

NT Lesson #27

# HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE IS RISEN

[MATTHEW 28; LUKE 24; JOHN 20,21]

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INTRODUCTION: Early on a Sunday Morning in June of 1980, my wife and I left the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and made our way to the traditional site of the Garden Tomb near the Damascus Gate. The day was cool, the streets relatively empty. We were delighted to find the garden deserted. We had been there the day before with our tour group and found our time continually interrupted by others like ourselves seeking physical ties with the redemption of Christ.

But this morning, the garden was empty. We walked to the tomb, and paused a moment before the door. It bore a sign: "He is not here. He is Risen." We entered and sat on the small bench, our eyes on the stone bed where his body might have lain, Did Peter and John find the folded raiment here? Did angels frighten the guards and move the stone in this very place. Did Mary Magdalene meet the gardener who turned out to be her Savior at this location? It felt like it to us. We pondered the reaction of those in the Spirit world who rejoiced while mortals wept in despair. What hymns they must have composed and sung when he burst through the veil and greeted the righteous who were assembled, waiting. We held hands and sat in silence and wept and listened to our hearts and were taught.

Years later I had the opportunity to pen lyrics for an anthem on the resurrection as part of an Easter Cantata called *Rabboni*. As I prepared to write, I remembered the feelings of that morning and turned to Isaiah 26:19 for my text:

Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust!  
The stone is rolled away.  
Shines from the opened tomb  
The light of resurrection's day.

The late Robert P. Manookin wrote the music and the Tabernacle Choir presented it in an Easter program. I think we all must have been singing that day. Pre-mortal and paradisiacal choirs with voices raised in rejoicing at the opening of the Savior's tomb, and thereby, every tomb in the world.

## **I. MARY MAGDALENE AND OTHER WOMEN ARE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTED LORD.**

Because the death and burial of the Savior took place late on Friday afternoon, and the Sabbath began at sundown, the women who loved the Lord had no time for proper preparation of the body for burial. Thus,

. . . Upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. (Luke 24:1. JST)

But the stone was rolled away, the sepulcher empty, and two angels standing by “in shining garments.” (Luke 24:4) The angels spoke to the worshipping women (Luke 24:5)

And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: And as they were afraid, and bowed down [their] faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words (Luke 24:4-8).

“ He is not here, but is risen . . .” For the first time in all of recorded history, a man dead and buried arose of his own free will and walked from the tomb. One unusual aspect of that event was a witness for John.

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but *wrapped together in a place by itself*. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and *he saw, and believed*. (John 19:6-8, *emphasis added*)

Grave robbers (Matthew 28:2-4, 11-14) would never have taken the time to fold the grave clothes. But someone did, for they were “wrapped together.” And when John saw it, he believed. But before all of this the women found the tomb empty and the angels, and were sent on an errand: “Go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead . . . And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great

joy; and *did run to bring his disciples word* (Matthew 28:7,8, *emphasis added*).

In a day when messages were usually carried by runners, both Isaiah and Abinadi spoke of the “beautiful feet” of those who would one day run with the most important message of all—the message of the atonement of Christ. (See Isaiah 52:7,8, and Mosiah 15:15-18) It is worth noting, and (if you are a teacher) mentioning that the first to run with the message of the resurrection were women. But an even more remarkable experience awaited them.

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him (Matthew 28:9).

The incomprehensibility of the resurrection is clearly demonstrated by the response of the disciples to these gentle witnesses when the women arrived with their message. These followers had listened to the Saviors prophetic descriptions of these events, and heard his testimony of the reality of the resurrection, and had watched him raise the dead, but when the women told them that they had seen the resurrected Christ, “their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11). Had also seen the resurrected Lord in the garden (Mark 16:9) “And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not” (Mark 16:11).

## **II. TWO DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS ARE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTED LORD**

The encounter of the two disciples with the Lord on the road to Emmaus is a sweet testimony of the resurrection and of the goodness of the Savior.

Two disciples, Cleopas and another (possibly Luke, as it is he who records the event), walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, some six or seven miles. As they discussed the reports of those who had seen the open tomb and heard the words of the angels, Jesus himself joined them in their travels. They walked and talked. He seemed in all respects like any wayfaring man. His speech, demeanor, dress, physical appearance were all deemed by them to be that of a fellow mortal. They invited him to spend the night with them, and his true identity was made known only as he brake bread. How better could he have taught them the literal and personal nature of resurrected beings (Bruce

R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, p.279 - p.280).

