

WHAT JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES *Part 1***LUKE 24:36-49**

We're reflecting on Jesus' last words before He went back to Heaven. Dale Durie tells the story of his grandfather's unexpected last words. One afternoon, his grandfather was at home with his grandmother and they heard a knock on the door. The visitor was a neighbor lady who said to Mr. Durie, "I was out feeding the horses, and I felt like God was prompting me to come and say thank you for the difference you've made in my life." She sat down and began to tell stories about times when he had been merciful to her as a widow, how he had cared for the cows and horses, and how he had done all of kinds of practical things. She thanked him for being so real. She went through a litany of good deeds and finished with this comment, "I just felt like God wanted me to tell you that." Mr. Durie paused, looked at her, and said, "It was the Lord Jesus Christ who did it." There was another pause, and his wife continued the conversation with this neighbor lady. A few seconds later they heard a cough and saw Mr. Durie slumped over. He was with Jesus. Just like that. Dale Durie's grandfather's last words were, "It was the Lord Jesus Christ who did it." I hope I can say something profound like that just before I enter eternity!

We're in the midst of thinking about Jesus' real last words. Not the words He spoke just before He died on the cross. Why not those? Because they weren't Jesus' last words! He didn't stay dead. He rose again and had several conversations with different people between Easter Day and His ascension back to Heaven some 40 days later. Jesus' real last words are very important, very profound, and very meaningful. Today, I want to read with you the story of Jesus' first encounter with ten of his original twelve disciples after His resurrection. You might recall Judas, who betrayed Him, was dead. Full of remorse, he'd killed himself. Another disciple, Thomas, was absent for some unknown reason. He had his own memorable encounter with the risen Jesus later on. We'll look at that story next week. But today let's look at what Jesus said to these ten of His disciples minus Judas and Thomas. I believe we can see here in Jesus' words an invitation to experience or live into the implications of His resurrection more fully. Like those ten men, the fact Jesus is alive today and everyday means I can...

I CAN EXPERIENCE JESUS' PRESENCE FULLY.

Jesus asked those ten men, "Why are you frightened? Why are your hearts filled with doubt?" (Lk. 24:38 NLT) Those are good questions to ask ourselves. If Jesus is risen, why are you and I ever afraid? If Jesus is alive, why are you and I ever filled with doubt? I suggest you and I need to have something happen to us today that happened to those ten men. We need to experience Jesus' presence fully.

It's fascinating to see how people reacted to Jesus after His resurrection. Three different Greek words pop up in the different accounts. The first word is "phobos" which means "fear, terror." We get our word "phobia" from "phobos." That's a word used right here to describe how the disciples reacted when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst that first Easter evening. Their fear was understandable. After all, they thought Jesus was still dead. They didn't expect any resurrection. Another word used in the

resurrection appearances was “ekstasis” which means your mind is temporarily displaced from its ordinary state. You hear our word “ecstasy” in “ekstasis.” Something happens that transcends your normal thought processes. Something just blows your mind! You’re stunned or shocked to the core of your being. When it was used to describe people’s reaction to seeing Jesus alive again, it meant profound amazement or incredible astonishment. Their minds had a hard time taking in what their eyes saw.

Then there’s the word “thaumazo.” It describes what a person feels when you’ve just experienced something beyond what you consider possible. You’ve heard the word “flabbergasted,” yes? The other day I read about someone who experienced something so totally astounding and unbelievable, he said his “flabber” was “gasted.” I like that! When it says in our story, “Still they (the disciples) stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder.” (Lk 24:41 NLT) It means they were completely “thaumazo-ized.” On the one hand, they were filled with incredible joy. On the other hand, they were unable to process or take in what their eyes were seeing. Their “flabbers” were “gasted”!

