

The Resurrected and Ascended Jesus
Luke 24:36-53

Brothers and sisters, when I was planning this sermon series and determining what scripture passages we should look at; to get a complete and fully biblical picture of who Jesus really is – it did not occur to me that the passage I selected for this Sunday October 29th seems to connect somewhat to the themes of specters and spirits and ghostly appearances that characterize the upcoming October 31st Halloween celebrations.

At this time of year stories about strange and unusual events where the line between this life and the afterlife becomes blurred - are very popular, and people are a bit more open to belief in the supernatural.

So if you think about it – a story about finding an empty grave... sightings of someone whom you know had died and was buried, meeting a mysterious stranger on the road who suddenly disappears – and then reappears in the middle of a group of people 11km away from where you last saw him...

Well... those are the kinds of stories that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up a little bit when you hear about them – because at this time of year supernatural things seem more plausible...

And if hearing such stories gives us shivers, experiencing them first hand would be downright scary. The disciples were certainly unnerved and afraid when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst - they thought they were seeing a ghost.

Now I wonder friends – what would we do if we encountered a ghost?

And since it is close to Halloween, we're less likely to say "*well I don't believe ghosts exist!*" and we're more inclined to consider how we would actually respond if we had an encounter with some sort of apparition, or saw evidence of an unseen presence at work... or if someone whom we had seen executed and we knew to be dead - suddenly appeared to us out of nowhere?

I'm thinking that most of us would be quite rightly "freaked out" and would want to get away from that experience as quickly as possible, and I'm it certainly unnerve and frighten us as well because not only is it out of the ordinary – it seems to be out of order.

An encounter such as this with the "supernatural" would rattle our confidence that the world around us is consistently "natural" – because we are confronted by physical evidence that the metaphysical part of reality that we typically can't see or touch or experience, actually exists...

And the metaphysical supernatural world doesn't play or work by the same rules of reality that we are used to – and when you think about it brothers and sisters, that is probably what frightens us the most about having a supernatural encounter. Not only do we know very little about how it works, or how we might be harmed or affected by it...

But it's extremely frightening to discover that everyday reality you depend on - isn't quite what you thought it to be, and that

spirits and ghosts and other supernatural beings could potentially disturb you and harm you in ways that you can't anticipate or protect yourself from - if you believe in that stuff...

You see my suspicion is also that after such an experience most of us would seek to convince ourselves that that what had happened could be explained rationally and naturalistically - a trick of the light, a hallucination, I'm hearing things, or perhaps it's smoke and mirrors, someone is playing tricks on me...

It reminds me a bit of how the cartoon show Scooby Do always turned out – maybe you're familiar with it as well.

Each episode would start off with something spooky and supernatural happening in an unexpected place, terrifying the people who lived there and driving away any visitors from the outside.

And somehow Scooby Do and the gang would end up getting involved and investigating the mystery – encountering the spooky monster or ghost or whatever was causing the trouble and getting chased around by it.

Inevitably in the course of their investigation they would learn about some ancient curse or legend or obscure prophecy that is linked to what is going on, and for a moment it appears as if this might be the real deal... something supernatural is actually happening.

But then one of the gang discovers some electrical wiring at the scene of the crime, or chemical residue that glows in the dark, and the obligatory trip to the local library usually turns up some family secret that pulls all the evidence together and reveals that this is an elaborate ruse.

And at the end of each episode the gang confronts the monster or ghost and basically “turns on the lights” while it does its thing, and then pulls the mask off of the person who was behind it all revealing that in fact it was a hoax.

And the guilty individual always ends up spilling the beans on why they were doing this and concludes their explanation by saying *“And I would have got away with it to, if it wasn’t for you meddling kids!”*

So the moral of the story is that there is always a rational explanation and natural cause for whatever supernatural phenomena we might hear about or experience – because that is how we believe the world works.

But what if something happened that we couldn’t simply rationalize or explain away by natural causes? What then? Well then the question becomes “What does this mean?” It reminds me of another TV show – a bit more recent than Scooby Do - that aired back in 2015 called “Resurrection.”

The story starts off with a young American boy being found in the middle of nowhere over in China. Once he is returned to the United States, his identity is established and his family is contacted – and the FBI agent in charge of the case discovers

that this boy has supposedly drowned thirty years ago. He supposed to be long dead...

