

LUKE 24

Luke 24:1–12. The Women Receive the First Tidings of the Resurrection

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1111–1113.

“He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:6). These words, carefully and solemnly recited by an angel, stand at the center of human history and reshape mortality. No longer does death hold sway; no longer does the end of life engender terror; no longer does eternal darkness cast a fearsome pall. The grave will open its doors; it will surrender its citizens; and it will bow to the will of its new master, the Risen Savior. A New World prophet, Jacob, in what may be a funeral oration, almost sings, “O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of . . . that monster, death and hell. . . . Wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead . . . by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.” Further, “the Holy One of Israel . . . delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell” (2 Nephi 9:10, 12, 19). In brief, the Resurrection changes everything.

In one of the most unusual developments in the Savior’s story, no human witness sees His Resurrection. This sacred, turning moment goes unwatched in the mortal world. To be sure, Matthew records that soldiers stand guard at the tomb until Sunday morning. But they become “as dead men” when an angel descends and rolls “the stone from the door” (Matthew 28:2, 4). The soldiers see nothing. Through the fog of unconsciousness, they may hear the noise of the rolling stone. But that experience does not constitute a sure witness, even though they later claim to relate “all the things that were done” to the Jewish council (Matthew 28:11). All they know is that the body of the condemned prisoner is missing. Thus the assembled council bribes the soldiers to keep quiet and makes up the story that Jesus’s disciples steal the body while the guards sleep (Matthew 28:13). In a word, none of them knows what really happens.

Two further observations are significant. First, the Galilean women become the initial witnesses of Jesus's Resurrection, learning of it from two divine messengers. Moreover, by carrying the words of the angels, they in effect become messengers or heralds of the news to others, including to the Apostles (Luke 24:9–10). So deep is the impression of what they experience at the empty tomb that they insist over and over, even in the face of the other disciples' dismissive disbelief, that Jesus is alive (see the notes on Luke 24:10–11). Their testimony is solid—so solid that their insistence sends Peter running to the tomb to learn the truth about their daring declarations.

The other important observation has to do with the utter surprise and disbelief with which all followers greet the news of the Savior's Resurrection. The news comes as an exploding bombshell. The fact that each of the Synoptic Gospels reports the disciples' disbelief points to a genuine, honest response.¹ Despite Jesus's repeated predictions about His return from the dead, the disciples do not expect it. And when the news comes, they disbelieve it. Why is this significant? Because their later message to interested hearers about the Resurrection rests on real experiences with the Risen Savior, not on claims which they fabricate or are based on hearsay.

Luke's major omissions in these verses consist of, first, an angel's instruction to the women and, next, the Savior's directive to them to tell the eleven to meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:7, 10; Mark 16:7). Scholars speculate about why Luke does not include the latter, simple directive. The reason that makes the most sense is that Luke keeps his focus on events in and around Jerusalem because, in his next volume, he will feature the Risen Lord's ascension from the nearby Mount of Olives and the Apostles' replacement of Judas during a meeting in the city (Acts 1:1–11, 13–26).

As with many other passages where Luke roughly parallels Mark, commentators differ widely on the question of whether Luke follows and modifies Mark's report. He seems not to. Rather, he appears to draw from a similar but divergent account and is true to what he learns. The simplest explanation is that when in Jerusalem with the Apostle Paul, and staying in the city for at least two weeks,² Luke learns about these events from at least one of the women who earlier experiences them and simply rehearses events as she remembers them.

Luke 24:13–35. The Risen Jesus Appears on the Road to Emmaus

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1128–1129.

At last, by His own account, the Risen Christ walks fully into our view so that we can see Him with our eyes, the revived, resurrected, glorified Lord (Luke 24:26). Before this moment, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of man who is to suffer, die, and rise from death, breaking its bands.³ But on the road to Emmaus, among rocks and dust and earth, amid shrubs and trees, touched by wind and sunlight, strolling

with two disappointed disciples, He reconnects with the mortal world as its Lord and Master, the Christ, the Anointed One. His title for Himself, “the Christ,” now sets Him off from all that happens before. In this present moment, in this earthly place, He walks bodily as the final fulfillment of “Moses and all the prophets” (24:27) and as the concrete completion of the central message of scripture. And with His keys, He opens scripture so that the two companions can see its true and proper meaning.

At base, the story rests on eyewitness testimony, that of Cleopas and his companion. Hence, the Resurrected Jesus’s self-designation as the Christ, the Messiah, is remembered and repeated among believers. This scene does not go back to some imagined mastermind who takes a simple story and embellishes it for the sake of religious symbolism. Nor is Luke its main author. Cleopas, a person known to other believers, including members of the eleven and important leaders from Galilee, stands as the chief source for this account, which illustrates that disciples regularly rehearse their experiences with the Savior to one another. We cannot come any closer to the Lord on this occasion than we do through Cleopas’s eyes and ears.

To be sure, the report exhibits a refined sense of storytelling. But this characteristic must go back to Cleopas and his opportunity to recount this set of scenes again and again among friends and believers. In truth, the narrative embeds more movement, life, length, and graphic description than other stories in the Gospel. But a vivid report from an eyewitness about one of the Risen Jesus’s first appearances does not surprise us. And the rehearsal of the Emmaus story is unique and does not exhibit parallels to the Savior’s post-Resurrection visits narrated in the other Gospels and in Paul’s writings. But the fact that all the records differ in what they report from the very day of the Lord’s Resurrection and from following days warns us not to make too much of differences such as the fact that other accounts feature the Risen Jesus’s appearances in Galilee⁴ while Luke emphasizes His appearances in and around Jerusalem.

