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Easter Sunday – Day of Appearances

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Introduction

This is the earliest day for Easter Sunday that any of us will see for the rest of our lives. Easter will not fall on March 23 until the year 2228, which is 220 years from now. It was on March 23 in 1913. In the year 2285 it will be one day earlier on March 22, but you will have to wait 277 years to experience that one. Easter Sunday indeed was a day of appearances for our resurrected Lord. This lesson will not only examine those three appearances, but also the five additional appearances that occurred after Easter Sunday. We know from the testimony of Scripture that we do not have a record of all the appearances Jesus made during the forty days after His crucifixion and before His ascension. We will examine the ones that we know about to learn the lessons of Jesus' ministry after His resurrection.

Jesus' First Appearance: Resurrection Sunday Morning

Eight days earlier the crowds cheered, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest," Matt 21:9. But the cheers ultimately became jeers as the crowds screamed, "Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified!" Matt 27:22-23. Finally, there was silence from sundown on Friday to the morning of the eighth day. Why did Jesus not rise on the Sabbath? We know that this was God's day of rest and inactivity, and that is partly the reason. But there is the matter of the eighth day. It is a symbol filled with messianic promise. The eighth day, the next day after the Sabbath, was considered the day of new beginning. The priests were consecrated seven days and began their service on the eighth day, Lev 9:1. The eighth day was a day of purifications for lepers, and others, Lev 14:10:23; 15:14, 29. The tabernacle tent rested on a frame of eight boards, Exod 36:20, 30. The entry to the millennial temple in Ezekiel's vision had entry porches eight cubits square with eight steps, Ezek 40:9, 31. The courtyard had eight tables for the slaughter of sacrificial animals. In Jewish symbolism 888 is considered the number of the Messiah, see A. Deissman, *Light From the Ancient East*, Baker, p. 278, footnote 3, and G. B. Carid, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper and Row, p. 176. In fact there are at least twenty significant symbolic uses of the number eight in Scripture that all have messianic meaning. The eighth day, the Lord's Day, Resurrection Day, was the crowning day of Jesus' victorious messianic ministry!

We have several accounts of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, who came early that first Easter Sunday to bring spices and ointments for further anointment of the body of Jesus, see Matt 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-

12; John 20:1-10. Mark gives us the identity of the other Mary as the mother of James and Salome, see Mark 16:1. Luke reveals that along with the two Mary's from Galilee, mentioned in Luke 23:55, there were "certain other women with them," Luke 24:1, who came to the tomb who also brought spices. When the women arrived at the tomb, they were startled to find two "men," obviously angelic beings, in "shining garments." These "men" asked the question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen!" Luke 24:4. They also were told that Jesus had told them about this coming event when He was with them in Galilee, when He said, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." When these men spoke, the women immediately remembered what Jesus had previously told them, Luke 24:8.

In route to tell Jesus, Matthew reports that Jesus appeared to them and said, "Rejoice!" They immediately fell at His feet and worshipped Him. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me," Matt 28:9-10. Luke further adds that these two women, accompanied by a third named Joanna, and the others with them went to the disciples and told them what they had seen and heard, Luke 24:8. Doubtless they ran and breathlessly told the disciples what they had seen at the tomb and how Jesus appeared to them in the way as they came to notify the disciples. Understandably the disciples were incredulous at such a fantastic report, but Peter and John decided to investigate and discovered the linen clothes "lying," Luke 24:12; John 20:6-8.

This is essentially the same report found in John 20:3-8. John used the same word, "lying," in 20:6, and adds that the facial covering, the "napkin," was not with the grave wrappings but folded and placed to one side, John 20:7-8. John wrote that when he, Peter, saw these grave wrappings and the linen napkins, "he believed." What was it about his seeing the linen bands used to wrap the body "lying" that caused Peter to believe? None other than the eminent Greek scholar, R.C.H. Lenski explains that the Greek text is very specific. Jesus had been prepared for burial according to Jewish custom using linen wrappings held in place by myrrh and aloes, both resins, that were also mixed with spices, John 19:39-40. Peter saw the linen bands used to wrap the body "lying" literally undisturbed in the shape of the body they once held. The facial "napkin" was neatly folded and placed by itself to allow those who entered to see that the body had evaporated from the wrappings without their being disturbed. As Lenski says,

No human being wrapped round and round with bands like this could possibly slip out of them without greatly disturbing them. They would have to be unwound, or cut through, or cut and stripped off. They would thus, if removed, lie strewn around in disorder or heaped in a pile, or folded in some way . . . But here the linen bands were. Both their presence and their undisturbed condition spoke volumes. Here indeed, was a sign to behold. It

corroborated what the women had told Peter and John on the way to the tomb: Jesus was risen from the dead! (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943, p. 1342).