Those ten men went from the lowest point possible to the highest point possible in a fraction of a second. Before Jesus arrived, they were an utterly defeated bunch. Judas had hung himself. Thomas was nowhere to be found. Worst of all, Jesus was dead – or so they thought. Their dreams had been crucified on the cross along with Jesus. His mission was meaningless now. They lived in fear the Jewish religious leaders had sent the temple police to arrest them. They’d either forgotten about, never understood, or just didn’t believe Jesus’ predictions He’d rise from the dead. Then Jesus Himself stepped into that dejected, defeated, and despondent scene. Can you imagine their reaction? Jesus... alive? Really? Truly? At first they thought they were seeing a ghost. That’s why Jesus invited them to inspect the nail wounds in His hands and feet. He invited them to touch His body so they’d know He was solid – not some kind of spirit being. He asked for a piece of fish and ate it. Ghosts don’t eat, do they?

“Well, Rick, if Jesus appeared to me like that, I’d believe in Him, too!” Many people say things like that. Woody Allen, the comedian, says it’d be a lot easier to believe in God if He’d just deposit a million dollars in a Swiss bank account in our name! Why can’t Jesus do for us what He did for those ten men? Why can’t He do something that would leave our “flabbers gasted”? Often your life and mine can resemble the dejection and defeat those disciples demonstrated before Jesus arrived. Life’s problems can defeat us. Perhaps living through this pandemic has been a severe trial for you. In addition, difficult or broken relationships – with our spouse, our parents, our kids, a close friend – can frustrate us. An insecure financial situation can be painful. An impossible job situation you have to return to tomorrow can drag you down. The poor health of a dearly loved one can fill us with anxiety. The overwhelming sadness of a loved one’s recent death can still overwhelm us. Yes, we know in our heads Jesus is alive. We’ve heard about it. We’ve maybe even read about it in the Bible. But what difference does Jesus and the fact He’s alive make in our real, every day, walk around life?

You and I need to experience Jesus’ presence fully. But, how? He probably won’t appear to you and me today like He did those ten disciples. It’s possible, however, to

experience Jesus' presence without actually seeing Him with our two physical eyes. Next week, we'll take a closer look at what Jesus said to Thomas – the disciple who was absent in our story today. “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.” (Jo. 20:19 NLT) Experiencing Jesus' presence fully happens when I realize that because Jesus is alive, the greatest problems of my life have already been addressed. Because of Jesus, my sins are forgiven. Your life and mine can now have a purpose and meaning beyond just existing. The awful finality of my death has been taken away. I have the assurance of eternal life in Heaven. When you realize God's already answered the biggest questions of life in and through Jesus, it's easier somehow to live with the smaller unanswered questions. The fact that Jesus is alive changes everything. The tough, ugly things about life are still there, still very real – to be sure – but there's a far greater reality out there than them. Jesus is alive and He can be known and experienced. There's nothing more real or more significant than that fact!

Experiencing Jesus' presence fully also means being able to access Him anywhere, anytime, and anyplace. When you leave this building today, you won't leave Jesus behind and hope He'll be here next week when you come back. He goes with you everywhere because now He's living in you. You can reach Jesus from wherever you are today, or tomorrow, or on May 2nd of next year. Even when you feel powerless, confused, defeated, and helpless? Oh, yes, especially then, most definitely then, and most assuredly then.

Experiencing Jesus' presence fully means possessing His peace. What was the first thing the risen Jesus said to those ten men? “Peace be with you.” (Lk 24:36 NLT) Yes, it was indeed one way greet people back then - to say hello. “Shalom.” True enough. But here, it's something more than just a greeting. Right along with Jesus' very real presence, comes His very real peace. There are many people in this room this morning who can give a testimony of how they've experienced God's peace in the midst of very tough situations in life, peace even in the mist of difficult relationships, and peace even in the most anxious moments of their lives. One of my all-time favorite Bible verses says, “You will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Ph. 4:7 NLT) We can have this inner harmony even when disharmony is all around us. We can have this kind of wholeness even when we find ourselves in brokenness. We can have a supernatural calm even in the midst of life's storms.

