

HE LIVES ETERNALLY: CARRY ON

Luke 24:1-8, 36-40, 44-53

Making a difference! All of us **do** make a difference. That is, we have “some” influence on the world around us. There is probably only one thing more devastating to our sense of being worthwhile than to believe that “it really doesn't matter what we do or even if we exist.” The most devastating would be to believe that what we do has a negative impact on our world. At one time or another, most of us have experienced a sense of having no power and being unproductive. Life can be filled with *activities* and there can be long periods of no *results*. This can become totally frustrating to most of us. We work to solve a problem and feel as if we were just spinning our wheels. Even worse, we work very hard and actually solve the problem and then wonder if it was worth solving in the first place.

We would probably be surprised to learn how many people have no sense of purpose in their lives. Those who were followers of Jesus during His earthly ministry were likely asking themselves questions such as “what the use of all that we’ve been through?” It is because of such uncertainty that the events following the Resurrection were so important to the emerging church and for Christians today. The post-resurrection events helped the disciples and followers of Jesus to put the past three and a half years and the trauma they had experienced in the last several days in proper perspective so that they could see the bigger picture of what God was doing in His plan of salvation. It would start with remembering, it would involve trust, and would require understanding for them to have a sense of purpose and be able to carry on to complete the mission for which they were saved.

Remember – 24:1-8

¹But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; ⁵and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? ⁶“He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, ⁷saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” ⁸And they remembered His words, Luke 24:1-8 (NASB95)

The women who went out early in the morning to anoint the body of Jesus would have done the same thing for any other friend and/or family member who had died or been killed. These were identified as Mary Magdalene, Joanna (wife of Herod's steward), Mary who was the mother of James and wife of Alpheus (who was likely the brother of Joseph the carpenter) and other women. One of the “other women” was identified by Mark as Salome (the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John and probably a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus). This is what we would expect friends and family to do. However, this was not exactly business as usual. They were putting themselves at risk of being arrested by the Romans or the Jewish leaders. Their fears of arrest were quickly replaced with confusion and perhaps with panic borne out of the discovery that the body of Jesus was no longer there.

We know that Jesus did not live an ordinary life and He did not have an ordinary death. On Friday the followers of Jesus were primarily concerned with providing a proper burial for Jesus. Apparently, they had forgotten about what He said about His death and what would occur after that, but were relying only on what they saw. We find this type thing all the time. We have been taught that “seeing is believing” and some times what we see is not in accordance with what the word of God says on a particular subject. If they had really listened and believed what Jesus told them, then they would have been planning a celebration rather than an embalming.

The women who were to take care of the spices for the body were treating this as an ordinary death, but what they found that Sunday morning when they arrived at the tomb was extraordinary.

The first situation out of the ordinary was that the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb was rolled away. As they approached the tomb, they first wondered how they would get the stone out of their way so that they could be about their business of embalming the body of Jesus, then when they saw that it was rolled away they wondered why and who had done it. When they looked inside, they discovered that the body was gone. To them this was tragic. All kinds of bad things ran through their minds about what might have happened. This “tragedy” turned out to be the greatest symbol of hope mankind has ever had. The empty tomb is a symbol of victory that even death will be conquered!

They didn't know what to do. Should they look for the body, go for help, wait or what? Then they looked up and saw two angels. Luke described them as “men in shining garments.” The women could tell that these two were not ordinary. They were struck with fear and immediately bowed down to the ground.

The question that the angel asked is a pertinent question for today. “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” In a more general sense, we find people today who are looking for life in areas that are not capable of providing it. It may be in new philosophies, false religions, morality, social justice, technology, or even in some churches who are conformed to the world rather than being conformed to the Word. The angel gave sound advice: “Remember what Jesus said.” We should always cling to the word of God. It is reliable and we can count on it.

We could even stretch the point and apply this looking for life in dead things to those who think that life was something that spontaneously developed from chemical elements and electrical currents. Life is found in the Creator Who is the Giver of life.

On many occasions during His earthly ministry, Jesus declared Who He is to the people. The Resurrection validated His ministry by providing evidence beyond what was humanly possible and beyond any element of coincidence that Jesus was God Incarnate. Paul concentrated on the implications of such evidence in many of his letters that make up a significant portion of the New Testament.