I would only add to this wonderful observation from Lenski that this was one of the miracles of the resurrection carefully preserved in the Greek text to clearly and accurately underscore the miracle of the empty tomb. Jesus rescued His earthly body from the tomb without as much as moving any part of the wrapping. But He paused and removed the facial covering to let the world see that there was nothing inside the wrappings. Yes Christ is risen indeed!

Jesus' Second Appearance: Resurrection Sunday Afternoon and Early Evening

Mark's gospel presents a brief non-descript account of this second resurrection day appearance of Jesus. Mark reports in 16:12-13 that Jesus appeared to two who walked into the country. They told others about the appearance but no one believed them. Luke presents this appearance in an extensive and detailed account in Luke 24:13-35. Two of Jesus' disciples, who are not named, were walking toward the nearby village of Emmaus. They were discussing the amazing events that had happened in Jerusalem when Jesus joined them. Luke says that their eyes were restrained and they did not recognize Him, Luke 24:16. Jesus began talking with them about the events they were discussing and they gave him their account of the wondrous events reported by the women who went to the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified and buried. They said that they all went to the tomb and found it as the women had reported, but Jesus was nowhere to be found, Luke 24:17-24.

Jesus responded, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" Then Jesus explained all things concerning Himself as written by Moses and all the prophets. But, they still did not know it was Jesus. By this time they had reached the village and implored Jesus to come home with them. When they sat down to eat, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and broke it and immediately their eyes were opened and they knew it was He. But Jesus vanished! As they reflected on the event they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" They immediately returned to Jerusalem to report that the Lord had appeared to them.

Three great lessons are presented in this wonderful resurrection day of appearances. The first lesson is this. If they had known the Scriptures, they would not have been so perplexed by the events of the day. The answers to all their questions could be found in the Word of God. It is the lamp and light to help us see and understand the ways of God, Ps 119:105. This is a wonderful affirmation that the entire Bible is Christ centered. After a stinging rebuke for their lack of

Bible knowledge, 24:25, Jesus explained all the things in the Word that were about Him. The answers to all of life's baffling problems may be found on the pages of His Holy Word! Jesus left the Holy Spirit who will guide us in the study of the Word and lead us to all truth, John 14:26; 16:13-16. That they did not recognize Jesus revealed they lacked knowledge of the Word. Had they known the Word, they would have recognized Him.

The second lesson in this appearance is a more positive one. They opened their home to Jesus and implored Him to come with them, Luke 24:28-29. Jesus did not invite Himself; they entreated Him. If they had said their goodbyes, nice fellow, interesting conversation, they would never have known who He was. As John says in Revelation 3:20, Jesus may knock, but we must open the door. Paul's prayer to the Ephesians includes the desire that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all believers what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes all knowledge," Eph 5:17-19.

The third lesson from this encounter with the resurrected Christ is that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him in the breaking of bread, Luke 24:30-35. Until they sat down to eat and let Jesus give thanks and break the bread, He was veiled before them. The breaking of bread is a reminder of the Lord's Supper, of fellowship, and of oneness with God in Christ, John 6:31-35, 48, 51-56. It is very revealing that these men had physical sight. Jesus had opened the eyes of the blind, but these sighted disciples did not really see who He was. It is a tragedy that many have physical sight but fail to see God, His Son, and the things of God that may be close at hand, even right before their eyes. When they finally recognized Him, He vanished having accomplished His mission. Upon reflection they recalled how their hearts burned within them when He opened the Word of God and shared it with them. Paul presents an extensive lesson on this truth in Romans 10:1-21, especially in verse 17: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." See also Ephesians 1:15-19 in which Paul expresses how the Word of God brings wisdom and knowledge of Him, and our spiritual eyes are then enlightened.

Jesus' Third Appearance: Resurrection Sunday Evening

Luke reports that the two men from Emmaus returned to Jerusalem at that very moment and shared with the disciples what had happened to them and how "He was known to them in the breaking of bread," Luke 24:33-35. As they were sharing their story, Jesus suddenly appeared to them, and they were very afraid believing that they had seen a spirit. They were very cautious even though He showed them His scars and offered to let them touch Him, Luke 24:38-40. Then He took some food and ate it to prove He was not an apparition. Then He gave them the same lesson He gave to the two at Emmaus. He explained all things in the Law of Moses

and the Prophets and the Psalms, which are the lead books in the Jewish three divisions of the whole Old Testament, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Jesus said the same thing to all the disciples gathered that Resurrection Sunday evening, that He had told the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me," Luke 24:44. Then Jesus gave them the wisdom to understand all those things in the Scriptures, and He told the disciples, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high," Luke 24:46-49.

