



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 24:36-53

To understand why Jesus appeared after the resurrection as well as the significance of ascension.

Late Night Visit

As soon as Jesus gave the two men in Emmaus the ability to recognize Him, they rose “at the same hour” to go back to the rest of the disciples in Jerusalem to tell them what had happened (Lk. 24:33-35). Bear in mind that these two men invited Jesus in from the road to stay with them because it was evening (Lk. 24:29). Also remember that the distance between Emmaus and Jerusalem was, give or take, 7 miles (Lk. 24:13). Normally a trip of this distance by foot during the night would have been avoided if possible given the danger of the road and the elements. However, the recognition of a very alive man that they believed to be very much dead was enough to motivate them to such an urgent trip. The resurrection changed everything. Having understood that Jesus was alive, they had to go back to the rest of the disciples as the two witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 19:15) and tell them everything they saw and understood.

He Appears!

Verses 36 and 37 pick up right where 35 left off: “As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.” Jesus, now resurrected, appears to his disciples and they were frightened. Below is a breakdown of what followed.

HANDS AND FEET

Immediately, Jesus responded to them: “And he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.” Their fear was specifically concerning whether or not Jesus was actually physically present, or whether he was a ghost of some kind. This is an interesting detail because it reveals at the very least that belief in the existence of ghosts was a present reality in the 1st century. They had conceptualized ghosts by this point. To assuage their fears he presents his hands and feet, parts of his body where the wounds of crucifixion could be seen and felt, as evidence of his physical presence with them.

DISBELIEF FOR JOY

Verse 41 is one of the most interesting verses in this passage. After seeing the risen Savior and hearing him speak, it says “while they still disbelieved for joy, and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything to eat?’” Literally it says, “they, being unbelieving from joy.” What does this mean? This is one of the most relatable passages in the New Testament. The disciples had such joy and excitement that their beloved Lord was somehow physically with them even after having watched him suffer and die, and it made no sense to them. They were thrilled with seeing him, but could not understand how this could possibly be true. Have you ever received news that was too good to be true? How did you process it? Most people get immediately excited at the prospect of this news being real, but in order to prevent themselves from being further hurt, they guard their hearts because they cannot believe it could be true. Disbelieving for joy means “not getting your hopes up.” They had already suffered the loss of Jesus once. To give in, believe, and then realize it was all a dream or a misunderstanding would be doubly injurious. They were protecting themselves from further harm.

FISH AND BREAD

To further prove his physical presence was real, verses 42 and 43 continue: “They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.” There is something else going on here too, perhaps, that Luke is counteracting. A well-known heresy in the 1st century, first Docetism and later Gnosticism, purported that Jesus had not been raised from the dead *bodily*. Gnostic teaching rejected the physical realm as evil and deceptive and taught that the true essence of a person was spiritual, and that the physical body was more or less imprisoning them. Several heretical teachings sprouted from this.¹ It is possible that by the time Luke wrote this Gospel account this heresy was already starting to gain traction. He might have included this detail of Jesus eating the fish in front of them to prove that he was physically raised; phantoms can’t eat food.

AN OPENED MIND

After explaining to them that everything he said would happen had happened, verse 45 says: “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” Again, as he did with the two witnesses in Emmaus, Jesus opened their minds to understand and recognize him fully (Lk. 24:31). Verse 46 continues: “He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’” The death and resurrection of Christ secures forgiveness through repentance and belief. Jesus’ death was not merely to demonstrate his power, for Jesus had already sufficiently proven his power throughout his earthly ministry. His death was for the purpose of international restoration.

¹ One modern example of Gnostic heresy can be found underlying the transgender movement which teaches that it is possible for the real you to be trapped inside of a body that is not you. This is not what the Bible teaches. The inner-person matters, but so does the body. It isn’t that you *have* a body; you *are* a body, and that body is exactly how God intended you to be.

THE COMMISSION

Jesus then reveals why he opened their minds and allowed them to understand everything they now understood: “You are witnesses of these things.” The Greek term for “witness” is μάρτυς (martyr) is a derivative from the word “martyr.” A witness of Jesus is one who can legally testify to the truthfulness of his claims and who will face the consequences for doing so. This witness, however, will not serve alone: “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49). The Holy Spirit will aid the believer to know exactly what to say and when to say it (Lk. 12:12). Christians today need not fear that they will not know how to witness to Christ; the Spirit will lead them if they are willing.

The Ascension

The conclusion of Luke’s Gospel is actually not resurrection, but ascension. Verses 50 and 51: “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” Acts 1:12 states that the ascension took place on the Mount of Olives, and Bethany is located there. After blessing the disciples, Jesus ascended into the heavens to be seated at the right hand of the Father (Rom. 8:34). Bearing in mind that Luke authored both this Gospel account and Acts, note that he revisits the ascension with a bit more detail.

The Ascension of Christ is arguably as important as the resurrection. There are other examples in the Bible of ascending in a similar manner (Enoch and Elijah) but the difference is that rather than ascending prior to death, Jesus dies and is resurrected and then ascends. He isn’t kept from death; he conquered it. The ascension signifies that he will never die again. His victory is everlasting. His redemptive work is acceptable to the Father as he now sits at his right hand until the coming time of the second advent. His ascension declares that the last days have begun. It’s only a matter of time until the fullness of time comes again and the Son returns to make right all that sin and Satan have destroyed in creation.

What About Now?

One takeaway is simply remembering the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit as you go about being a witness for Jesus. You are never alone. It is never left fully up to you to speak about your faith to non-believers because God has promised you to be with you and aid you as you talk to others. Another takeaway is the comfort we find in knowing that the disciples were not so different from us. They guarded their hearts from further hurt when confronted with the risen Lord because it seemed too good to be true. Christ was kind enough to gently confirm his presence to them, and he is kind to us as well.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 24:36-37. What were the disciples doing when Jesus spoke to them. How did they respond?

2. Read Luke 24:38-40. What did Jesus say to them to help calm them? Why was this good evidence?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 24:41-43. What does it mean that they “disbelieved for joy?” What did Jesus do to further help settle them?

2. Read Luke 24:44. In your own words, summarize what Jesus said to his disciples.

Day Three

1. Read Luke 24:45-47. What did Jesus do to them? What did he say after opening their minds?

2. Read Luke 24:48-49. What did he call his disciples? Who did he say would help them be his witnesses?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 24:50-51. To where did he lead them? What did he do to them? What happened to Jesus after he blessed them?

2. Read Luke 24:52-53. What did the disciples do in response to Jesus’ blessing and ascension?

Week 88 Discussion: Too Good To Be True

In verse 41, after being met with the risen Lord, the disciples “disbelieved for joy and were marveling.” The resurrection seemed too good to be true. Talk as a group about that feeling and how to handle it when it happens.

1. Icebreaker: Share a time when you received news that seemed too good to be true.
2. Whenever you receive news that’s too good to be true, how do you typically respond? Why?
3. Do you think it’s healthy to protect yourself from further heartbreak by “disbelieving for joy?”
4. Jesus ate fish to prove he was physically present. How can you help others in their disbelief?
5. Does underlying woundedness play a role in how you protect yourself? Why or why not?
6. How can the church help people address their hurts to prevent them from being so guarded?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus appears to the disciples and opens their minds to understand everything he had said previously.
2. Jesus commissions the disciples to be His witness before ascending into heaven.