From his hospital bed on the evening before open heart surgery, Pastor Bruce McIver asked his famous cardiologist, Dr. Dudley Johnson, "Can you fix my heart?" The doctor, known for being short and to the point, said, "Sure." Then he quickly turned and walked away. Following the 12-hour surgery, McIver asked Dr. Johnson, "In light of the blocked arteries that I had when I checked into the hospital, how much blood supply do I now have?" "All you'll ever need," replied the doctor, who again ended the conversation by walking away. Upon his discharge from the hospital, McIver's wife, asked the doctor, "What about my husband's future quality of life?" Dr. Johnson paused and then said, "I fixed his heart; the quality of his life is up to him." How true that is! Are you

experiencing Jesus' presence fully? The quality of your life is up to you. And because Jesus is alive, it can be wonderful. That's what happened to those ten men – they began to experience Jesus' presence fully - and it can happen to everyone here today. But here's another equally important experience.

I CAN EXPERIENCE JESUS' POWER FULLY.

Jesus said, "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." (Lk. 24:49 NLT) What was this power? Not what but who! Jesus was speaking about the Holy Spirit. Before He died on the cross, Jesus had said, "It is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you." (Jo. 16:7 NLT) When you're alive to Jesus' risen power, you're able to deal with every difficulty in life through the Holy spirit who now lives in you.

One of the most interesting – and sometimes saddest - things about sporting events for kids can be parents' reactions to their own children's athletic efforts. Here's what happened at one track meet. It was the fourth and final lap of the boys' mile run. As the runners approached the finish line, the group of parents in the bleachers was cheering wildly. Behind two front runners was a clump of other runners a few yards back. Behind the clump was one more runner – a short, overweight kid running hopelessly last. By the look of him, he probably would have been challenged to walk a mile much less run one. His entire body was wobbling toward the finish line. His bright red face was twisted in pain. Suddenly, an adult leapt down from the bleachers to the railing of the track. It was obviously the boy's mother. She yelled at the top of her lungs, "Johnny, RUN FASTER!" A look of hopelessness crossed Johnny's face. He might have been thinking to himself, "Run faster? Run faster? What do you think the problem is here – I just forgot to run faster? I'm running as fast as I can!"

Have you ever felt like Johnny when it comes to life? You come to church after a week that's left you weary beyond words and Pastor Rick seems to say to you in so many words, "Run faster!" You read a book to get some encouraging insights, but what's the overall message you receive? Run faster! You open up to a friend about your problems, but you get a familiar sounding piece of advice. Just run faster. I don't know about you, but when it comes to living life, I don't need advice so much as I need power. Power to deal with life's challenging realities. I don't need encouragement to try harder; I'm trying as hard as I can. I need strength to prevail that comes from somewhere outside of me. Jesus promises us the power of His Spirit. He enters your life the moment you put your faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit now lives in you. His power is now accessible to you. How do you get it to work for you, then? Jesus told His disciples to wait – to wait for God to do something. Sometimes that's the very best course of action when we're up against life's challenging realities. When we feel at wits' end. When life's stresses feel unbearable. Call out to the Lord. Tell Him all about it. Invite the Holy Spirit to take over. Then, wait on the Lord. Continue to trust Him. Instead of telling us to run faster, Jesus often tells us to wait and too trust in Him and His power.

When you're experiencing Jesus' power fully, you begin to understand God's will better. Jesus supernaturally enlightened those disciples so that – at last – they could finally understand how the Old Testament was fulfilled in Him. It says, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." (Lk. 24:45 NLT) We all face times of confusion and uncertainty as we walk through life. Quite often Jesus gives us His wisdom through the Bible itself – just like He did for those ten men. The Bible says, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." (Jam. 1:5 NLT) I'm not saying you always get specific answers to specific questions just by reading the Bible. It's more subtle than that. As you read and meditate on the Bible consistently with a spirit of submission, as you listen to it proclaimed, as you study it with others, over time the Holy Spirit builds up within you a reservoir of wisdom. There's power in here – God's Word. It's mediated by and through the Holy Spirit. It's one primary way God can speak into your life. And as you interact with God's Word day by day, the Holy Spirit empowers you to understand God's will better.

