

GSM 21/4/13

Luke 24:36-53

This morning we're concluding our mini-series looking at Jesus's appearances to his disciples following his Resurrection from the gospel of Luke. [name] is going to read verses 36 to 53 from Luke 24.

[read]



I guess if you know who these characters are then it may age you a bit. This is Statler and Waldorf, who would appear each week on the Muppet Show, a staple of my childhood television watching, as two old guys sitting in a box watching the show and generally rubbishing it. They had their own little section in the show's theme tune, in which they asked the question "Why do we always come here? I guess we'll never know. It's like a kind of torture to have to watch the show." I want to ask the same question that they asked themselves this morning to all of us – why do we always come here, to church on a Sunday morning? There are plenty of other things we could be doing. There are jobs around the house. There are sports to play or friends to visit. There are beds to lie in.

The view of some would be that as a group of people we can support each other and help each other work out our problems. Through friendships and community we can build each other up. Well, important though that is, if that was the main reason that we meet together, then you wouldn't see me here much. There are other more enjoyable activities where that can happen. If that's what it's all about I would much rather do something like play sports or music and meet people that way. I've heard others, maybe of a different generation, say that one should come to church because it's the thing to do on a Sunday morning, it's what one *should* do. Again, I don't believe that for a

moment, and I guess that general way of thinking is less common than it used to be. But maybe for lots of us we come to church because we've fallen into the habit of doing so – it's a mix of those two other reasons – being part of a community and feeling we should come – but also because it's kind of what we've grown accustomed to doing. It gives us something to do.

The Bible is quite blunt about the fact that the reason we meet together on Sunday rests on whether or not the gospel is **true**. If it isn't true then, really, who cares about a community built on a falsehood, or about a sense of social obligation. In particular, the Bible says that our faith all rests on the truth of the resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthian church: "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith ... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile ... *If only for this life* we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." So, whether or not Jesus was raised from the dead becomes very important. Did he rise from the dead or not? Is our faith futile or not? Are we wasting our time here or not? Should we all get on with other stuff? The new atheist movement would say so. Famously in 2008 they organised an advertising campaign using London buses with the slogan "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life". In doing so I believe they did Christians a great service because it threw us back onto the fundamental question of our faith – is it true? Can we believe in someone actually rising from the dead?

Well, I believe that this morning's passage helps to answer those questions, and others also. We'll see from this passage three things – the power of the resurrection, the promise of the resurrection and the pattern of the resurrection. Let's look at these three things in turn.

First, the power of the resurrection. The power of the resurrection can be seen in how the disciples's outlook was suddenly and radically changed. I don't know how long it normally takes you to change your outlook on things. Let's take politics, obviously in the news recently because of the funeral of Margaret Thatcher a few days ago. I don't know how many of you can remember back to 1979 when she became prime minister, after fairly desperate times in the 1970s marked by shortened working weeks, power cuts, and uncollected rubbish. I don't know what you think of Margaret Thatcher's legacy but I would be surprised if your opinion remained the same constantly since 1979. Fast forward to 1997 and the bright new dawn of Tony Blair becoming prime minister – "things can only get better and all that". May some of us who were celebrating into the night had our enthusiasm pricked slightly by what happened after that in our adventures in Iraq. Opinions change, but it often takes time. We need to see how things develop, then take an informed view.

But this morning's passage shows a rapid and fundamental change of mind in the space of a few hours. First, consider what state the disciples are in at the beginning of this passage. The passage doesn't tell us this, but elsewhere in the gospel accounts we read that the disciples were meeting in a locked room. Consider what had just happened – they had seen the man in whom they had placed so much hope executed by the Romans at the request of the Jewish authorities. They had fled for

their lives. They were surrounded in the city by those who had executed their leader and were doubtless still worried for their own safety. They hear perplexing news about sightings of Jesus, and then suddenly there he is amongst them. How might they react? Well, we're told in verses 37 and 38. "They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?". Startled, frightened, troubled, doubting. This is not a description of people who were expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. Now look how their views evolve over the verses. Come verse 41 they still do not believe, but this time not out of doubt, but joy and amazement. Now look forward to verses 52 and 53. Now unbelief has been replaced by worship and, more than that, look where they are in verse 53 – in the temple, at the centre of the powerbase of those who had executed Jesus. From a locked room in hiding to spending all their time in the place they are most at risk. Now, why move from a situation where you are hiding away to something where you put yourselves deliberately at risk? Well, what other explanation can there be unless they had actually seen the risen Jesus? Two things here: firstly, all the disciples ended up being exiled or martyred for proclaiming Jesus's resurrection. Secondly, this story comes at the end of the gospel of Luke. At the beginning of Luke's gospel he says this to his friend Theophilus: "I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." This is a hostage to fortune because if you include anything after that that isn't true, you set yourself up for a hiding – Luke must have been sure of his facts before writing this account of Jesus's resurrection.

