

# Historical Jesus 16: Resurrection

Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion traumatized his followers. They did not grasp the meaning of his death, nor did they have faith in his resurrection while he lay in the grave. They experienced cognitive dissonance: holding, on the one hand, that he was God's chosen one, while, on the other, they knew he was now dead. The Jewish leaders and Roman government publicly humiliated Jesus, making his death a mockery and spectacle. They reeled in grief, mourning the loss of their friend, their rabbi, their messiah. How could God let this happen?

## Appearance to Mary

Then, on first day of the week, Mary Magdalen came to the tomb and noticed the stone was no longer standing in its place. She ran and reported it to Peter and John, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him" (Jn 20:2). She did not give any hint of a belief in Jesus' resurrection; she was merely upset because someone moved his corpse. Peter and John ran to the site and found the tomb empty with the linen cloths lying there and the face cloth folded up by itself.

John 20:10-18

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes. 11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." 14 Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"-- and that he had said these things to her.

Jesus' first resurrection appearance was not to Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, or Joseph Caiaphas. He did not announce the greatest miracle in human history in the halls of power. He did not first show himself to Peter, James, or John. It was to Mary Magdalene, a peasant woman from whom he had cast out seven demons, that he first made himself known (Lk 8:2).<sup>83</sup> Just like God's announcement to the no-name shepherds when His Son was born, so Jesus appeared to a simple, godly woman who had genuine faith.

## Appearance on Road to Emmaus

Now that the Sabbath was over, some of Jesus' followers decided to go home. They had heard what the women reported, but it sounded to them like an "idle tale" (Lk 24:11). A man named Cleopas and his friend were journeying the seven miles back to the town of Emmaus when a stranger came up to them. It was Jesus, but "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Lk 24:16).

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<sup>83</sup> Like the twelve, Mary had accompanied Jesus on the road along with Joanna and Susanna (Lk 8:3).

Luke 24:17-27

17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad 18 Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

They arrived at Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he would press on, but they convinced him to dine with them. When they sat at the table, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Suddenly, they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They didn't remain in Emmaus that night but double-timed it back to Jerusalem and reported what happened to the other disciples. By then, Jesus had already appeared to Peter. Just then, in front of everyone, Jesus himself stood among them. Everyone stood there in shock, unable to believe their eyes. Jesus showed them his hands and feet and ate some fish before them.

Of course, there were several other resurrection appearances, but time doesn't permit us considering each. The real question is, "What does resurrection mean?" It means that the Roman cross is flipped upside down—that rather than a symbol of Caesar's right to rule the world through domination, it is instead the symbol of God's love for humanity shown through His beloved Son who gave himself for us. It proves once and for all that Jesus is God's true agent—the Messiah. It teaches us that death is not the end, that God has broken the power of death in Christ, that there is hope for the age to come when God will resurrect the faithful to rule with His anointed one.

### **Great Commission and Ascension**

Jesus' earthly ministry did not end with his resurrection. He spent several more weeks with his disciples before he ascended, speaking to them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He told them the promise of the Father—the baptism of the holy spirit—was about to come so they should stay in Jerusalem. They asked him if this was the time to restore the kingdom to Israel. To this question he gave this answer:

Acts 1:7-11

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Jesus' ascension is not the end of the story. He remains in heaven, in a position of immense authority at God's right hand actively involved with the church until he comes to establish his Father's Kingdom. In the meantime, it falls to us to share the gospel with others and make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them what Jesus said (Mt 28:18-20).

What will you do? Will you share this gospel about the Kingdom, cross, and resurrection, or will you keep it to yourself like the man who buried his talent? Will you commit to follow him? Will you rejoice when he returns or flee from him in dread? I pray you would believe in his death for your sins, that God raised him from the dead, and that he will come back to establish God's Kingdom here on earth. In the meantime, let's follow him. Come to Jesus.

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light