

Another Post-Resurrection Appearance, and the Ascension of Christ

Luke 24:36-53

Luke 24:36-43: Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." 37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." 40 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" 42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. 43 And He took it and ate in their presence.

Background Notes

Luke 23 records two post-resurrection appearances of our Lord. The first half of the chapter records the Lord's appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, on Resurrection Sunday afternoon. The second half of the chapter records the Lord's appearance on Resurrection Sunday evening to the disciples gathered together in Jerusalem. Notice that this gathering included the apostles and other disciples (v33).

From what the two disciples from Emmaus said in verse 34, there was an earlier appearance on that Sunday to Peter, as well as the early morning appearance to Mary Magdalene and the other women. This earlier appearance to Peter is only mentioned here and in 1 Corinthians 15:4-5: "...He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,^{and} that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve."

The term "the twelve" in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is an expression meaning the apostles, even though Judas was no longer among them. In the same way, in Luke 24:33 the term "the eleven" is an expression meaning the apostles, even though we know from John 12 that Thomas was not present at the first Sunday night appearance to the disciples.

So there were a number of post-resurrection appearances of our Lord. There were forty days between our Lord's resurrection and His ascension (Acts 1:3). During that time, the Lord made a number of appearances, proving His resurrection. Acts 1:3 - "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Doctrinal Points

1. The resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection.

We see from these verses that the resurrection of Christ was not just some kind of spiritual resurrection; it was a **bodily resurrection**. The tomb was empty, and the Lord appeared **bodily**. It is true that His resurrection body was different than His body before death, but it was a physical and material body.

One difference is that His resurrected, glorified body was not subject to certain limitations, like gravity and closed doors. The parallel account in John 20:19 says that the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, and Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, *“Peace be with you.”* Notice it doesn’t say the Lord walked through the doors - they did not see the Lord stepping through the door. No, the Lord simply appeared suddenly in their midst. Even though His resurrection body itself was a literal, physical, tangible material body, in His resurrected body the Lord could assume different modes that were without physical limitations.

At first the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost, but the Lord assured them that they were not seeing a spirit - they were seeing **Him**, alive and well and in a physical body! He invited them to touch Him and see that the body they saw had material flesh and solid structural bones. Spirits and ghosts don’t have flesh and bones!

Furthermore, He asked them for something to eat and He ate a piece of broiled fish that they gave Him. Ghosts don’t eat. And no one later would be able to say that it wasn’t real fish, because the disciples gave it to Him.

There are two things that this text is not teaching. It is not teaching that broiled fish is the best health food, because the Lord ate it in His resurrection body. And it is not teaching that the Lord had to eat in His resurrection body. Philippians 3:21 indicates that believers will have resurrected bodies in the future, bodies that will be transformed to be like our Lord’s resurrected body. Our resurrected bodies will be literal, tangible, physical, material bodies because the resurrection of Christ was a bodily resurrection.

2. The ascension of Christ was a bodily ascension.

Verses 44-51: Then *He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.”* **45** *And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.* **46** *Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,* **47** *and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* **48** *And you are witnesses of these things.* **49** *Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power*

from on high.” **50** And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. **51** Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

Verses 44-49 are probably a summary of our Lord’s teaching to the disciples before His ascension. Verse 45 says that the Lord opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, specifically how the Scriptures are Christ-centered. He was speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures, which at that time had three divisions – the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (v44). Verse 46 indicates that the Old Testament Scriptures teach the suffering death and resurrection of the Messiah - in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, for example.

Psalm 22 is a well-known Messianic Psalm. Verse 16 says, *“For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”* Verse 22 begins the resurrection part of the Psalm, *“I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.”*

Isaiah 53:7 says, *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”* Verse 9, *“And they made His grave with the wicked, but with the rich at His death.”* And now comes the resurrection, at the end of verse 10: *“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.”* And verse 12: *“Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

Psalm 16:10, a Messianic Psalm, clearly predicts the resurrection of Christ, *“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

In Luke 24:47, we have the great commission to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. In verse 49, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit to come with power. This, of course, took place at Pentecost.

The ascension is recorded in verses 50-51. Notice that the ascension of our Lord was a **bodily ascension**. The ascension account in Acts 1:9-11 says, *“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”* The Lord ascended bodily, and He will return to this earth bodily. The ascension of Christ was a bodily ascension.

Practical Application

Make the Lord and His people the center of your activity!

*Verses 52-53: And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, **53** and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.*

Even though the Lord had departed from them, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with joy because they knew that Jesus was alive and that they would see Him again. They were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God!

This doesn't mean that they stayed at the Temple around the clock, singing and praying, and forgot about their responsibilities or left their jobs! No! It means that the Temple became their center of activity. That's where the Lord's people gathered, and that's where the Lord was honored and praised by the believers. These things were top priority for the early Christians. This center of activity became the center of their social life as well as their religious life.

This should be true of our lives as well. We have our jobs and responsibilities, and it's not wrong to have wholesome, secular interests, but we should make the Lord and His people a priority in our lives. Make the Lord and His people the center of your activity!