The resurrection turned around the disciples' worldview and behaviour almost instantaneously. What is its power for us? Well, it confirms the truth of the gospel. It shows that what Jesus says about himself is true. And if it's true, it's the most important truth that any of us have to face. It means that the only possible coherent reactions to the gospel are acceptance and discipleship or rejection – we can't be indifferent. It doesn't allow us to ignore it. We are forced to examine the claims of Jesus and his call on our lives. It should unsettle us and, if we follow Jesus, reassure us that, yes, what we believe is true, not just something we want to be true.

Secondly, what this passage shows us is the promise of the resurrection. Now promises are very important, and they play a big part in each of our lives. Every time we enter into a contract with someone supplying goods or services to us, we make mutual promises to each other – I will pay you if you sell me this. Marriage is founded on promises by a two people given in front of others – promises to love each other exclusively. But more fundamentally most of you here this morning will be carrying with you a promise upon which you place an awful lot of faith. Here's an example [**hold up bank note**] – if you have a bank note, get it out, and have a look on the side of it with the queen's head on. You'll see a statement from the Bank of England that says "I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of", then whatever sum it is – in this case [**amount**]. Now, if you receive an income of any sort by someone transferring money into your bank account, you are trusting in that promise – that you will be able to exchange the money you have received for goods of equivalent value. You're also trusting in the promise of your bank, that you will be able to withdraw your money when you wish to do so. If you were to believe that the promise written on the bank note was no longer

valid, perhaps because the currency was about to be devalued so that your ten pounds would only be worth eight pounds, or that the promise from your bank that you would be able to withdraw your money was no longer valid, you would not be content to receive your income as a bank transfer. You would want to receive it in things with an actual value to you, such as food or clothing. But I assume that none of us do this – instead we're content to rely on receiving income into our bank accounts. Why? Because we trust the Bank of England and our own bank to honour the promises they have made. Our trust is based on what has happened before – that whenever we have called on the promise to be fulfilled in the past, it has been. When this confidence gets shaken, as it was in 2007 and 2008 with people lining up outside Northern Rock to withdraw their money because their trust in that bank had been lost, the government acts to restore that trust, because it's important to the functioning of the country that people can trust in the promises written on bank notes and given by banks.

We trust in promises because of what has gone before and because of the power of the authorities to fulfil the promise. So, we should trust in God's promises because we see in the resurrection how he fulfils his promises. Look with me at verses 45 to 47: "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Jesus points out that his resurrection is something that God had promised in his Word a long time before it actually happened. He goes on to say in verse 48 "You are witnesses of these things", as if to say, do you see, you can verify that the things that were promised have now come about. Now what does it do to show that a promise that was given has been fulfilled? It builds trust. It means that the next time that a promise is made, it can be relied on more than if past promises had been broken. So when Jesus goes on to say in verse 49 that he will send them what God has promised, which is the Holy Spirit, they know to trust that promise. Why? For the same reason that we trust in banks and bank notes – because of the promises that have been kept in the past and the power of those giving the promises to ensure that they are kept.

The promise of the resurrection goes beyond, of course, what we see in this passage. The resurrection is our receipt that the price for our rebellion against God has been paid – it is the guarantee that God will accept those who follow Jesus and make him the Lord of their lives. Someone once described it this way – if your electricity is cut off because you don't pay the bill and someone tells you that they have paid for the electricity to be reconnected, how do you know if what they say is true? The answer is – the lights come back on. The resurrection is the equivalent of the lights coming back on for us. It shows that the promised payment for our sins was made by Jesus on the cross. The Bible also points to the fact that the resurrection of Jesus is our guarantee that we also will be raised and enjoy life after death. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 4: "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself." The resurrection of Jesus gives Paul, and us, confidence in our own resurrection.

