

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Upper Room Appearance of the Risen Christ

by Dan Trygg

“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. ²² But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also 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 exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see. ²⁵ And He said to them, ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”

Luke 24:21-27

“So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ ²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” John 20:19-20

According to the gospel of Luke, there were two other appearances of Jesus, which had taken place earlier in the day: (1.) Jesus’ appearance to those on the road to Emmaus (24:13-33); and (2.) a personal appearance to Simon Peter (24:34).

Luke recorded in some detail the experience of the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-33). Two disciples of Jesus (not of the twelve apostles) had left Jerusalem, and were traveling to Emmaus, a town about seven miles distant. Jesus walked up alongside of them as they journeyed, and had engaged them in discussion. They did not recognize Him because God had prevented their eyes from that recognition. As He listened to their consternation about how their hopes had been dashed when the prophet Jesus had been crucified, ...and how His body was missing from the tomb..., He chided them about being “unperceptive and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken”. Then He took them on a tour of the scriptures, and explained to them more thoroughly what they had to say concerning Himself. Later on, they asked Him to stay with them for dinner. He was made known to them as He broke bread at the supper table, ...and then *He disappeared!* Upon realizing what had happened, they immediately returned the seven miles to Jerusalem (Lk. 24:13,33), and found the eleven disciples gathered (actually, we find out from John that Thomas was not there -- 20:24) along with some other followers of Jesus, who told them that Jesus had also appeared to Peter. **Of this personal encounter with Jesus, we have no record, although Paul alludes to it as the “first” resurrection appearance**, ...at least “first” in his list of eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:5), for we know that He appeared to Mary Magdalene *before* He appeared to Peter (Jn. 20:11-18).

It was during the interaction between the Emmaus travelers and the ten other disciples that Jesus made His upper room appearance (Lk. 24:36). This gives us a clue as to when this would have occurred. Luke reported that the Emmaus travelers had invited Jesus to stay with them, since it was “getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over” (Lk. 24:29). They had actually gathered for their evening meal when Jesus was recognized by them, we can conclude that it must have been at least 5:30-6:00 p.m. by this time. Then these two disciples had to repack and journey an uphill road back to Jerusalem, which would have taken more than two additional hours. Thus, **the upper room meeting we are about to examine would have occurred in the later evening, certainly well after dark, probably approaching eight-thirty or nine o'clock.**

“*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week...*” (20:19) -- That is, Sunday evening. “*...when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews...*” -- We find out from Acts 1:13 that they were staying in a large, upper room. It was large enough for 120 people to gather therein (Acts 1:15). **Fearing further retaliation from the Jewish leaders who had just crucified their Master, the disciples were staying to themselves and kept the doors shut, and probably locked** (the Greek word encompasses both meanings). **The point of telling us this is not only to indicate the fear of the disciples, but also to set the stage for the miraculous appearance of Jesus.** He did not simply sneak into the room when they weren’t looking. The doors were barred against any surprise visitors. “*Jesus came and stood in their midst...*” -- His sudden appearance right in the midst of their gathering was *startling*, conveyed more vividly in Luke’s account. “*...and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’*” This was the normal Hebrew greeting. The Hebrew word, *shalom*, which underlies this greeting refers to health, prosperity, and balanced order. It was a *declaration*, ...not a wish. Literally, the Greek simply says, “Peace to you”, not “*May* peace be with you”, which sounds more like a desire for peace, not a statement or declaration of it. **Jesus was here bringing peace, not asking or hoping that it might happen.**

“And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side.” (vs. 20) -- From Luke’s account, we learn that they thought that possibly they were seeing a ghost (Lk. 24:37). **Jesus took deliberate action to show that He was risen with a physical body. He was *not* a phantom.** According to Luke, He said, *“See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bone, as you see that I have.”* The word for “handle” means to touch by feeling, grabbing hold, implying movement of the hands over the body. It means more than simply “touch” with a poke of a fingertip. It means “squeeze, rub, hold”. The experience of actually feeling and handling Jesus’ flesh was such a vivid and overwhelming experience in John’s mind that he later used the same word in His first epistle, *“What we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld, and what our hands handled concerning the Word of Life...”* (I Jn. 1:1). Then, if this were not enough: **“And saying this, He showed them His hands and His feet.”** (Lk. 24:40). **He specifically went out of His way to show them the wounds in His hands and in His side, to convince them that it was indeed Him, ...and that He was a living miracle!** There were the holes in His body, but there was no blood! **Unquestionably, He was risen from the dead!**

