

Lesson 5 | March 31, 2024

Experiencing the Resurrection

Study Text: Luke 24:13–35; John 20:1–18; 21:1–23

Central Truth: Because Christ is alive, we can experience a personal relationship with Him.

Key Verse: Philippians 3:10

That I may know him [Christ], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (KJV).

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe how each individual in today's lesson encountered the living Christ right where they were.
- Students will view the resurrection of Jesus as an invitation to a personal relationship with Him.
- Students will reach out and call on the living Christ in all circumstances.

Introducing the Study

Say: From a purely human standpoint, how would most people expect Jesus to appear after His resurrection? If these events had happened today, many would expect Him to call a high-profile press conference. Since this was Bible times, we might have expected Jesus to stride into the emperor's palace in Rome and present His credentials as King of kings, certified by virtue of rising from the dead. At the very least, we might expect that Jesus would organize a meeting of all His followers to show himself alive. But He did none of these things.

Opening Activity—Reporting from Jerusalem . . .

Ask: In our culture, if a public figure died, was buried, and came back to life a few days later, how might the news media report on the event? What speculations might they make?

Say: Jesus didn't go to Pilate or the religious leaders of the day to prove they were wrong about Him. Instead, He appeared to individuals or groups of believers at unexpected times as they went about their everyday lives. Today's lesson examines three case studies from Scripture. As we talk about each one, consider why Jesus may have chosen to interact with people in such personal and intimate ways after His resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus' resurrection authenticated His identity as Messiah and Son of God. It verified the efficacy of His sacrificial death to atone for sin. It confirmed His victory over death and Satan. In fact, it is the foundational event in God's plan to redeem and restore all creation.

Part 1—Recognizing the Risen Christ

A Fruitless Search

John 20:1,11–13

Say: God sometimes chooses to work through unlikely people to display His glory. Mary Magdalene was certainly an unlikely candidate for being the first witness of the risen Savior. In the culture of the day, women were not considered valid witnesses in legal proceedings. Plus, Mary herself was not a woman of high standing or spotless reputation. In fact, Jesus had delivered her from seven demons (Mark 16:9). But God has a way of turning culture upside down to fulfill His own purposes. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Along with other faithful followers of Jesus, Mary Magdalene had stood at the foot of the cross and watched Jesus' brutal execution. But she and the other women had been unable to prepare Jesus' body for a proper burial because of the approach of sundown and the start of the Sabbath. When they arrived at His tomb very early on Sunday morning, they must have been eager to anoint the body, as was the custom of the day. All four Gospels include the account of Mary Magdalene visiting Jesus' tomb, although Matthew, Mark, and Luke also describe other women accompanying her.

Mary found the stone at the entrance of the tomb had been removed. She hurried to report the news to Peter and John. These two disciples, Jesus' close friends, raced to the tomb to investigate. They found the linen cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus' face and body. John recorded he "saw and believed" Jesus had risen from the dead, although verse 9 indicates the disciples did not yet fully understand how Jesus' resurrection fulfilled Scripture.

After Peter and John returned home, Mary remained at the tomb weeping (verse 11). When she looked inside, she saw two angels dressed in white. Apparently, the angels did not reveal themselves to Peter and John, but they decided to show themselves to Mary. Their question seems to reflect honest puzzlement: "Why are you crying?" (verse 13, NLT). Mary's answer shows she had no thoughts of angels or resurrection; she was concerned only with locating the missing body of Jesus.

Resource Packet Item 1: Marys in the New Testament

Distribute the information sheet detailing the numerous women named Mary whose stories are included in the New Testament. Discuss the influential roles they fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus.

Discuss

? Why do you think Mary and the other disciples were so slow to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead although He had predicted His resurrection on multiple occasions?

? Why do we find it hard to believe the words of Jesus when they seem to conflict with what we see and feel?

Startling Encounter

John 20:14–18

Say: Often our circumstances are so stressful we fail to recognize the hand of God working in our lives. Mary’s grief over Jesus’ death and her distress over His missing body were dominating her thoughts and emotions as she stood outside the tomb. But Jesus knew just how to break through and reach her. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mary turned and saw Jesus, the very One she was looking for, standing only a short distance away from her. But she did not recognize Him (John 20:14). Why not? Perhaps the tears in her eyes blurred her vision. Perhaps her last sight of Jesus as a lacerated, lifeless corpse left an indelible imprint on her mind. Perhaps Jesus’ countenance had changed after the Resurrection. Or perhaps Mary was simply so concerned with finding His body she paid little attention to anything else.

Then Jesus spoke to Mary, and His questions echoed the angels’: “Why are you crying? . . . Who are you looking for?” (verse 15, NLT). Still, Mary did not understand. Her mind jumped to the conclusion that seems most likely: This must be the gardener. Jesus spoke again, this time calling Mary by name. She immediately recognized His voice, conveying tender love and comfort, spoken with an intimate knowledge of her heart and soul. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep, and they know His voice (10:27).

