**WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?**

April 13, 2014

Luke 24:1-35

Key Verse 24:5b “but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’”

Luke the evangelist and historian does not develop theological arguments on the resurrection of Christ; rather, he gives the evidence of the resurrection of Christ from the dead by telling us what happened in the hearts of those who saw the Risen Christ. Therefore, in this passage, we don’t want to study the theory of the resurrection, but the evidence of the resurrection; how people were changed after they saw the Risen Christ.

When Christ died on the cross, everyone thought that his life was over. They believed in their hearts that what they had witnessed and experienced for those three years was over and there was nothing else for them to do. They did not understand that their lives was about to change drastically forever. But what they understood, they believed and what they believed they acted on. You see, whatever we believe will dictate our actions. Let me give you an example. In the movie “Knowing,” the main character in the movie was traumatized after his wife died and he lost his belief in almost anything. He took the stance that everything that happened did so by chance and with his belief he stated that there was no way to prove that heaven existed. Well, he acted on what he believed. As the story moved along, as he begin to see some things, as his belief changed his actions changed also. How many times have you acted based on something you believed, even if what you believed was actually wrong? You see, at this point it is not always about the truth, but it is always about the belief. This is what we find when we read the story of Jesus’ resurrection. The disciples believed he was gone forever, an untruth, and yet even though this was not true, this is how they acted.

If Christ had not risen from the grave, everything we believe--everything we practice--would be a lie because we believe that through his death and resurrection, he conquered sin and death and is now sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us. If we do not really believe that he rose from the dead, then we can’t believe he is interceding for us! The criminal on the cross was the first to learn that Christ was Lord and that his life didn’t end with his crucifixion. Everyone else – the disciples, his mother and all the other followers – had to wait to find out. Yet they were not really waiting because they didn’t think he would rise. Again, they acted on what they believed and they believed that Jesus was dead.

The first part of this passage is about how sorrowful women were changed after meeting the Risen Christ. Look at verse 1. “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.” Who were they? They were the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee all the way to Golgotha and saw his crucifixion. After his crucifixion and burial they found out where the tomb of Jesus was and returned to their own places with broken hearts. They must have stayed up all night in consuming sorrow. They must have thought of Jesus who had been so good, but was crucified by evil men. They felt their hearts were dead. They felt as if they were suffering in the place of Jesus. When they saw Jesus crucified, these women were so wounded and became even more sorrowful than they had been before being healed by Jesus. They were overwhelmed by sorrow. Very early in the morning, they went to the tomb to anoint his dead body with their spices. This was what they could do as the expression of their love for the dead Jesus.

Jesus was buried in a cave tomb which was closed by a big stone. But when the women came, they found the stone rolled away, and when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. Their last hope of anointing the dead body of Jesus was gone. While they were wondering about this, something unusual happened. The angels appeared to them. Look at verse 4-5. “While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’” These women were looking for the dead body of Jesus, not knowing that Jesus has risen. They were beautiful and faithful women in the sight of God. However, they were only looking for the dead body of Jesus, for they did not remember what Jesus had said to them concerning his death and resurrection. They were too attached to human Jesus and wanted to hang around him forever. They did not accept the glorious resurrection hope.

To these sorrowful women the life-giving message was given. Look at verses 6,7. “He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” During the time of his earthly ministry, Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection to his disciples again and again (9:22,44; 18:31-32). At the time of his crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples failed to comprehend or accept what he had been saying to them. But look at verse 8. These women, who until now had only overheard over the shoulders of the disciples, immediately remembered what Jesus had said before his crucifixion. When they remembered what Jesus had said, their spiritual eyes were opened and they could recognize the Risen Christ. They saw with their eyes the glorious Risen Christ. When they saw the Risen Christ, sorrows melted from their hearts. They felt their dead minds come back to life. In a moment, they were overwhelmed by eternal joy overflowing in their souls. They were overjoyed because of the glorious resurrection hope. They had not eaten for several days because of their sorrows. But they felt great strength in their souls. And they came running with their whole strength and told what had happened to the apostles.

