, but he mentions that only in passing, and without recounting the actual event, even though it was decisive both for Peter and then for the other disciples to be convinced of the resurrection.

How does the narrative advance his purpose? What lesson does he draw from it? This account accentuates the point that Luke has been making to this point: the disciples never expected Jesus to rise from the dead, and struggle to get their minds around it once he has.

The two are walking along when Jesus joins them *in cognito* ("their eyes were prevented from recognizing him"). In response to this apparent stranger's query, they recount the reports they have received so far: two witnesses that the tomb is empty; one who claims to have had a vision of angels. This is all puzzling, but even combined, it does not compel assent. But, the stranger insists, the Old Testament itself teaches that the Messiah must suffer and only then be glorified. Even the exposition of Scripture fails to convince them until, over a meal reminiscent of the Last Supper, their eyes are opened and they recognize him. What brings them to this realization? A number of factors play a role: the initial report from the women, the confirmation of the empty tomb, the exposition of the Old Testament. But ultimately, their acceptance of the reports depends on 'their eyes being opened', on God granting them perception. The same remains true today: acceptance of Christ and his resurrection still depends on God granting perception.

Day 5: Luke 24:36-46 (with 1 Corinthians 15): What does resurrection entail?

Most of this chapter focuses on the disciples' struggle to accept that he rose from the dead. But this last section turns to a second challenge: their struggle to understand what resurrection entails.

While two groups of disciples are sharing their respective encounters with the resurrected Christ, he suddenly appears in their midst. "Whoa, what's

this?” they ask; “A ghost?” Luke underscores their surprise with redundant descriptions: they are startled, frightened, troubled and doubtful. To quell their fears, Jesus does two things. First, he invites them to touch him, to confirm that he still has flesh and bones. Second, he eats a meal in front of them. He is no disembodied spirit. His death did not separate spirit from body, as some Greek philosophies thought. Instead, he rose, in both spirit and body.

Luke does not tell us, not here at least, why the physicality of the resurrection matters. But Paul does. In the face of some controversy in Corinth, the apostle insists that a physical resurrection – both of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-7) and of his followers (1 Cor 15:12-28) – is an essential element of the Gospel. God created us as physical beings, and when humans fell, the effect was partly physical: we began to die. So God’s purpose is restored, and his reign fully realized, only when death is defeated, and our bodies are restored. So the story is not over when we die, and our spirits sail free from our bodies. The story is over only when we are resurrected, and we – both body and soul – are restored to our Edenic state. That resurrected body will be somewhat different from our current state. But it will still be physical, albeit splendid (1 Cor 15:35-49): “The perishable [will be] clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor 15:54).

Day 6: Luke 24:46-53 What does it all mean for us?

With Luke’s stress on the disciples’ struggle to accept the reality of the resurrection, we could overlook an important, albeit brief, reinterpretation of Jesus’ role. On the walk to Emmaus, the two disciples summarize their previous understanding of Jesus: “He was a prophet.” But more, a special prophet, like Moses, “powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.” They had even hoped that he would prove to be the Messiah, redeemer of Israel. A hope dashed, of course, by his death.

Now, with his resurrection, Jesus not only rekindles that earlier hope, but significantly reshapes it. He is indeed the Messiah, and this role is confirmed – not disproved – by his suffering. It is further confirmed by his resurrection. But his role is different from their expectations in two respects. First, it is not he who redeems, end of story. His death is indeed redemptive, but the end of the story has not yet arrived. Instead, now *they* are to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name. Secondly, it is not Israel whom he redeems, but *all nations*, beginning with Jerusalem, and extending to the ends of the world. This mission will not start until the Spirit comes at Pentecost, but once they receive the Spirit, that mission does not end until it is complete. They – we – are to proclaim Jesus’ death and resurrection to the rest of the world, until he comes again.