Having found Jesus alive and well, Mary embraced Him. Notice His response: “Don’t cling to me . . . for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father” (20:17, NLT). Jesus still had work to do on earth, and He also had an assignment for her. Mary was instructed to tell His disciples the news of His resurrection and imminent ascension. The news was too good to keep to herself. She had to go and tell the others. The fact that all four Gospel writers mention Mary Magdalene as a witness to the Resurrection added to its credibility. In first-century culture, male writers certainly would not have mentioned a woman’s testimony if it were not true.

At the cross, when Mary’s hopes had been dashed and her heart broken, her love for Jesus remained constant. As a result, her faith was renewed and her joy restored. When our circumstances are chaotic and our minds muddled, we too can hold on to our love for Jesus.

Discuss

? Why do we—like Mary—sometimes fail to recognize Jesus’ presence or understand what He says?

? What might God’s choice of a woman to be among the first to herald the Resurrection say about the place of women in the Church today?

Part 2—Relationship with the Risen Christ

Walking and Wondering

Luke 24:13–24

Say: When newsworthy events occur, it’s natural for people to talk them over. Recorded only by Luke, this account of the two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus further bolsters the authenticity of evidence for the Resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Luke 24:13–16 describes two of Jesus’ disciples (not part of the Twelve) walking toward the town of Emmaus. It is noteworthy there are two witnesses and one is identified by name (possibly because he would have been known by at least some of Luke’s audience). In Jewish law, at least two witnesses were needed to validate the truth of an event.

As they walked, they discussed the events of the previous days. Then a fellow traveler started walking with them. It was Jesus himself, “but God kept them from recognizing him” (verse 16, NLT). It was not yet time for Jesus to reveal His identity.

Jesus asked about the topic of their discussion. They reacted with surprise and sadness, then proceeded to recount the tragic story of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. They also related how their hopes of Israel’s redemption had seemingly perished with the Man they hoped was the Messiah. Finally, they shared the astonishing story of the women who had visited the tomb and encountered two angels who said Jesus was alive. Peter and John had run to the tomb and confirmed that it was empty, but no one seemed to know what to make of all this. So there they were, despondent and perplexed, walking and wondering.

Discuss

? Like Mary Magdalene, the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus at first. Why might Jesus choose not to show himself to us in the way or at the time we expect?

Seeing and Believing

Luke 24:25–35

Say: We might be surprised at the anemic faith and spiritual dullness of these disciples. Hadn’t Jesus told them He would be killed and then rise from the dead? And now they had the testimony of the women and the angels, plus the evidence of an empty tomb. Still, they could not bring themselves to believe. However, we often miss God’s work in our lives too, even with the entire Bible in our hands. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Rather than simply reveal himself to these disciples, Jesus led them in a Bible study. They needed to see the death and resurrection of the Messiah was not a strange new doctrine, but the fulfillment of prophecy. He may have covered passages like God’s declaration to the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:15), the promises to the patriarchs, the substitutionary deliverance of Isaac (22:1–18), the exodus from Egypt and the Passover lamb (Exodus 12), the messianic Psalms (especially Psalm 22), and the prophets’ oracles (especially Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12). By the time they arrived at their destination, perhaps the disciples were finally beginning to understand the Hebrew Scriptures were all about Jesus and that His suffering, death, and resurrection were part of God’s plan from the beginning.

Resource Packet Item 2: Christ in Prophecy

Distribute the worksheet, and ask the students to match the Scriptures with the messianic prophecies they contain. Then encourage students to reflect on the question about God’s promises in their own lives.

When they neared Emmaus, Jesus indicated He would keep traveling, but the disciples urged Him to stay the night (Luke 24:28–29). Such hospitality was common and expected in their culture. As they sat at the table for the evening meal, Jesus took the role of host rather than guest. He blessed and broke the bread, and handed it to them. Perhaps something struck a chord in their memories, since Jesus had no doubt performed the same actions in their presence many times before. Perhaps they observed the nail prints in His hands as He passed the bread to them. Whatever had obscured their sight was removed, and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit they finally recognized Jesus. Because of His teaching that evening, they almost certainly had a more complete understanding of what it meant for Him to be the Messiah.

As soon as the disciples recognized Jesus, He vanished. His purpose had been achieved. In spite of the lateness of the hour, the disciples walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell their fellow disciples about meeting the risen Christ.

God is present with us at all times, but like the travelers to Emmaus, we are not always aware of His presence. We all face times of confusion and disappointment when we cannot understand God’s plan. It is good to do as Jesus did and review the Scriptures. We can refocus ourselves and revive our hope by revisiting God’s unfailing promises.

Discuss

? What Old Testament passages do you think Jesus might have shared to teach these disciples about His suffering and glory?

