

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see.”
~ Luke 24:36-49

Pastor Tom
April 17, 2022

Thank you for joining us today in person or online. It’s great to have you with us. Thank you to those who have prayed for Lori and myself. We both got Covid and recovered together at home. Yet we sensed your prayers and would ask for continued prayer as we hopefully leave the full effects of the virus behind. We know many of you also have had the virus or currently have it. So you are in our prayers.

Yet we still get to gather in some way this Easter Sunday, for which we are thankful. Some of you here or watching on line may be here out of politeness or consideration for your Christian family member or friend. You would not call yourself a Christian. But you’re willing to join us. Thank you for giving us some of your time today. I am sure your presence or agreement to come has encouraged your family of friends. So thanks for being willing to do that.

Today is obviously Easter Sunday when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ. There are a lot of people in the world who aren’t Christians. Everyone has their reasons. Three reasons why people might not believe in Christ or the resurrection. Some have very specific reasons like they don’t believe the Christian claim that Jesus physically rose from the dead. In fact, some churchgoers and churches don’t believe in a physical resurrection of Jesus. They have adopted a symbolic or inspirational view of the resurrection. They say that Jesus was not physically resurrected but His spirit was resurrected. They say that we too can experience a spiritual resurrection by some sort of trust in God. They might say it doesn’t matter whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead. It is the idea of resurrection that inspires.

I would disagree with this approach. It may seem to “solve” the problem of a supernatural resurrection. But it creates other problems. It makes the eyewitnesses to the resurrection liars. It moves the whole resurrection account into the mythology realm. We also have a passage in the New Testament called 1 Corinthians 15. There, a guy named Paul argues that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, Christianity is a sham. We are to be most pitied and it’s time to close the church and get onto something else.

So where might this idea of a spiritual resurrection of Jesus instead of a physical resurrection come from? Well it might come from a naturalistic or materialistic worldview. A worldview is the lens through which we view the world. So this lens will affect the way we interpret or evaluate that which is before us. This worldview believes that nothing happens outside of nature's laws. So there are no miracles; no miraculous intervention, no God figure over it all, no life after death because that goes outside of nature's laws. The only reality is nature itself and that which can be observed or tested in a laboratory. If anyone claims a miracle, it can be disproved or explained by nature if someone will take the time to investigate it. People who hold a naturalistic world view find other problems with Christianity beyond the resurrection. Three reasons why people don't believe. So these folks would have **intellectual reasons** for not believing in Christ and His truth claims. That may be the position that some of you hold. Or if you're a Christian, you will see this view in friends, family members, coworkers or classmates.

Then there's another group of people who have **emotional reasons** for not believing in Christ. Maybe they had a bad experience at a church or with a Christian. Maybe they have a friend who claims to be a Christian but doesn't live at all like one. Maybe they look at bad decisions or actions by the church in history. They conclude "if the church of Christ can do that, I want nothing to do with the church or Christ."

As Christians, we have to acknowledge the church has a much checkered history. Think about how many southern US churches in the 1950's and 60's still practiced segregation. They had white's only churches. Or much closer to home, think about church residential schools and the abuses. That happened in the name of Christ. So, people will respond emotionally to such information. Or maybe people have a bad experience and conclude that God abandoned them. So they want nothing to do with a church or Christians after their experience. So some have intellectual reasons that lead them to not believe. Some have emotional reasons.

Then there are **social reasons**. It costs a lot to become a serious Christian and begin a life of following Christ closely. So a person may hesitate because of the social impact Christianity may have on their lives. They might ask questions like "Will I lose all my friends? What will my family say or do? My spouse? My parents? My extended family? What will I do on the weekends? Who will I hang out

with? Will I have to give up all fun?" These questions become even more intense in cultures where leaving the dominant faith results in a complete severance of ties from family and social circles. That's a high cost to pay to come to Christ. As a Christian, I agree that costs much to follow Christ. Yet I would argue that it ultimately costs much more not to.

So people may have intellectual, emotional and social reasons not to believe in Christ or His claims. Some have a combination of reasons that fall into each category. If any of this describes you, I am not going to dismiss or trivialize your objections. You may have thought a fair bit about them. You've had some real tough experiences. You've got some serious questions.

I respect that. But for those who are searching spiritually I would invite you to try something. I'd ask you to recognize that the church is filled with flawed people. It is difficult to separate the core of Christianity from churches and Christians. Yet we need to at least recognize that people who claim to be Christians often don't live like it. We often do things or believe things that go against Christ. Christianity begins and depends on Jesus Christ. He is the core. When a church or a Christian aims to rightly align themselves to Christ Himself, it greatly increases the probability of authentic Christianity.

