

The Forty Days After the Resurrection of Jesus, Part 1: The First Two Appearances

Looking into the Face of Jesus
The Life of Christ, 2: Pages 600-607
Manuscript: Lesson Plan 124

Introduction

Our text for this lesson comes from Mark 16:9–11; John 20:11–18; Luke 24:10; and Matthew 28:9–15. We will be looking at Mark 16 and John 20 in a moment.

Before we get to the text from the Gospels, we need to read Acts 1:1–3. Luke begins his history of the church by writing:

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Jesus appeared to His apostles for forty days. If you read the Gospel texts, sometimes you tend to think that all of these events happened over just a few days. There are ten appearances recorded in the Bible, but there could have been many more. We do not know for sure.

We also do not know the order of these appearances. We will use the chronological order presented in Truth for Today's *The Life of Christ, 2*.

The feast of the Passover was fifty days before the feast of Pentecost. Why did Christ spend forty of those days appearing to His disciples? He had more to teach them. He wanted to take whatever time was needed to convince His apostles that He really was alive again. All of this is lead to that magnificent moment where He ascended to heaven.

So, let us begin with . . .

The First Appearance: To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9–11; John 20:11–18; Luke 24:10)

We want to start by reading John 20:11–18 and Mark 16:9–11 (read).

Let us start by examining the appearance, taken from John's account. Mary Magdalene finally made it back to the tomb, probably expecting to see Peter and John and the other women, but they were already gone. She stood outside the tomb weeping, reminding us of the love she had for Christ (John 20:11a).

She stooped to look inside the tomb and saw the two angels. One was at the head and one at the feet where Jesus had been lying. J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton commented, "The angels were placed like the cherubim upon the ark, as though the grave of Christ was a new mercy seat."¹

¹J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel or A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1914), 743.

The angels asked why she was weeping. She explained that she did not know where they had taken her Lord. It was at this point that she turned around and saw Jesus but did not know who He was. Maybe there were subtle changes to His resurrected body. Maybe she just was not expecting Him to be there and alive.

Jesus also asked, "Why are you weeping?" and, "Whom are you seeking?" She thought He was the gardener, so she asked Him to tell her where they took Him so she could "take Him away"; she wanted to give Him a proper burial.

When Jesus said her name, she recognized Him. She responded, "Rabboni" (Aramaic for "Teacher"). She obviously was clinging to Him in some way because He had to tell her to stop. He told her to stop because He had yet not ascended to the Father. That probably meant that she did not have to hold on to Him because He had not left yet. But He wanted her to go tell His brothers; this meant His apostles and disciples. This is the first time that the word "brethren" was applied by the Lord to his disciples.

"I am ascending to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God." Notice that Jesus did not say, "Our Father," and, "Our God." He sustained a different relationship with God than the apostles.

Now we turn our focus to Mary's reaction. For this we will use Mark's account. She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept (Mark 16:10). I can imagine the excitement in her voice. I sure she kept repeating the words He told her to say. However, they refused to believe her (Mark 16:11)—hence, one of the reasons forty days were needed.

Thus concluded the first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. We now look at . . .

The Second Appearance: To the Other Women (Matthew 28:9–11a)

Let us turn in our Bibles to Matthew 28:9–11a (read).

It is important to notice what was happening before the Lord's appearance. The women had left the tomb with great joy after seeing the angels and went to report the word to Jesus' disciples. However, their words appeared to the disciples as "non-sense" and "were not believed" (Luke 24:11). This appearance of Christ happened either to or from that trip to the disciples.

Now we can discuss the appearance of Jesus to the women. Jesus met them and greeted them (Matthew 28:9). Matthew's account seems to have Jesus appearing to the women on the way to the disciples, but when Cleopas was reporting their visit to the disciples, he mentioned only that the women had seen angels (Luke 24:22, 23). This may indicate that Jesus appeared to the women as they left the disciples. This makes sense; the disciples did not believe them. As reassurance to the women that they really had seen the empty tomb and the angels, Jesus appeared to them.

The women "took hold of His feet and worshipped Him" (Matthew 28:9b). Jesus reminded them to not to be afraid (Matthew 28:10). Jesus repeated what the angels had said about telling His brethren to meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:10b).

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and to the other women. While these two incredible interactions were taking place, those who had, in vain, sought to prevent Jesus from rising from the dead were formulating . . .

A Report and a Lie (Matthew 28:11b–15)

Let us pick up our reading in the second part of Matthew 28:11 (read Matthew 28:11b–15).

Do you remember what happened to the guards at the tomb? They fainted! When they regain consciousness, the corpse they had been charged with guarding is gone. What are they going to do?

About the time Christ appeared to the women, perhaps, some of the guards had gone “into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened” (Matthew 28:11b).

They make a report to the Sanhedrin. Can you hear them explaining what happened? They probably could not believe everything that just happened. Saying something like, “Hey, no one warned us about earthquakes, angels, and a vanishing body!”

Instead of listening to the truth, the Jewish leaders were only worried about damage control. They had made their best efforts to secure the tomb. This surely was an embarrassment to them that Jesus was gone.

So, they decided to start a rumor. They first gave a large sum of money to the guards. They told them what to say—that “His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.”

There are some problems with this story. Surely in removing the heavy stone they would have made a loud enough noise to wake up at least one of the guards. And, by the way, if the soldiers were asleep, how could they have known who took the body? This was absurd then, and it is absurd now.

The guards probably reminded the chief priests that it was a capital offense to go to sleep while on duty, thus the leaders told them they would protect them from the governor. Matthew added that “this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day” (Matthew 28:15b). Matthew penned these words around AD 60. Justin Martyr in AD 170 says that the Jews “dispersed the story by means of special messengers sent to every country.”²

This was the first attempt to “explain away” the empty tomb. However, for twenty centuries, people have been trying to explain away the empty tomb. All attempts are futile; the truth is that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Conclusion

In the past few lessons, we have talked about how we serve a Savior Who is alive and risen from the dead. We now have Him appearing to His followers so they could believe and, with energy and excitement, tell others the exact same message.

We also read of the attempts to keep this message from circulating. We too, even today, can keep this message from circulating; not necessarily by what we say, but by how we act. If we truly believed that Jesus was in our midst, we would worship differently, serve differently, teach differently, and act differently? Are you telling a lie about the resurrection of Jesus today?

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²Ibid, 747. The reference is to Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, 108.