But what sort of resurrection will we get? People talk about life after death without really going into what that life will be like. If you have a miserable life on earth then the prospect of life after death may be very unattractive, if it has the same quality of life before death. If it has a different quality of life then what is that different quality of life? I thought I'd show a clip of what the popular conception of life after death is like, and this is my favourite depiction of life after death in films. It's taken from the Ice Age movies for kids, and this is a bit where the sabre-toothed squirrel Scrat, who spends all the movies obsessed with the search for acorns, dies.

[show clip - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwWzHqipWug>]

So there you have common themes – angelic choirs, heaven being a place separate from earth, an individual place in the sky of fluffy clouds especially for you where you can enjoy what you were deprived of on earth as a sort of consolation. But what this passage shows us is how untrue that is as a picture of life after death, because it shows us the pattern of resurrection. The reason it shows us the pattern for our resurrection is that the Bible teaches that by looking at Jesus in resurrected form we can see what we will be like when we enjoy life after death. Back in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says this: “just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.” So, just as we resemble Adam, so we shall resemble Jesus.

So what can we learn from this passage as to what our life after death will be like? Well, from this passage we see three things that mark Jesus's resurrected body, and will therefore mark ours:

- Physicality
- Limitations being disappplied
- Suffering turned to greater glory

So, firstly, physicality. Verse 39: “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” Verses 41 and 42: “he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” Jesus touches, and can be touched. Jesus enjoys food. What does this mean for our life after death? It means that we will be able to dance. We will enjoy food and drink. We will be able to relate to each other physically. This is not some disembodied existence playing harps on clouds. This is a real physical existence.

Secondly, limitations being disappplied. We saw last week how when eating with the two men Jesus met on the road to Emmaus, that he disappeared from their sight. This morning all the disciples are together in a locked room and suddenly, verse 36, Jesus stands among them. No wonder the disciples were startled and frightened, thinking they had seen a ghost, because a normal human can't get through locked doors. But that's the reality of Jesus's resurrected body. Normal limitations don't apply. What does that mean for us for our life after death? It means that normal limitations don't apply. What currently limits you in your enjoyment of life? Let me pick on a few – infirmity, depression, dyslexia, just a general inability to do things the way you want to do them. This passage says that the things that limit us from being as we want to be will be removed. So, we can touch and eat, but we can also disappear from view or pass through locked doors. We will be able to play the violin and piano as we always wanted to but were never able to. We will be able to create in a way

that was always just out of our reach. We can run and jump in a way that we can only vaguely remember from our youth.

Finally, suffering turned to greater glory. Verse 40: “When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.” What’s special about Jesus’s hands and feet? That’s where the nails went in. *Jesus’s resurrection body contains the signs of his suffering.* Now, for you or I, to be made perfect means to do away with all blemishes. We might wear clothing that makes us look less portly, or use make-up to cover over unsightly spots. Yet here we see Jesus resurrected still showing the signs of his suffering. Do you think he was waiting to have these signs removed and he wouldn’t be perfect until that happened? No. The Bible teaches that when Jesus comes again in glory and appears on the throne of heaven he will appear as “a Lamb, *looking as if it has been slain*”. Jesus, in glory, looks like a sacrificed lamb. The suffering does not detract from his glory, as a spot might detract from our appearance – *it enhances it*. In some way that’s hard for us to understand, the signs of suffering that Jesus went through make his glory greater, not less. He keeps the signs of the nails in his hands and feet and thereby gains greater glory. What does this mean for us? It means that any suffering that we undergo for the sake of Jesus will also enhance us in glory. Your poverty, your rejection, your physical pain that you undergo for Jesus’s sake will work to enhance your glory after you die.

That is the pattern of the resurrection – a physical body unhindered by limitations, whose glory is enhanced by the suffering undertaken for Jesus. That’s what we have to look forward to.

Tim began this mini-series with a quote from the atheist journalist Matthew Parris that included the following: “If a faith is true, it must have the most profound consequences for a man and for mankind. If I seriously suspected a faith might be true, I would devote the rest of my life finding out. Is it true? That is the question. It was the question when I was 12, and the question when I was 22. 40 years later it is still the question. It is the only question”. We meet together as people who follow Jesus because the gospel is true. This passage shows us that it is true by pointing to the fact of Jesus’s resurrection, it shows us the power of that truth and the pattern of that truth. May our lives reflect the promise and the power of that truth.