Luke leaves to his sequel, the Book of Acts, the account of the further activities and appearances of Jesus that continued for forty days until Jesus ascended into heaven, see Acts 1:1-11. During these days Luke says Jesus presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days during which time He spoke to them about things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

This is a simple lesson. We have a mandate as believers to search the Scriptures, to know the Word, and to be ready to give an answer for the hope we have in Jesus, see 1 Pet 3:15. The Word of God will sanctify us and purify us, Eph 5:26, as it teaches us to seek the Lord. But we must guard against worship of the Scriptures themselves. Jesus answered the Jewish leaders who sought to put Him to death because He claimed to be the Son of God, John 5:16-19ff. One of the things He said to them was, "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life," John 5:39-40. The Bible is a wonderful and priceless treasure, but its sole purpose is to lead us to the feet of Jesus, for only He can provide our salvation. As Jesus told the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and later that same evening all of them as they gathered to rehearse the amazing events of the day, all Scripture is only a teacher to bring us to Jesus that we might be justified by faith, Gal 3:24.

Jesus' Fourth Appearance: Eight Days Later

We have examined the only three recorded appearances on resurrection Sunday. But we have noted that there were many other appearances and "infallible proofs" that Jesus gave us during the 40 days before His ascension. John's Gospel alone reports that at the meeting of the disciples on that first resurrection Sunday, one of the disciples, Thomas, was absent, John 20:24. When Thomas later listened to

the testimony of the disciples, he was incredulous. He said, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." So it was that eight days later on the first Sunday after the resurrection, the disciples again gathered, this time behind locked doors. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus again appeared to them and greeted them, "Peace to you!" He immediately turned to Thomas and said, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing," John 20:27.

Thomas needed nothing more than to see and hear Jesus. He responded, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus gave a wonderful blessing that all believers since that time have been able to claim. He said, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet they have believed," John 20:28-29. This is a blessed lesson. John states that there were many other signs performed in the presence of His disciples that were not written, but the ones that are written are given "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you might have life in His name," John 20:30-31.

Jesus Fifth Appearance: The Disciples in Galilee

Sometime after Jesus' appearance on the eighth day the disciples returned to Galilee as Jesus had told the women at His first appearance. They were at the Sea of Tiberius, also called the Sea of Galilee and Sea of Chinnereth. No doubt they were adjusting to the absence of Jesus and wondering what they could do. Peter said, "I am going fishing." So, all the disciples joined him. They fished all night and caught nothing. When morning came a man appeared on shore and called out to them, "Children, have you any food?" and they replied, "No." So the man said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they did so and the net was so full of fish they could not haul them aboard the boat. So John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" They brought fish to Jesus, and He prepared a breakfast for them. This was the third time He appeared to all the disciples, John 21:1-14.

Jesus came to ask some penetrating questions to Peter and all the disciples. These questions are still appropriate today. Three times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" There is something significant taking place in this interchange that is lost in translation. The first two times Jesus asked the question of Peter, He used the Greek word "*agape*," pronounced a-gah-pay. The word means unconditional and unrestrained love and devotion. Peter's answer to the question was, "Lord you know I love you." But Peter used a different word for love, *phileo*, a word that means respect, honor, and brotherly love. So, Jesus repeated the question, "Do you *agape*' me?" Again, Peter answered, "Lord, I *phileo* you." The third time Jesus used Peter's word and asked, "Do you *phileo* me?" Peter was grieved that Jesus asked

but gave the same answer, "Yes, I *phileo* you." Jesus commissioned Peter to feed and care for the sheep, meaning believers, John 21:15-19. Jesus then gave a brief prophetic word to Peter about his death. Peter was crucified as a martyr and tradition states that he said it was an honor to die in the same way Jesus had died. So his opponents crucified him upside down instead.

Peter never seemed to grasp the point Jesus made that day. Jesus is not interested in our admiration, respect, honor, or brotherly love (*phileo*), unless He has our undivided and unconditional commitment (*agape'*). Yet, how loving and accommodating that in His third question Jesus adopted Peter's word, "*phileo*," and Peter replied as before. God loves us with unconditional *agape'* love. This is the word used in John 3:16, "For God so loved (*agape'*) the world. . . ." He only seeks our love as commitment in return. He wants us to direct it to Him through believing on His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose victorious from the grave!

Jesus' Sixth Record of Appearances: Many Over Forty Days

Many other appearances took place over the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension. We have few details about these appearances other than the fact that additional appearances took place. The first statement about these appearances is found in Acts 1:2-3. Here Luke, who wrote his Gospel and the Book of Acts, refers to his former work in 1:1. He refers to his Gospel as a record of all that Jesus "began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up." He gave His final instructions and commandments to the disciples, Acts 1:1-2. He presented to them "many infallible proofs" and was seen by the disciples over the forty days before His ascension. He was teaching them the things of the Kingdom of God, 1:3. Just what those "proofs" were, we are not told. There were other unmistakable proofs from eyewitnesses who saw Jesus.

