

COMMISSIONS

Luke 24:36-49

Not many of us have ever had a significant supernatural encounter, at least not one of which we were aware at the time. We may have had some but just didn't realize it. The Bible tells us that many have entertained angels and been unaware of it. Every now and then we will hear about people who have had encounters in which they had, either in a dream or a vision, a visit from Jesus. I have read and heard of others who have had such visits from Jesus which happens in areas where the presentation of the gospel is not allowed. There are visitations of angels recorded in both the Old and New Testaments and there were appearances of Jesus after the resurrection and even after the ascension. In these records, we see evidence that such happenings were frightening to those involved in them. I can imagine so! When Jesus appears to us or when He sends His angels, it is to comfort and to reassure, but He realizes that it can be frightening and the initial words spoken in such appearances many times are "Be not afraid" or "Fear not" or in the case of Jesus appearing to His disciples in the upper room, He said, "Peace be unto you."

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 leaders 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 quite 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.

Assures – 24:36-43

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. ⁴¹ While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; ⁴³ and He took it and ate it before them. Luke 24:36-43 (NASB95)

There were five reported incidences of the followers of Jesus seeing Him on the day of His resurrection. The first was Mary Magdalene, then by three other women as they were going to tell the disciples about His body not being in the tomb. Luke told us that Jesus had appeared to Simon and about the extended encounter of Cleopas and his traveling companion. The fifth appearance was to the group in the upper room immediately following the testimony of the two from Emmaus. Luke reported that those in the upper room told these two (from Emmaus) that the Lord has risen indeed and we would assume that this (along with other reports) would have produced joyful confidence; however, Mark (16:13) reported that the disciples and those with them did not believe this fourth report (and presumably, were doubting the other accounts). They were obviously struggling with trying to sort out all that had happened and what did all these things mean. They were at what we might call an impasse of what to believe because they were not remembering what Jesus had told them was going to happen and they did not have confidence that the reports they had heard (or maybe even experienced) were actual confirmations (fulfillment) of what Jesus had said.

Right in the midst of their doubts and uncertainties, Jesus appeared (maybe a better word

is “materialized”) to bring some order out of the confusion they were experiencing. However, in this case, the initial effect was that His appearing increased their anxiety. Luke wrote that they were “terrified.” They were filled with terror because they thought that which they were seeing 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 does come in, we may not recognize Him. Sometimes, and this was such a case, He needed to get their attention and to do so, He made a sudden appearance.

If someone suddenly appeared in this room, I think that our reaction could be described with the same words that Luke used such as amazed, astonished, terrified, and frightened. Why do you think that this would likely be the universal reaction of most people? The first word that came to mind is “unknown.” Why would we not experience elation or joy when we encounter something that might be described as “other worldly” or spiritual? Is there a built-in bias in the human psyche that causes us to expect harm rather than benefit from the spiritual realm? Such a bias would have likely developed in areas or realms that were controlled by “other gods” rather than what we should expect in the kingdom of YHWH, the Creator God of all things. After all, what is our confession regarding God? It is, “God is in control and God is good, all the time!” So, if our reaction to spiritual encounters is “terror,” then what does that say about our confession?

Our reticent reaction of less than enthusiastically embracing such encounters might be related to a realization that we have failed to walk in Godly ways in our everyday lives which creates a rift in that spiritual relationship. If we realize it, then why would that still be an issue since we have a remedy for such failures? On the other hand, if our concern is that the encounter we are facing is not with righteous spiritual entities, then we must rely upon the promise that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

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.

Jesus knew they were thinking He was just a spirit that had appeared, so he accommodated their doubts by letting them touch him and He also directed their attention to the nail holes in His hands and feet. Finally, He ate some broiled fish that was left over from their evening meal as “physical” proof that He was “flesh and bones” and not just a spirit.

Luke reported that those gathered in the room were still experiencing “belief issues.” However, their unbelief had been transformed from doubtful and somber unbelief to hopeful and elated unbelief. This latter unbelief sounds like an oxymoron, but we still use similar expression to describe how we feel when we begin to realize that something wonderful and beyond our wildest expectations has happened. This would be like saying, “this is too good to be true” in our amazement.

The remainder of Luke's account appears to be a condensed summary of the instructions that Jesus passed on to His followers during the forty-day period before His ascension.

Opens – 24:44-46

⁴⁴ Now 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.”⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and 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 before the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. They were seeing and experiencing the fulfillment of prophecies 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.

Since all these promises were in what we call the Old Testament, then why didn't those familiar with these writings recognize Jesus as the Messiah during that forty-two-month period of His active ministry in Galilee, Judea, and neighboring areas? We could make the case that a few people did recognize this truth but the majority did not. However, even those who did embrace Jesus as the Messiah had difficulty in making the connection of all the Old Testament references to what they had seen and were currently experiencing. The statement that He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" is thought by many to mean a supernatural enablement so they could see the "connections" of the many references in the "Law, Prophets, and Psalms" with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This view seems to agree with Paul's comment regarding the Jews in Romans 11:8. "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

This is still a problem for Christians today. Do we still have difficulty in "connecting" the Scriptures to what is happening in our lives? The answer is probably "yes" for most of us. However, this is not the way it should be since we (as born-from-above believers) have the Holy Spirit in us to guide us into all truth. The reason that we still have difficulty is that we continue to hold onto our prejudices and our preconceived opinions that are sometimes misapplications of Scriptural truths to life. *Barnes Notes Commentary* states that "If a man is willing to take the plain declarations of the Bible, he will commonly be little perplexed with mysteries." What we typically do when Scripture passages seem to conflict with our preconceived opinions is that we create our own explanations that resolve the conflict and these "made up" narratives become the "proof" that we were right in our prejudices.

Jesus also set the stage for why they were involved in this the most significant event in the history of mankind: the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In this event 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 provisions for our inability. We see how this is to happen in the continuation we see in verse forty-seven.

Sends – 24:47-49

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)

These verses appear to be a very condensed summary of the meeting of Jesus with his disciples in Galilee in which the Great Commission (make disciples of all nations) was given to them and a later meeting they had with Jesus prior to His ascension near Bethany. It was in this last meeting that they were instructed to remain in Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Fortunately, we do not have to do the work for which God saved us in our own strength.

He provides the power by the 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.

Jesus reminded these followers that they had seen and experienced the unfolding and revelation of the fulfillment of Scriptural prophecies and promises and because they had witnessed these things that they were equipped to share what they had seen. Being equipped is essential, but being empowered was also a necessary component to being effective witnesses.

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. Not only have we seen and experienced what God has done in our lives we ourselves are to be witnesses to others by our actions that give evidence that Christ is in us and impacts what we do. This manner of witnessing is powerful and it is what either validates or confuses the verbal witness that we share with others.