So if you are spiritually searching and wondering about the Christian faith, I would invite you to get to know Christ Himself. You can do that by reading the writings called Gospels in the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each one will introduce you to Jesus. You will get to know His story and teaching His character and His love. If you don't have a Bible and you're here with us today, feel free to take that one home that is in front of you. You can borrow that or keep that. Looking at Jesus' life and teaching can often have a transforming effect on us.

We're going to look at Jesus in the few moments we have left together today. It is a short passage in the Bible that talks about Jesus' resurrection. It follows other episodes.

From the Christian point of view, these appearances are pretty important. If Jesus was raised from the dead and directly went to heaven, we wouldn't have any eyewitness testimony to consider. Everyone could write their own conclusions about how the tomb got empty. But Jesus encounters people and shows them He is alive. My argument is that Jesus continues to reveal Himself to us in different ways

today. **Jesus encounters people to show He is alive.** So let's see that happen in this account and then I will share a little of my own story about how Jesus has done this in my life. It's Luke 24: 36-49 – Page 748.

Luke 24:36-49 (ESV)

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw 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 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything 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 said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

This passage comes from the Gospel of Luke. He was an educated man who knew how to read and write. He was also a doctor. He writes this Gospel for a person of higher social standing. We see this at the beginning of the Gospel. Luke writes, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

So Luke notes that there are different accounts of the life of Christ. He references eyewitnesses who delivered their testimony to him. He has followed all things closely for some time. So he decided to write an orderly account for this “most excellent Theophilus.” That’s a Greek name so this is a non-Jew who has come to believe in Christ. Luke also states his purpose – “So that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” So Luke claims this is not some thrown together story that

he wrote for people's entertainment. It's a carefully ordered account to provide greater certainty and assurance to this Theophilus person about the reality of Jesus' life and impact.

If Luke is a responsible doctor, he would not report lies. He would not talk about something as extraordinary as a resurrection without careful investigation. So he provides many examples of the resurrection appearances of Christ throughout chapter 24. Our passage follows the account of these 2 people walking to a village outside of Jerusalem called Emmaus. It is the Sunday afternoon of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus joins them and explains how the Christ's death had to happen according the Hebrew Bible. They don't recognize him. But then they sit down to eat. Jesus breaks apart some bread and opens their eyes. They suddenly recognize him. Then He suddenly disappears.

So they decide to go back into Jerusalem to tell the 11 remaining disciples and other followers of Christ about their encounter. So in Luke 24:33-34 we read, "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who stayed with them gathered together saying, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

So they are all gathered around talking about this when suddenly Jesus Himself stands among them. He says to them, "Peace to you," which was a standard greeting of the day. But in verse 37 we're told that they don't rejoice and start celebrating. Instead, His sudden appearance startles and frightens them. They think they have seen a spirit," which was a disembodied presence of some sort. This reaction seems strange since someone just said "the Lord has risen indeed." But talking about a resuscitated person and seeing them are quite different, especially when the risen person suddenly arrives with no warning.

Then I kind of smile at Jesus' response. He asks, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Well, if I was there, I would have several responses to those questions. Why am I troubled? "I have never met a resurrected person before in my life, ever. So I have no clue how to relate to you. You just suddenly appeared without any notice or knock on the door. I know you were

completely dead on Friday with a broken body and a spear into your side. So I might need a moment to get over my fear and doubt.”

Yet Jesus immediately shows compassion for their struggles. Verse 39 – “See my hands and feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones that you see I have.” Jesus points to the physical reality of his body. He invites them to look at his hands and feet to see that it is him. Now this could mean that he expected them to recognize his hands and feet from their familiarity with him. Besides the head, these were the only uncovered parts of their bodies that others could see. But it’s likely he refers to his hands and feet because they would contain the unmistakable mark of wounds. The nails that attached Jesus’ body to the cross pierced his hands and feet in the crucifixion.

But not only does Jesus say “see my hands and feet.” He invites them to touch him. They could feel his physical body with their hands. Then he adds another point to emphasize his physicality. “For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

Notice how this does not align at all with the “spiritual resurrection only” interpretation we referred to earlier? If Jesus was only resurrected spiritually, we would expect him to give an inspiring message like he does in verses 44-49. But there would be no need to point so directly and intentionally to his physical body.

The scene continues in verse 40. He shows them his hands and feet. Yet they still hesitate. Notice that strange verse 41. “And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling. So they disbelieved for joy and marveled. That is a strange statement. Yet it makes more sense if we use an expression more common to us – “It’s too good to be true.” If you’ve ever thought that or said that in a situation, you might do it while smiling. You look at the advertisement proposed or listen to the pitch by the salesperson. You conclude “it’s too good to be true.” You smile because you’d like it to be true but you also laugh a little because you know it can’t be true. That’s maybe what was going on in this moment.