How did the apostles respond to the women’s words? They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. They thought that the women were gone insane because of their sorrow. They did not believe because they had no word of God in their hearts. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. We can see here a sharp contrast between the women and Peter. The women went to the tomb with sorrowful minds. But they met the Risen Jesus and came back with great joy, because the women could remember the promise of God concerning his glorious resurrection. On the other hand, Peter, when he did not remember Jesus’ words concerning his death and resurrection, went to the same tomb and saw only a few pieces of grave clothes.

The second part of this passage is a story about two despaired men on the road to Emmaus and how they were changed after meeting the Risen Christ. Look at verses 13-14. “Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.” As a matter of fact, they were on the way to Emmaus to escape from Jerusalem. They were the runaway disciples. But the Risen Christ did not punish them for their cowardice. He came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?’ They stood still, their faces downcast.” “One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Of course, the Risen Christ knew everything. But to draw out what was on their hearts, he asked, “What things?” Then they opened up. Look at verses 19b-20. “‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him...’”

Look at verse 21a. “...but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” They had lost hope. It had been dashed to pieces. They had followed Jesus with a hope that he would establish the messianic kingdom, redeem Israel from Roman oppression and make her glorious once again. Their interpretation of the messianic hope was bound to this world. It was more political than spiritual. Jesus had taught them about the kingdom of God again and again. But instead of coming to share God’s hope of the kingdom of God, these men had retained their own worldly version of messianic hope. When Jesus died, this hope was dashed to pieces. Men must have hope. But they had no more hope. They were men of despair and they were running away to Emmaus.

It is important to realize that these men knew all the essential facts about the resurrection (22-24). They knew the tomb was empty. They knew the women claimed to have seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. But knowing the facts did not give them resurrection faith. Rather, they thought everything was over. They were talking with the Risen Christ. But they did not know who he was or what was happening. Here we learn that human hope leads to despair, and despair makes people spiritually blind and fearful. Despair makes people run away from their mission. Jesus had taught his suffering, death and resurrection to his disciples again and again. But when it happened, they did not believe it. It was because they had never accepted his teaching from their hearts. They didn’t like to hear about his suffering and death. They held on to their human dreams. When Jesus died, their human dreams died and they despaired. How did the Risen Christ help these men?

He began by saying, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” Despair is not an intellectual problem; it is a heart problem. It made them slow to believe prophecy. They needed to repent. So Jesus rebuked them. It was like cardio shock treatments to restore their spiritual heartbeat. Jesus’ rebuke gives life. Then Jesus taught the Scriptures to them in a special way. Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. It was the best Bible study ever! It was given, not to Peter and John, but to two runaway disciples. At their invitation, Jesus went in to stay with them. As he was at the table, he took bread, gave thanks and broke it and began to give it to them. Then, amazing things happened in their hearts. Their spiritual eyes were opened and they recognized him. Finally, Jesus communicated his love by feeding his disciples. This convinced them and they were changed.

Look at verse 32. “They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” Yes! A miracle happened. Their dead hearts became alive again. There was no more despair in them. They became courageous. Before meeting the Risen Christ they were running away from Jerusalem, escaping from the realities of the world. But after meeting the Risen Christ, they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and where secret policemen were scattered all around to arrest Jesus’ people. Before meeting the Risen Christ they were full of fear. After meeting the Risen Christ they became the witnesses of the Risen Christ. When they arrived in Jerusalem, there they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

According to statistics, Korea has had the highest suicide rate among the industrialized nations for eight consecutive years. The main cause is despair and loss of hope. Without meeting the Risen Christ all mankind cannot but despair and end up with the thought of death. But whoever meets the Risen Christ can overcome the world. When we are attached to things of the world such as family, job or career, we cannot but be anxious and get tired in order to save ourselves and it leads to despair. When we do not believe in Jesus’ resurrection, we cannot but be attached to things of the world and go back to our old bad habits, and waste our time and energy by chewing on our past failures and by regrets. But Jesus conquered death. Death has been crushed. Only its tail is wagging. When we do not believe in Jesus’ resurrection, we are frightened by its wagging tail, thinking that it will overpower us. But when we believe in Jesus’ resurrection, we can have inner spiritual strength to overcome our bad habits and past failures and sorrowful memories because sin and death has been conquered.

Whatever we believe will dictate our actions. When we believe that this world is everything we have, we will seek hope and happiness in things of the world, and it leads to despair and loss of hope. But those who have faith in the resurrection of Christ can live victorious lives in this world.