But here he is, unchanged since that date and ready to go back to his family and they are shocked – but ready to have him back as well...

Further investigation reveals that this is not a hoax or a ruse, but that somehow this boy has been resurrected back to life some thirty years later.

So the plot line for this TV Show begins to develop along the question of what does this resurrection mean and what exactly is going on here... and what the main characters eventually discover is rather alarming!

Now I won't spoil it completely, but I will say that they also discover – like the Scooby Do gang - that what is happening is linked to an ancient prophecy as well - from the Book of Revelation in the Bible.

And to be honest friends, that's where I lost interest in the show because nothing ruins an interesting storyline for me like a bringing in bad interpretation of the bible.

Now, speaking of bible interpretation – you may be wondering why I've spent so much time talking about how we might respond to supernatural encounters and TV shows – as opposed to unpacking this scripture passage.

Because brothers and sisters, when we read about such events in the scriptures – they have become so familiar to us that that hearing about Jesus suddenly appearing among the disciples doesn't have the kind of impact on us as it would if we considered that same event in a non-scriptural context.

You see friends what is described here in the last chapter of Luke's gospel ought to shake us up and frighten us a bit because this is no ghost story that sounds a bit more plausible around Halloween, rather this is a *"carefully investigated, orderly account"* that has been put together from those who were eyewitnesses to these events (Luke 1:1-3), which

challenges what we think we know about how reality really works.

In reality that we know and live in - when someone is beaten and whipped as much as Jesus was, when someone is nailed up on a cross, exposed to the elements, losing blood and becoming weakened to the point where the exhaustion and pain no longer allow you to breath and you pass into unconsciousness and die of suffocation.. like Jesus did.

When someone is stabbed in side, up into the lung and heart to ensure that they are dead, before they are taken down from the cross... When someone is wrapped in grave clothes, where the blood on the body would have soaked into the first layer of cloth and then dried – adhering the clothes to the body like glue...

When someone is laid in a tomb and the entrance to the tomb is sealed by a large stone slab and guarded by soldiers... in the reality that we know and live in... that someone stays dead in that tomb.

But we have just read that

. Jesus was not in the tomb, He suddenly appears among his disciples while they are inside a closed room!

This is not how things are supposed to work – so we can totally understand why in this situation the disciples can only conclude they are seeing a ghost – that’s the only “reasonable” explanation they can think of in this situation

But Jesus is not a ghost, he’s not a hallucination, the disciples aren’t seeing things.

Instead Jesus speaks to them and says *“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”* (vs. 38-39)

And for further proof he asks them for some food and he eats it in front of them.

This is amazing of course – that Jesus has come back to them and they are just incredulous, they can hardly believe it – but it all checks out, somehow, beyond all natural occurrences, Jesus has come out of the tomb and is alive...

Now – think carefully about this for a moment, apart from the emotional consideration that the disciples have received back someone whom they are very close to and have followed and trusted and believed in – why would the disciples be frightened and amazed?

After all didn't their reality include the possibility of people coming back to life after they were dead? After all these were bible times – and just like how supernatural things are more plausible around Halloween, wasn't being raised from the dead more plausible in bible times?

Didn't Jesus raise the widow's son back to life in the town of Nain (Luke 7:11) and didn't Jesus raise Jairus' daughter back to life? (Mark 5:41) and who can forget the dramatic scene where Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb! (John 11:43)

But something was different here – we get an indication of this in Luke's description that all of a sudden Jesus had just appeared among them.

You see friends, in all of the other instances in the scriptures where people had been raised back to life, they were still normal human beings who lived and operated like any other human being and would eventually die again – they were still mortal.

And when you look at these instances of people coming back to life in the gospels you will find the term "raised from the dead" being used - but that phrase is absent here in this account in Luke when Jesus appears...

Instead when this event is referred to later on by the disciples and Paul and the other writers of the New Testament they call it the "Resurrection." Now you might say "well isn't that the same thing?"

No – it's not. In the Greek it is "anastasis" which is literally the re-being... this is not the same as simply being raised "egiro" back to the same old life.