Luke 24:36–49. The Last Meeting in Jerusalem

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1138–1140.

In the full view of many disciples, not just Peter or the two on the way to Emmaus, the resurrected, glorified Lord appears, complete with His body of “flesh and bones,” “the Christ” in the fullest sense of this title (Luke 24:39). He proves that He is Himself, physically resuscitated, by encouraging His gathered followers to examine and touch His wounded hands and feet and to share their meal with Him. Luke captures their joyous feelings, their almost disbelieving sight as the Savior stands before them. In our mind’s eye we behold their trembling hands, their weakened knees, their quiet tears, as they stretch their hands to touch His hands and bow their knees to feel His feet (1 John 1:1).

Indeed, they know by now the reports from Peter and the two disciples who reside in Emmaus about seeing and talking with the Risen Savior. But might they anticipate, might they hope that He will appear

to them, either here or in another setting? They may think such thoughts. Yet, when He comes, “they were terrified and afrighted” and “believed not for joy, and wondered” (Luke 24:37, 41). This is not a story that they make up to salve their mourning or to make Jesus’s life turn out as He predicts. They are as surprised as anyone else. Thus, their witness is firm; it is to be trusted.

Notably, the Resurrected Jesus features His special relationship to the Holy Ghost, declaring, “I send the promise of my Father upon you” (Luke 24:49). This feature arises even before Jesus’s birth. For example, in the angel’s words to His mother, we read: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (1:35). At the coming of Mary to Elisabeth’s home, “Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost,” who bore witness to her soul about “the fruit of [Mary’s] womb” (1:41–42). During Jesus’s mortal life, at His baptism, “the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him,” and it remains with Him as illustrated when “Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan . . . into the wilderness” (3:22; 4:1). Thus, this member of the Godhead is ever with the Savior and ever assists Him.

Above all, the Risen Christ restores the broken fellowship of the eleven Apostles and the others. Beginning with Judas’s treachery, continuing with the scattering of the eleven and others at the arrest, and cemented by Peter’s denial, this spiritual and convivial fellowship lies fractured, torn by depression at the Lord’s death (Luke 24:17). The gathering of disciples on Sunday evening forms an important step in restoring this comradeship. But Jesus’s sudden appearance among them brings them together in ways that will endure, tying them together as witnesses of His return to life.

Unlike the very abbreviated account in John 20:19–23, Luke’s account preserves a more extensive summary of the Savior’s teachings on this occasion. What is more, it seems that here Luke also preserves the broad outline of the Lord’s teachings during the forty-day ministry that he sums up in a few words elsewhere: “Speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). It appears likely that the Savior simply begins on this evening to open “their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Because He reviews matters “written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning [Himself]” (24:44), we are justified in seeing this approach as a beginning of His larger teaching agenda. For, when we take all these passages together, we gain a sense for what He teaches these beloved followers during the next six weeks, starting this night.

Jerusalem now stands large in the lives of Christ’s followers. Previously it looms large for Jesus even in His youth but especially as He approaches the city and the events that will descend on Him there. For Him, it holds His destiny. But His disciples are Galileans. Their inclination will be to return home and to their former occupations, which they do (John 21:2–3). But the Savior needs to establish these followers in a place where they can carry on His ministry and win souls to His cause. The most natural place is Jerusalem, where as in Galilee, virtually all citizens speak Aramaic, the disciples’ native language. Naturally, as we learn, the Holy Ghost assists them in communicating with others, mostly Jews from distant lands, by giving them the gift of tongues (Acts 2:4–12). This gift, fulfilling Jesus’s promise to “send the promise of [his] Father,” links them ever after with the capital city (Luke 24:49).

Luke 24:50–53. To Bethany and Back

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1142.

The Resurrected Jesus ascends bodily out of this world for the first time. The second, final ascension is almost six weeks in the future (Acts 1:9). As on prior occasions, the witnesses see Him with their own eyes, not in a dream or vision. And what is the reaction of His close, devoted followers? Sadness at His departure? No. Unrestrained joy. At this moment of initial separation, they understand.

As a further explanation, Jesus’s ascent here is not the same as that which Luke records in his book of Acts. Luke frames the two accounts differently because they occur on separate occasions. Here, Jesus departs from “the eleven . . . and them that were with them” after a full night of teaching and discussion (Luke 24:33, 50). In the later incident, Luke identifies only “the [eleven] apostles” as present at the Savior’s ascension (Acts 1:2). Further, in the later occurrence, angels attend the event and even instruct the gathered Apostles (Acts 1:10–11). No such personages are present in the Lord’s first ascension near Bethany (Luke 24:50).

When Jesus ascends this first time, about twenty-four hours after His Resurrection, He effectively separates the era of His mortal ministry from His continuing ministry out of heaven. His meaningful words, “while I was yet with you” (Luke 24:44), point to this partition of time periods. From this moment on, we step into the grand era of the Spirit.

Notes

- 1 Luke 24:11; Matthew 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13.
- 2 Acts 21:15, 18, 26, 27; 22:30; 23:1–12, 32; 24:1.
- 3 Luke 9:22, 44; 17:24–25; 18:31–33; 24:7.
- 4 Matthew 28:7, 10, 16–17; Mark 16:7; John 21:1,

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