

“Forty Days with the Risen Lord”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 5/03/2020

Text: John 20:30-31 and 21:25 at FBC of Newport, NH

//30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.// —John 20:30-31 (NIV)

//25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.// —John 21:25 (NIV)

Preachers are often inclined to preach on a single verse, or more often on a single episode of the overall story, which is a very natural way to get the impact of what the Word is saying. But sometimes we need to step back a bit further and take in an even wider perspective. I think this is especially important when it comes to the resurrection appearances of Jesus. For a lot of people have no real idea how these events unfolded. Of course we don't know the exact outline because they're not given to us that way. But we have enough clues with what we have been given to paint a general picture of what it would have been like for those earliest disciples of Jesus to find themselves walking with their resurrected Lord over this forty day period. And I'd like us to look at that picture as a whole.

The very first day was the very first day of the new week—Sunday. Remember, the Sabbath day ended at sundown and the new week started when the first star could be seen that 'Saturday' evening. So, Easter (it wouldn't have been called 'Easter', but I'm going to call it that here) would have started without any notice. The disciples would have gone to sleep after a frustrating day of doing nothing but hiding from the authorities after Jesus' crucifixion and unfinished burial.

But this first day would be the day which all the Gospel writers would focus upon and give the most information about. The women start it off in the morning while it's still dark, aiming to finish burying Jesus properly in the tomb. I covered the subject of the empty tomb on Easter so I don't need to go into detail, but remind you how important this was as it's recorded in all four of the Gospels. No one sees Jesus directly yet, but they do get word from an angel about Jesus being risen. And the empty tomb backs up this message with its mouth hanging open for all the world to see.

With this the women run back to the main house to tell the other disciples what has happened. But they aren't believed. The scenario can be confusing at this point, but essentially, after telling the men about this, the women themselves did meet Jesus, starting with Mary Magdalene. She is a most unlikely person to be chosen as the very first witness of the resurrected Christ, but that was Jesus'

choice. Mary, the least likely, was the first witness. But she was not believed either.

On that same day, there were two other people who met the risen Jesus. They didn't realize it until the last minute, but they had been walking with him for quite a long time as they were traveling to Emmaus, just outside of Jerusalem. Somehow they didn't recognize him, though somehow their hearts burned within them as he spoke. While he played along as if he didn't know what was going on, he ended up giving them a Bible study on why the Messiah had to die and be resurrected. Then, when they settled down to eat, literally broke bread and gave thanks, their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus as Jesus—and then he disappeared before their newly opened eyes.

They rushed back to Jerusalem to that upper room, where most of them were staying, to report what they'd seen. The long ending of Mark indicates they were not immediately believed, but Luke skips that and goes right to the point of agreement. For evidently Peter himself had had a private encounter with the risen Jesus. Peter's word, along with everything else adding up, was enough to get everyone excited about what the two from Emmaus were reporting.

At this point, Jesus appears to them all right there in that room. The doors had been locked, but Jesus simply appeared in their midst. Luke says the most about this climactic, late-in-the-day meeting. Mark's original ending and Matthew's account say nothing about it.

But John speaks about it. Though he makes a point of connecting it to what happened a week later. You see, Thomas was not there. So just imagine what it must have been like when he comes back and pretty much everyone is now talking about having seen Jesus resurrected. He's still grieving! And possibly now, he's hurt and angry. He doesn't believe any of them. And this goes on for a whole week. So even though Jesus is raised from the dead, and even though he's proving himself raised by showing himself to many of his followers, most of the time Jesus is nowhere to be seen—for any of them. I think that's important to remember. Seeing him is important, oh, once a week or so, but believing he is risen is the very atmosphere you breathe day in and day out.

One week later, the next Sunday, everyone is in that same room again. But this time Thomas is there. Jesus appears. And Thomas is bowled over. He confesses Jesus as "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus pronounces a blessing, not on Thomas, but on those who believe even though they haven't seen with their eyes. We talked about the importance of that earlier. If Jesus intended to just travel the world and show himself to everyone directly (even to people who knew nothing about him in the first place), he might as well make this his Second Coming and bring Judgment before he brings the Gospel of grace. It is vital that *some* people see the risen Jesus, but *most* people are going to have to believe without seeing. This is how the Gospel is best extended to the world, without leaving much of the world looking like the 'dead' men guarding Jesus' tomb.

All the while Jesus is making these appearances, he and his messengers are also pointing to more appearances to take place in Galilee. This is a three to five day walk and Galilee will be a much more compatible place for believers in the crucified (and now risen) Messiah. According to John, Galilee would be the place of the “third appearance” of Jesus. (John 21:14) By that I doubt he meant to count up each personal appearance: to Mary, the two in Emmaus, Peter, the roomful, Thomas, etc.. I’m sure John meant this was the third day of major appearances. The first was Easter day. The second was a week later. The third was in Galilee, maybe a week after that. There was enough of a delay that the disciples decided to go back to fishing for a while. Remember, most of the time these disciples were seemingly walking around on their own. But, of course, they weren’t on their own. That was the whole point.

So, Galilee is obviously the place where the second miraculous catch of fish takes place, along with the reinstating of Peter for leading and feeding the sheep. This is also the area where the Great Commission takes place on an agreed upon mountain. That may also be the site which Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 where more than “five hundred brethren” all saw the risen Jesus. And it is probably Galilee where Jesus met with his brother James, who though he never believed in Jesus while he lived, came to believe in him after he died. That fact alone is virtually inexplicable apart from the resurrection of Christ.

And we know from John’s word to us in our text that there were other appearances, *many* other appearances. Then they were all capped off with a return to Jerusalem and a final appearance on the Mount of Olives. It was unlike all the others because it ended with the ascension of Jesus. Not only did he rise up above them in the sky, but he was surrounded by clouds in such a way that heaven itself was seen as his destination. Angels then made sure the disciples knew that Jesus intended to return in the same way in which he left.

With these experiences, with Pentecost being but ten days away, and with the promise of “Surely I am with you always ...” the body of Christ was being well prepared to proclaim and prove to the world: He is risen! And He is Lord!