? Have you ever felt your “heart burn within [you]” (Luke 24:32, KJV) as you studied the Scriptures and found Christ revealed in them? Explain.

Part 3—Restored by the Risen Christ

Fellowship Breakfast

John 21:1–14

Say: Our third case study is from a later scene in John 21 where some of Christ’s disciples saw Him a third time. This encounter likely brought back fond memories, but it also probably reminded Peter of his repeated denial of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.) Six other disciples had joined Peter for a night of fishing, but they caught nothing. At dawn, they heard a voice call from the shore, instructing them to cast the net on the right side, where they caught a huge number of fish. For Peter, James, and John, this undoubtedly brought to mind their first encounter with Jesus, when they answered the call to follow Him (see Luke 5:1–11).

John recognized that the voice belonged to Jesus. Impetuous Peter hurled himself into the sea and headed for the shore, leaving the others to bring in the boat, towing the heavy net. They were all surprised to find Jesus there, waiting to serve them a breakfast of bread and fish.

Interestingly, the disciples noted the exact number of fish they caught, and John recorded it: 153 (verse 11). This specificity emphasizes the wonder of the event. This many large fish, combined with a soaking net, could weigh well over 300 pounds. Yet this time the net did not tear, unlike their first encounter with Jesus (see Luke 5:6). The disciples didn’t ask Jesus to confirm His

identity, as He had done in an earlier appearance (John 20:20), because “they knew it was the Lord” (21:12, NLT).

Discuss

? Why do you think Jesus chose this time and place to meet His disciples?

? Why do we, like the disciples, desire clear confirmation of Jesus’ presence and power, even though we know He is with us?

Loving Conversation

John 21:15–23

Say: When we fail Jesus, He longs to reconnect with us. So it was with Peter, who had denied Him three times during His trial. Having “wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75, KJV), Peter was obviously repentant, but he likely still carried the guilt of his failure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After breakfast, Jesus addressed Peter by his given name—*Simon*—rather than the name He himself had bestowed on him—*Peter*, which means “rock.” Simon had not yet become the rock Jesus intended him to be; instead, Peter’s denials had shown the old nature of his character at work.

Jesus’ question, “Do you love me more than these?” (verse 15, NLT) could be interpreted three ways:

1. Do you love Me more than you love these fish, boats, and tools of the trade?
2. Do you love Me more than these other disciples love Me? *This had been Peter’s claim on the night of Christ’s arrest (see Matthew 26:33).*
3. Do you love Me more than you love these other disciples? *This would also provide a stark contrast to Peter’s boasts in Matthew 26:33.*

Scholars generally agree that one of the last two explanations is most likely the correct understanding. In any case, Peter was aware of his failure and recognized Jesus knew the extent and nature of his love and dedication. It grieved Peter that Jesus repeated the question a third time, but Jesus seemed to seek a confession of love that would negate Peter’s previous denials. Jesus told Peter how to demonstrate the love he confessed: through service to His people (John 21:15–17). Verbal declarations of love are insufficient in themselves. True love is shown in action (see 1 John 3:18).

In giving Peter the assignment to feed and care for His people, Jesus was also restoring Peter to his leadership role. But lest Peter believe this meant extra honor and privilege, Jesus warned him that his old age would bring pain and sacrifice (verses 18–19). Indeed, tradition holds that Peter was crucified as a martyr, which Jesus alluded to. Regardless of past failures or future challenges, Peter’s call remained the same: “Follow me” (verse 19, NLT).

Many of us, like Peter, live with painful memories of times we have failed the Lord. Thankfully, Jesus offers each of us forgiveness and restoration. Past failures need not limit our future service for God, but they can become learning experiences to help us depend on His grace. While we

may not follow Peter's footsteps to martyrdom, each of us is called to run our own race. Rather than monitoring the course and running style of others, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Why does Jesus connect our love for Him with our willingness to serve others?
- ? Why is it unwise to compare ourselves and our callings with others?

Resource Packet Item 3: Resurrection Sunday

Distribute the information sheet and encourage students to review the time line and Scriptures about Resurrection Sunday throughout the coming week.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Resurrection is more than a theological concept; it testifies to a living Savior who desires an intimate relationship with each of us. Jesus longs for us to spend time with Him, serve His people, and reach the world with the good news that He is alive!

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Commit to spending quality time with Jesus each day. Then add it to your schedule.
- Look for at least one way to serve another believer this week.
- Be alert for opportunities to share the news that Jesus is alive with someone who may be doubting or who does not believe.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Samson's Strength Restored.
Judges 16:25–30

Tuesday:

Naomi's Hope Restored.
Ruth 4:13–17

Wednesday:

David's Joy Restored.
Psalm 51:1–13

Thursday:

Lazarus's Life Restored.
John 11:38–44

Friday:

Thomas's Faith Restored.
John 20:24–29

Saturday:

Saul Encounters the Risen Christ.
Acts 9:1–15