To the Jew, resurrection required the coming to life of a physical body. Jews had a holistic view of human nature. God had created everything. The heavens, the earth, the plants, the animals, ...and it was all good (Gen. 1:21). God had not created anything that was inherently evil. Everything God had made was good. According to Genesis 2:7, God formed the man’s body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath or spirit of life, and the man came to be a living soul, or self. **A human being was *not* a conglomeration of parts.** He did not just “have” a body, a soul, and a spirit. **He was a body, made alive by the spirit, to become a conscious individual self.** When a person died physically, that conscious spirit-self continued on, but *the person was incomplete without a body.* Paul described the disembodied state of the conscious self as a “naked” state (II Cor. 5:3). Thus, *to the Jewish mind, the resurrection would require a new body,* because it is to be a restoration of what God created humanity to be.

To the Greek, however, the resurrection of the body was confusing, even offensive (e.g., I Cor. 1:23; Acts 17:30-32). **They saw human existence as dualistic, i.e., that humankind was a combination of spirit and body.** In Greek philosophy, spiritual perfection was understood as the ideal. Matter was a particular expression of the ideal, and was inevitably fraught with imperfections and fell short of the ideal. So, **physical matter was seen as intrinsically evil** (or irrelevant) and spirit was viewed as good. **In the Greek mind, the body was nothing more than a prison-house for the spirit-self. To be rid of the body was a good thing, in their view.** It was finally to escape the prison of imperfect shapes and deteriorating existence in this imperfect world, to attain existence as a perfect spiritual consciousness. The notion that God was the Creator of the material world, and that He raised Jesus from the dead in a physical body would be offensive on two fronts.

It is clear that the teaching of Jesus and the apostles were consistent with the teachings of the Scripture, not Greek philosophy. Thus, **Jesus sought to clarify that He was not some disembodied spirit, but a resurrected person, complete with a body.** This physical aspect of the resurrection made it verifiable, hence **Jesus encouraged His disciples to use their physical senses to establish that He really was there, risen from the dead.** Luke tells us that, in addition to touching Him, they gave him food to eat, and watched Him eat it (24:42,43). A ghost, or spirit, cannot eat a meal of fish.

It is important to see that the Bible treats Jesus’ resurrection as an historical event, ...not as a symbolic hope, or “the rise of faith in the disciples”, as though this were merely an overcoming of fear, while Jesus’ body still lay in a tomb. No. Without the resurrection of Jesus’ body there is no hope of grace through Him. The resurrection was an actual event, as verifiable as any other historical event of the past. These eyewitness accounts form the backbone of the evidence (I Cor. 15:4f). **We have already seen some of the corroborating evidence: The empty tomb, and the empty grave clothes.** If the resurrection required a physical coming to life of a dead body, then the grave clothes and the tomb could not have still contained a body for the claim of resurrection to make any sense. All that the hostile authorities would have to do would be to open the tomb and show that the corpse was still there. Instead, the grave was empty. “Come, see the place where He was lying” was the angel’s invitation (Matt. 28:6). **Another key piece of corroborating evidence for the resurrection was just beginning to take place: The radical transformation of the disciples.** From fearful, devastated men, hiding behind locked doors, they would soon become fearless, motivated, bold spokesmen for the Master. Their unified testimony declared that Jesus was ALIVE! Risen from the dead!

“...the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” -- You can imagine the height of their emotion, moving from despair, to disbelief, to fear and now to the most incredulous experience of joy. Jesus had said that their “grief will be turned into joy” and that “no one will take your joy from you” (16:20,22). **The resurrection is the most significant event of world history. Just as it was a life-transforming event for those disciples in the upper room on that night, it can also be the foundational truth for us, the beginning of radical transformation for us, if we make Him our Joy.**