

This is the last story from the Gospel of Luke. I was not an eyewitness to these events. That said, know that I am a *Greek* doctor, I am very jealous of my reputation would not ruin it by writing things I don't fully believe to be true. I carried out a careful investigation before writing. Meticulous, would be more precise. I spoke to eyewitnesses and studied the accounts that had already been written. Be assured, I am convinced of all that I write. Down to the most minute detail.

We've come to the end of Jesus' first life. When the Romans crucified someone, they finished the job. They were experts in death. Jesus was dead.

Joseph of Arimathea quickly buried Jesus' body on Friday before the Sabbath started. There was no time for him to properly prepare the body.¹ The Sabbath officially started on Friday at sundown, and it was forbidden to deal with dead bodies on a Sabbath.

Very early on Sunday morning, the Sabbath was over, several women hurried to the tomb with spices to prepare the dead body of Jesus. These women were devout followers of Jesus, and included Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. They never got the chance to prepare the body.

When they arrived at the tomb, the huge stone covering the entrance was rolled away, and the body was not in the tomb. They were stunned, astonished, just gaping at one another. Suddenly, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. The men said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen!" The men went on to remind the women how Jesus had prophesied his crucifixion and his resurrection on the third day. Though deep in shock, the women remembered the words of Jesus.

Imagine the emotions of these women. On Friday, their leader, friend, their Messiah, was put on trial and condemned. He was killed by a horribly excruciating crucifixion. On Saturday, the Sabbath, they could do nothing but try to worship God while they mourned the death of Jesus. Never a lower emotional point than that day. On Sunday morning, they go to prepare the body of Jesus and find that he has risen from the dead. They had seen Jesus raise people from the dead, but they could not have conceived that he could raise himself from the dead! Their realization must have been overwhelming. Overwhelming to the point of...just, overwhelming joy.

¹ Mark 14:3-9

The women went back into Jerusalem, and told their story to the remaining eleven apostles and other followers of Jesus. They didn't believe the women at all. The story seemed ludicrous, kind of a too good to be true, know what I mean? Pure nonsense in their eyes. But Peter, he jumped up and ran to the tomb to see for himself. He found only strips of linen. And then left wondering what had happened. He could not bring himself to believe that their story was true, that Jesus could possibly be alive.

That same day, seven miles from Jerusalem, two disciples of Jesus were walking to Emmaus, a tiny village. They were talking about all that had happened in Jerusalem, when a man, just some stranger, came up to walk with them and asked what they were talking about. One of two, Cleopas, said "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened? They couldn't believe it, so they told the man how the one they'd hoped would rescue Israel was killed, but then his body was missing from the tomb - and supposedly was alive again.

The stranger began to explain what the scriptures said about the Messiah. They stopped to eat and, it hit the two, they recognized him! It was Jesus! But then, he was gone! Vanished! They rushed to Jerusalem to tell the apostles, kicking themselves because they hadn't realized who he was earlier. The apostles confirmed that the Lord had risen and had appeared to Simon Peter. The two told their story about how Jesus had appeared to them and explained the Messianic scriptures. They were in a daze, talking about the impossibilities of what was happening when the most miraculous thing happened!

A talking ghost appeared among them. "Peace be with you." But it wasn't a talking ghost...it was the Lord Jesus in a resurrected body. They freaked out. But at his request they touched him, his body was as solid as their own. They even touched the places on his hands and feet where the nails from his crucifixion had pierced him. They could not believe what was happening, they were amazed, they were overjoyed, but still they couldn't believe it...I mean, think about it. So, like a good Jewish boy, Jesus decided to solve the problem with food. Broiled fish. That's what they gave him. The Resurrected Lord took a piece of broiled fish and ate it. No more proof was needed.

In the most obvious "I Told You So" ever, Jesus reminded the group that he had told them this would happen in order to fulfill the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then, he opened their minds so they could finally understand what the Scriptures said. He said it was written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations. He said, "You are my witnesses, and I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in Jerusalem until you have received power from on high."

The group was gaining understanding of what Jesus had been talking about for three years, but they could not even begin to comprehend what God was going to send to them to clothe them with power from on high. They would not find out what that was for another seven weeks.

Now, since I am a Greek writer, you should expect that my story ends here. The protagonist of the story has suffered unjustly, and has heroically overcome his enemies. Any classical Greek writer would have stopped here. I can't stop, because the story is not even close to being through.

Over the next forty days, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people.² He gave many convincing proofs that he was alive, and taught about the Scriptures and what was going to happen. He was setting the stage for the coming of Holy Spirit, the revealing of the Church, and the explosive growth of Christianity.

After the end of forty days, Jesus led his followers to the Mount of Olives, near the vicinity of the village of Bethany. He lifted his hands and started blessing his followers. While he was blessing them, he began to rise in the air, and was taken up into Heaven. Regardless of what had happened over the previous forty days, his followers were still amazed to watch him rise in the air.

They worshiped the Lord, and then returned to Jerusalem as he had instructed them to do. They couldn't wait to be clothed with power from on high, whatever that meant. They did what so many others before them had done. They stayed at the Temple and continually praised God.

If you have a good memory, you might remember how we began twenty stories ago. I wrote the Gospel of Luke to Theophilus in order to give him an orderly and accurate account of the life of Jesus so that he could be certain of the things he had been taught.

The stories started with the miraculous birth of Jesus. From there, we talked about the three-year ministry of Jesus. Most of his ministry took place in the area around the Sea of Galilee, but he did make several trips to Jerusalem and other places. Our stories centered around the teachings and actions of Jesus. Sometimes he taught, sometimes he healed people or did miracles, and sometimes he did both.

Before Jesus, many Jews connected righteousness with rule-keeping. The better you keep the rules, the more you are obedient to God. Many of them connected righteousness with earthly well-being. The more earthly wealth you have, the more righteous you must be, and the more God must love you.

Jesus turned those mentalities up-side down. He taught that God loves all his children, and that God wants all of his children to have a relationship with him. He taught that love for God and other people is paramount in being obedient.

The teachings and actions of Jesus were so radical that he eventually offended the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem so much that they plotted to kill him. They eventually succeeded in doing

² Acts 1:3, 1 Corinthians 15:6

so with the help of Pilate. With the death of Jesus, the Jewish leaders probably thought their problems were over.

When the news started circulating that Jesus had come back from the dead, the Jewish leaders panicked. Resurrection?! They even bribed the guards at the tomb to say that Jesus' followers had stolen his body.³ Unfortunately for them, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people in many different settings and times. His followers absolutely knew that Jesus had risen from the dead, and they began behaving that way.

Three decades after the death of Jesus, I was with Paul as he was on his missionary journeys, and we often talked about Jesus and the research I had accumulated. He summarized what we knew to be true: "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him."⁴

We first Christians fully believed that Jesus died, rose, and ascended to sit at the right hand of God. We had full hope and belief that Jesus would return. I hope that my research and my book have brought you to believe those same things.

³ Matthew 28:12-15

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:14