Paul adds additional information in his letter to the Corinthian believers. He affirms that Peter and the other disciples did see Jesus. He reported that there were five hundred, obviously at some gathering, who saw Jesus at the same time. These were people most of whom were still alive at the time of Paul's writing. He states that He was seen by James and last of all by Paul himself, 1 Cor 15:3-8. Paul's own experience is recorded by Luke in Acts 9:1-6; 18:9, 10; 22:1-8; 23:11; 26:12-18.

Jesus' Seventh Record of Appearances: Bethany, the Ascension

At the end of the forty days, Jesus came to Bethany, located on the Mount of Olives just over on its eastern slope facing the Dead Sea. Luke reports that Jesus led His disciples "as far as Bethany." Then He "lifted up His hand and blessed them." While He was blessing them, He was taken up into heaven so the disciples returned to Jerusalem praising and blessing God, Luke 24:50-53. Only Mark and

Luke report the ascension, Mark 16:19-20. In Acts, Luke gives additional details not included in his Gospel. Acts 1:4-8 presents the final teachings that Jesus left with His disciples. He talked with them about the coming of the Holy Spirit, 1:4-5. He answered questions about when the Kingdom would come, 1:6-7. He reminded them that the coming of the Holy Spirit would empower them to continue to do the work of the Gospel, 1:8.

Luke says that when Jesus had finished saying these things, they all watched until He was out of sight as He was taken up into heaven, 1:9. While they were looking, two men in white apparel appeared to them with a question: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven," 1:10-11.

Jesus' Eighth Record of Appearances: Paul on the Road to Damascus

We do not know exactly how much time had passed after the crucifixion. It was certainly long enough for believers to become at least loosely organized and seen by the Jewish leaders as a threat. Paul first appears as a witness to the martyrdom of Stephen, Acts 7:57-8:3. We actually know very little about his personal life. He was a Roman citizen — a privilege he used a number of times in his defence, appealing against convictions, Acts 16:37-38; 22:25. According to Christian tradition, he was from Galilee. He studied in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel, well-known in Paul's time, Acts 22:3. He described himself as a Pharisee, Phil 3:5. He supported himself during his travels and while preaching — a fact he alludes to a number of times, 1 Cor 9:13-15. According to Acts 18:3, he worked as a tentmaker. Paul was assigned the duty of opposing Christians and was an observer at the stoning of Stephen, Acts 9:1-8, and brought havoc upon the churches, Acts 8:1-4.

Not only did Paul have a dramatic conversion experience as reported in Acts 9:1-9, but his life radically changed, Acts 9:10-30. While on the road to Damascus to continue persecution of believers, he was struck down by a blinding light. Paul inquired, "Who are you Lord?" And the answer came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," 9:5. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul stated that Jesus appeared to him also "as one born out of due time," 1 Cor 15:8. Later when Paul was a prisoner he used his dramatic conversion as part of his defense, Acts 25:1-26:32. In writing to the Philippians, Paul rejoiced in the resurrection power that was the basis for his salvation, Phil 3:8-10.

Josephus: A Secular Eyewitness

Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote his work entitled *Antiquities of the Jews*, sometime near the end of the first century c. AD 94. In this work he has a most interesting statement on the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, ---a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, [AD 33, April 3] those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, [April 5] as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. See *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, iii, 3. William Whiston, *Josephus Complete Works*, Translated by William Sanford Lasor. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1964, p. 379.

Josephus' words are significant because it provides an assessment from a secular historian. Being Jewish, he could certainly have taken the literary license to qualify his statements about Jesus, but instead he corroborates the New Testament account of Jesus' resurrection, as well as His life and ministry.

Resurrection Lessons: Four Mandates

1. The resurrection of Jesus as God's miraculous provision is a mandate for obedience on our part. With an attitude of gratitude, we should give thanks and be obedient for all God has done for us, 1 Cor 15:58.
2. The resurrection is a mandate that we sorrow not as others who have no hope, 1 Thess 4:13. The resurrection also is a pattern that gives us hope about our loved ones and hope about our own resurrection from the dead, 1 Cor 15:17-19.
3. The resurrection is a mandate to seek first the things that are above where Jesus is on His throne, see Col 3:1-4. Don't seek earthly treasures because they are all perishable commodities, Matt 6:33; 5:19-21; 2 Pet 3:10-13.
4. The resurrection is a mandate for us to be more diligent in not yielding to sin in our lives since we are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus," Rom 6:11-13. To accomplish this we must rely upon Him for the power He made available through the power of the resurrection, Phil 3:8-10.