When you're experiencing Jesus' power fully, you receive a new ability to point other people to Him. Jesus told these ten men, "It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: "There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent." You are witnesses of all these things." (Lk 24:47-48 NLT) In John's version of this very same resurrection appearance, Jesus said to the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." (Jo. 20:21 NLT) Did you know that if you're a follower of Jesus, you've been given much the same mission as Jesus Himself? Like Jesus, we're sent into the world. What does that mean? As the Son of God, Jesus didn't stay in Heaven. Instead, He came down to us. If Jesus took the initiative to come to us, you and I can take the initiative to reach out to people who don't yet follow Jesus. How? Pray for specific people. Build relationships wherever possible. Look for opportunities to have conversations about faith. Be available to point people to Jesus whenever and however possible. Sometimes we Christians expect people who don't share our faith to come to us. We expect them to take the initiative while we stay safe and secluded in our churches. Sometimes we try to get as far away from lost people as possible. Of course, it's more comfortable to be with other followers of Jesus all the time. Heaven was certainly more comfortable for Jesus. But He was sent into the world. And He went out into the world. And because we're His followers, we're sent out into the world, too.

Why was Jesus sent? To help bring lost people into a new relationship with God. Like Jesus, we're sent to people who aren't followers of Jesus yet. We see every person as someone God loves and for whom Jesus died and rose again. No one is written off. No one is beyond hope. No one is ever considered beyond the power of God's grace. It's the Bible itself that says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." (Rom. 10:13 NLT) Anyone can come. No exceptions. Even if you feel like you're very far from God today, you're welcome. Like Jesus, we're sent into this world to help bring people into a relationship with God for the glory of God. That's why Jesus, the Son of God, left Heaven. That's why He became a human being. That's why Jesus suffered and died on the cross. That's why He rose again from the dead. And that's why He's in Heaven waiting His Father's command to return to Earth again and wrap it all up.

Ultimately, it's all for His Father's glory. Every follower of Jesus can experience His power fully today – and every day - by recognizing you're sent into this world to help bring spiritually lost people into a relationship with God for the glory of God.

Generally, getting stuck in a snowstorm isn't a great experience, but for a group of stranded motorists in Oregon back in late January it ended up being a stroke of good luck. That's because in their long line of cars stranded during a snowstorm was a group of healthcare workers returning from a COVID vaccine clinic at a nearby high school. The workers from the Josephine County Public Health Department had six doses of the Moderna vaccine remaining. But with a jackknifed tractor-trailer ahead of them, they realized they could be stuck for hours and those precious doses would expire.

So, those health department workers made the decision to walk from car to car asking stranded drivers if they wanted to be vaccinated, right there on the spot. One of them said, "We were a little nervous because not a lot of people in this part of the state are eager to get the vaccine at this point in time." It took them 45 minutes to find six individuals willing to get the COVID vaccine dose. Most politely declined, but some of those who accepted were overjoyed. One individual was so happy, he took his shirt off and jumped out of his car! Those health department workers said it ended up being the best way to spend four hours stuck in a snowstorm they'd ever experienced. The ambulance that accompanied the workers to the high school was also on hand for anyone who may have had an adverse reaction to the vaccine.

Followers of Jesus have an eternal cure for the virus of sin and death – a condition that's infinitely more serious than anything COVID can do to human beings. In these troubled times in which we live – a pandemic that's still with us, social justice issues raging around us, and all sorts of hatred and division among people being so prevalent – let's take any and every opportunity to point people to Jesus who is the only real and lasting cure. Just like those folk stuck in a traffic jam in Oregon who were offered the COVID vaccine, many people will decline the offer of Jesus, others will be hesitant, but some will receive Him with great joy. Let's be ready and willing to share Jesus with others. Let's experience His presence and His power fully.