Their confusion was supplanted with fear and awe when they saw the angels. The angels made themselves visible to the women to give them an important announcement. Angels are messengers from God and what they told the women was the finishing touch to the Good News of the Gospel. “He is not here, but is risen!” This was the fulfillment of the hope of salvation. This message confirmed what Jesus had told His disciples that on the third day He would arise. The events of the previous three days, beginning with His arrest and culminating in the resurrection, were exactly as Jesus had told them they would be.

Trust – 24:36-40

³⁶ While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸ And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ “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.” ⁴⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. Luke 24:36-40 (NASB95)

Those disciples in the upper room were afraid of many things on that day they discovered that Jesus was missing from the tomb. They didn't know if the Romans and the Jewish religious leader might be after them to hang them on crosses too. Besides all of these fears for their personal safety, rumors were flying all around. Several people had reporting seeing Jesus, but

most of the disciples were really skeptical about these stories at this time. They had just gotten a report from a couple of followers of Jesus that He had appeared to them on the road to Emmaus and that they had not recognized Him until He broke the bread at the evening meal and then He vanished from their sight. Of course, they rushed back to Jerusalem to report to the others what had happened to them.

Right in the midst of our doubts and uncertainties, Jesus comes to us to bring us peace. In the case of these disciples, the initial effect was that His appearing increased their anxiety. Luke tells us that they were “terrified.” They were filled with terror because they thought that it was a ghost. After all, Jesus did not walk in through the door but just appeared in the room. We would almost be tempted to say, “Lord, don’t DO that! Knock on the door and we’ll let you in.” The problem with that approach is that so many of us get so caught up in the troubles of life that we don’t hear (or pay attention to) the knock and when He comes in, we may not recognize Him. Sometimes, and this was such a case, He needs to get our attention and to do so, He makes a sudden appearance.

Jesus appeared to His disciples to solidify their faith. We might think they should have been able to believe since they had spent more than three years with Jesus. However, they needed to experience the risen Lord. The teachings of Jesus and the miracles are wonderful and we need them, but without the point and power of the resurrection we are left with trying to walk in the teachings and trying to benefit from the miracles in our old nature. It is good to witness about the teaching and the miracles but the testimony that brings change in the life of the hearer is that regarding the resurrection.

Jesus greeted them with a blessing of peace as was the traditional greeting of that time. The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. To help them recognize Him and to know that He was real, he showed them the evidence of the crucifixion. When we meet people and greet them, do we show any sign we have been to Calvary or that we daily take up our crosses as we follow Jesus? If others are to see Jesus in us, then they will see Him in the evidence of our death to self.

Jesus asked the same question that He had asked them on several other occasions: “Why are you troubled, why do you doubt?” Good questions! We know that God loves us and we know that He knows what is best for us. We also know that He has the power to do anything. Trusting God is simply resting in this assurance that He can and will do what is the absolute best for us even if we do not understand what is going on.

Understand – 24:44-46

⁴⁴Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, Luke 24:44-46 (NASB95)

After having assured them that He was not a ghost (even though in His resurrected body, He had the power to appear and disappear) He reminded them that what was happening to them was exactly what He had told them would happen. They were seeing and experiencing the fulfillment of prophecy and promises that God had given to the people of Israel down through the ages. These promises were in all the writings of the sacred scriptures. He helped them to understand how these passages related to what was happening to them.

Jesus also set the stage for why they were involved in this most significant event in the history of mankind: the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – this event in which God Himself took on humanity and lived among us to experience our humanity and, at the same time,

to communicate to us the true nature of God as a loving, caring Father. The purpose for which they were involved was to see it and to experience it so that others could know. This small group was to tell others of the love of God and the good news of salvation. They were probably thinking, "I can't do that." But Jesus had already made provision for our inability.

Follow Through – 24:47-53

⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:47-49 (NASB95)

Fortunately, we do not have to do the work for which God saved us in our own strength. He provides the power by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The early disciples were told to wait for that power. That same power is available to all Christians today.

God came to the world to save the world and in doing so He blesses us beyond that which we can comprehend. Jesus comes to us to abide with us by the Holy Spirit so that we are blessed in our lives, every day and in every way. Then there are those mountaintop experiences in which some are blessed to experience the presence of Jesus in a special way, but these last only a short time and He departs from us even as Jesus did from His disciples. The impact on their lives was far-reaching and they found themselves in continual praise and in communion with God even though the special visitation was over and they were left behind to do the work to which Jesus had called them.

We too must see that God's work still goes on and that He wants us involved in it. That is why He did not take us immediately to heaven the moment we were born again or born from above. Part of that work is to share what Jesus has done in our lives for we are truly witnesses to that.