That he would take the opportunity to visit with two of them on their journey, hiding his true identity (Luke 24:16) and striving to open the meaning of the scriptures to them (Luke 24:27) tells us something important about our own testimony of him and of his mission and redemption. The Savior could have appeared to them in the form in which they had known him in the past. He had appeared in just that way to the women. But he hid himself and tried to teach them the reality and meaning of the resurrection from the scriptures. What a message he gave to them and to us: the answers we need and the understanding we need and the clarity we need, are in the scriptures. It is not essential that we stand with the disciples in the closed room. We do not need to handle the wounds. We do not need the vision of angels. We need the word—the iron rod—and the burning (Luke 24:32) that testify of the truth. That is more than enough.

### **III. THE APOSTLES ARE WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTED LORD**

The two disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem with the testimony of what they had seen and heard. As they were speaking, Jesus himself appeared among them. The experience these disciples then had with the Lord in the upper room in Jerusalem on the night of the resurrection was a divine sermon on the nature of resurrected beings.

The Savior did not come simply to show that he was still alive. He did not appear and speak and depart. He declared with godlike authority that he was more than a spirit. He ate in their presence. As would also occur among his disciples in America, he invited them to “handle [him] and see” that he had verifiable corporeality. He was a being of flesh and bone!

No need to wonder any longer about what resurrected beings are like. In a world in which the vast majority of Christian teachers and leaders has retreated from the belief in a literal, physical resurrection, the Savior in the upper room sends an irrefutable message. Matthew’s comment also certifies that the resurrection involves more than spirits:

And the graves were opened; and the bodies of the saints which slept, arose, who were many, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.  
(Matthew 27:52,53)

Elder McConkie wrote of the lessons learned that night:

He stood there as a man; a spirit is a man; this they knew. He had been a spirit before his birth. "This body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh" (Ether 3:16), he had said to the brother of Jared in days gone by. He had been a spirit when he preached to the other spirits in paradise. But now he had a body -- not of flesh and blood as do mortals, but of flesh and bones as do those whose bodies and spirits are inseparably joined in immortality. Flesh and bones is tangible; it can be felt and handled. He is continuing his "living sermon"; he is teaching them the reality and corporeality of the resurrection; though he had come through the enclosed wall of the room, yet he was a tangible being.

Then "he shewed them his hands and his feet." They felt the nail marks therein. What a marvel it is for mortal flesh to handle immortal flesh. "And while they yet wondered and believed not for joy, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?" Their meal included broiled fish and honeycomb. These were handed to Jesus, and -- marvel of marvels -- he took them and ate them. A resurrected person eats and digests food; the body, though immortal, is tangible and real. If ever there was a "living sermon," such is being seen and believed and understood by the favored faithful in the upper room this night! (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.4, p.280)

#### IV. SOME OF THE APOSTLES SEE JESUS AGAIN AT THE SEA OF TIBERIUS

At least some of the apostles thereafter returned to Galilee. Peter finally said he was going fishing and six others went with him. They spent an entire night on the water without success. In the uncertain light of early morning, an unknown man stood on the shore and called to them: "Children, have ye any meat?" *Have you had any success?* "None," they told him.

"Cast the net on the right side of the ship," he told them, "and ye shall find." The multitude of fishes enclosed then was a witness to John, who must have remembered the same experience from Luke 5. "It is the Lord," he said. And Simon, unwilling to wait for the loading of the fish and the sluggish sailing of the

ship to land, cast himself into the sea and swam to shore. The others came with the boat, dragging the net behind them. Notice what they found when they arrived: “As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.” (John 21:9) These were not the fish they had caught. These were provided in some miraculous way by the Savior to teach a lesson. *I can feed you. I will feed you. Do my work.*

And so they ate. When the meal was concluded, Christ asked the question. He might have first walked with Peter to the edge of the sea, and to 153 great fishes in an unbroken net. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest me more than these?” (John 21:15)

“Yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.”

“Feed my lambs.”

The two additional repetitions of this exchange must have been designed to teach Peter and the other six apostles and all the millions who have since read the account how to show love for the Savior. We must feed his lambs and his sheep.

I think Peter must have learned the lesson well, for I am nearly certain he never went fishing again.

## CONCLUSION

The quote that follows is an important reminder that we are all shepherds and that we must be about the business of feeding the sheep.

We realize, as in times past, some of the sheep will rebel and are “as a wild flock which fleeth from the shepherd.” (Mosiah 8:21.) But most of our problems stem from lack of loving and attentive shepherding.

With a shepherd’s care, many of our new members, those newly born into the gospel, would be nurtured by gospel knowledge and new standards. Such attention would ensure that there would be no returning to old habits and old friends.

With a shepherd’s loving care, many of our young people, our young lambs, would not be wandering. And if they were, the crook of the shepherd’s staff, a loving arm, would retrieve them (Ezra Taft Benson,

“A Call to the Priesthood: ‘Feed My Sheep,’ ” Ensign, May 1983, 44).

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