Jesus recognizes this and immediately addresses their continuing doubt by asking for some food. They give him a piece of broiled fish. He eats it before them. This ultimately convinces them that He is

real in a resurrected body before them. So Jesus proves the physical nature of his resurrected body by eating and allowing people to touch him. Disembodied spirits cannot eat or be touched by others. Jesus appears to people to show that He is alive.

Then in verses 44-49, Jesus teaches and gives them their commission. He explains how the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament had a lot to say about Him. The crucifixion, death and resurrection fulfilled the scriptures. Then in verse 45 as he opened the eyes of the 2 walking on the road to Emmaus, here he opens the minds of those assembled to see Him in these Scriptures. Then in verses 46-47 he commissions them with the message they must spread. "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." He reminds them that they are eyewitnesses. Then he commands them to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the outpouring of the Spirit to carry out this mission. Then the Gospel will close with Jesus' ascension to heaven. So Jesus encountered people after the resurrection to show He was alive. Jesus' appearance convinced His followers that He was physically resurrected. They gave their eyewitness account to others including Luke who wrote it down in this Gospel which has been passed on to us over 2000 years to this day. This is the Christian claim. Jesus physically rose from the dead.

Now wouldn't it be great if Jesus did this for all of us? Wouldn't that give our faith a jolt if Jesus suddenly stood among us this morning and invited us to touch his hands and feet? Yet this hasn't happened to us. So what is going on? God has revealed Himself in multiple ways for us to discover Him apart from Jesus' physically appearing to us. In His wisdom God has determined these other ways provide sufficient revelation for us. These other ways include: creation, speaking to us in prayer, or through others and speaking to us through His Word.

That's what happened in my story. I grew up in a Christian home. I would say that I was initially a Christian for social and emotional reasons. The Christian community was my primary social group. I experienced a lot of great things in that community. So I was emotionally connected I both at the family

and church family level. But I didn't really worry much about the intellectual side. I didn't think it that important.

Then I had some people in my life who raise some serious questions about Christianity that I could not answer. I got scared. I would not even entertain their questions for fear that the Bible could not stand up to scrutiny. So I would just get angry when we talked and hide in my social and emotional reasons for remaining a Christian.

But then I entered the ministry. Forgive me for those of you who have heard this before. I started as a pastor at the age of 26. I had never read the Bible through completely. I was actually scared to for many years. I thought I would certainly find fatal contradictions, errors and enough evidence to prove that all I believed was false. But I instead discovered the brilliance and complexity of God's saving work throughout history. I was convinced it was God's work because it did it in the exact opposite way we would. I couldn't believe how He wove all these threads together into a beautiful tapestry in Jesus' life. Then I learned how Jesus' life and words fulfilled all this expectation from the Old Testament. Then I saw how Jesus' disciples were ordinary people who God used to spread this news about Christ. It became a worldwide movement. I wasn't just impressed by God's brilliance. I encountered God and the Lord Jesus as they spoke to me through these pages.

So I did not have an encounter where Jesus appeared to me physically and let me touch his hands and side. But I encountered Him as He spoke to me again and again through His Word. I believe He continues to open my mind to understand the Scriptures.

Yes, this does still require faith. This kind of faith is not the blind faith that just chooses to believe something even though we know it's not true – like the tooth fairy. This kind of faith depends on solid evidence like an empty tomb. Yet, we don't get everything explained or have all the evidence we think we need. That's because we do need to live by faith to have a relationship with God who is so unlike in many ways. In His great wisdom He has revealed enough of Himself so that our faith is on solid ground.

The certain account of Jesus coming, living, execution and resurrection is because of God's love. He sent His own Son to die to pay for our guilt. So when a person trusts Christ instead of themselves to

justify their lives, God immediately forgives and adopts into His family. God has come through again and again in my life. Ultimately He's my hope, faith and love. I would love to see you experience this yourself if you haven't already. God is the greatest need in my life and the greatest treasure I will ever have.

But don't take my word for it. Take His Word for it. He's preserved it for us in what we now call the Bible. There's some tough stuff in there to understand and interpret. But so much is clear and life giving. You can read it free online or you can take one of these Bibles. Listen to it. Start maybe in Mark.

If you already know Christ, I pray that today strengthens your faith. I pray you will know the certainty of the things you've been taught over the years. Then let us as a church together continue the mission He gave us. "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations." Let us continue in this mission until we do see Him face to face when we get to see and touch His hands and feet.