Now I know that vs. 36 in our passage does contain the phrase "rising from the dead" but it's not that word "egiro" that is used when Jesus brings people back to life. Instead it's the the root word "anistemi" from which "anastasis" is derived which is used.

So what has occurred here with Jesus is different – anastasis, resurrection is coming into a new life which is qualitatively different than the old, so much so that his humanity – his flesh and bones - in this new life does not seem to experience some of the limits of the old life.

Jesus is able to come and go without having to physically move through time and space as he used to, but most importantly – as Jesus himself says concerning what it means to experience "resurrection" in Luke 10:35-36 is that *"in the resurrection from the dead, [they] will neither marry nor be*

given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."

Do you see the difference between Lazarus coming back to life and Jesus being resurrected?

Do you see how this encounter with the resurrected Jesus states that reality we think we know has now changed – In Jesus, human nature has experienced an 'anastasis' and has become immortal and this changes the reality of this world.

And now the question becomes - what does it mean? Since we can't rationalize it or explain it away through naturalistic causes... what does the resurrection of Jesus mean?

Well first off – in addition to all that we have come to know about who Jesus truly is; born and raised under the Law of Moses, a Revelation to the Gentiles, the Son of God – which means He is the true Israel, the King of Israel, and the 2nd

Adam... in addition to all this – or perhaps we should say encompassing all this – is this reality of His resurrection.

All of who Jesus is – all that we have come to know Him to be through the scriptures – is now resurrected. He is the resurrected Jesus!

So we can't say that we really know who Jesus is unless we know Him as the resurrected Jesus.

Secondly Jesus' resurrection means that for the very first time in the history of humanity since Adam and Eve experienced the Covenant consequences of their rebellion – human nature has entered into a new life that is no longer under the penalty of death and decay and the curse of Sin.

It means that we need to stop thinking that resurrection simply means coming back alive from being dead – but realize that resurrection means that human nature is free from death and decay and the curse of Sin.

So – this also means that Jesus is still alive. Two thousand years later, Jesus has not died, he has not aged, He is still very much alive – and not because he's in our thoughts and hearts – but because He is resurrected!

This is why we are to put our faith and trust in Jesus – because He is resurrected, He is the prototype of what can happen to us.

Brothers and sisters the good news is that we can become, as Jesus said "*children of the resurrection*" We too can be set free from the consequences of sin, the curse of death and decay and sickness - and receive a qualitatively different life – eternal life.

A life that does not end... a life that will not end because it is not affected by sickness, decay or death...

And I'm not making this up – this is what Jesus says that the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms all speak about...

this is the message of the scriptures, this has been God's plan all along.

And so the very best answer to what Jesus' resurrection means - is what Jesus himself says; *"repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations..."*

In other words brothers and sisters - Jesus resurrection means that God considered the blood which Jesus shed to pay for ALL human covenant violations and unfaithfulness – our sin – to be sufficient.

Resurrection is proof that the blood price for breaking Covenant with God is fully paid – not because life came back from being dead – but because resurrection is being freed from the grip of death, the consequence of sin – there is no more grounds for the consequence to have a hold on anyone once the debt has been paid.

So brothers and sisters – when I say we need to put our trust and faith in the Resurrected Jesus – what I mean is that we ask for what has been accomplished in Him, to be applied to us.

We ask for our sins – our covenant unfaithfulness - to be forgiven by Jesus because we accept and believe that God sent Jesus to be our substitute.

We turn away from whatever else we may be trusting in to overcome the consequence of sin in our lives – and we turn to Jesus instead.

The Resurrected Jesus is proof that God will consider our Covenant debt paid in full and thus the consequence of sin will have no grounds in our life – and we can become children of the resurrection – those who receive a life no longer bound by death.

So it's no wonder that once the disciples' minds were opened to understand –and believe this – Luke's gospel finishes with

the disciples worshiping Jesus and going back to the Temple to praise God at the Temple.

Jesus' Resurrection means that we worship Him and praise Him and honor Him for what He has given us in His Resurrection.

So friends – it is my prayer that the Lord Jesus, would have also open our minds over this past two months, so that we are able to understand these scriptures which speak of Him – and that He will have appeared to us as well through them.

And that we will trust in Him, believe in Him, and obey Him – because we truly know who Jesus really is.

Amen.