

Did You Read The Directions ?

Luke 24:36-49

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One Christmas Santa brought our children an outdoor- swing set. It came in a box. I took out all the pieces and laid them out in a row. It looked easy to assemble, and it was. But when I finished, I had 38 pieces left over. I wondered where they might fit. I tried to add some of them, but it didn't work. I was distressed and agitated. Then I read the instructions. Slowly, I undid the swing set I had created and reassembled it the way the instructions said. When I finished, there were no pieces left over. I had finally gotten it right. I had read the instructions.

Today's Scripture from Luke 24 is a lot like the swing set I had assembled. They had been with Jesus through all the events leading to Easter, but they couldn't put them together correctly to understand what was happening. They had tried to on their own, but by Easter evening all they had was a mess. They were confused and down in the dumps.

Consider where they were for a minute. Jesus was dead. He had been branded a criminal by Rome. He had been rejected by the leaders of the Jewish Church and the political leaders of the Jews. Jesus had been tried and convicted and taken to the cross. He had died and been buried. None of this was supposed to have happened. The Messiah the disciples imagined was not anywhere close to Jesus in the grave. They were so upset; they wondered if they were next and they were in hiding. Then, on Easter word of some strange goings on were coming in to them one at a time. The women who went to the tomb to preserve the body found the tomb opened, with two men there telling them Jesus was alive, and the tomb was empty. Silly women, prating-on about what couldn't have happened! So two of the disciples went and looked and they too reported an empty tomb. Next came Mary Magdalene, saying she had seen Jesus. Peter went again and came back saying he had seen him too. Then came two men from Emmaus, who said they walked with Jesus and talked with him and eaten with him. Just after they reported to the eleven, an event took place that Luke records in Chapter 24.

Luke 24

- 36 While they were still talking about this, (The facts they knew and the reports they were getting) Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."
- 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost.
- 38 He (Jesus) said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"
- 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."
- 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.
- 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"
- 42 They gave him a piece of boiled fish,
- 43 And he took it and ate it in their presence.
- 44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."
- 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.
- 46 He told them, "This is what was written,

- 47 The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,
and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name
to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
- 48 You are witnesses to these things.
- 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised: but stay in the city
until you have been clothed with power from on high."

THE WORD OF THE LORD!

The directions they weren't getting straight came from Isaiah and the Psalms. They knew the Scriptures generally, but they had not tied the directions, the prophecies from God of the coming One, the Messiah, with the Jesus of the cross. Messiah meant something else to them. They were trying to assemble their concepts of a living, breathing person, without reading the directions. But, God was explicit about the coming one. One example is in Isaiah 52:13-53:11

Isaiah 52 (God speaking)

- 13 See, my Servant (the description of Christ) will act wisely, he will be raised and lifted up
and highly exalted.
- 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured,
beyond that of any human being, and his form marred beyond human likeness
- 15 so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will
understand.

Isaiah 53

- 1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- 2 He grew up before Him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we
should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind; he was a man of suffering and familiar with
pain. He was like one from whom people hid their faces;
He was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
- 4 Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by God and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities.
The punishment that brought us peace was on him.
and by his wounds we are healed.
- 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each has turned to our own way.
- 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter;
as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away,

- yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
for the transgressions of my people he was punished.
- 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- 10 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

The directions were clear:

A servant was coming, not a military commander.
He would suffer, and be mocked, and be killed.
His death would be to erase our sins and take them away.
He would be despised and mocked.
His hands and feet would be pierced.
He would be placed in a grave of the rich.
He would live again after death.
Kings would bow to him and listen to him.

Directions! Written so folks would know what was coming, who was coming, what it was going to look like.

The Messiah promised was

a servant,
a sufferer,
a silent one in defense of the charges brought against him,
a stand in for us, to take away our sins,

The directions said he would live again, but the eleven sat in the upper room, doubting, discouraged, dispirited, until Christ, the risen Christ, came and stood among them, and said "touch me," "feed me," "believe me." Now. I like the father trying to build a swing-set on his own, they couldn't make sense of the facts they knew, the Scripture they had always known, and the revelations they were experiencing. The Good News was that: Christ was alive. He was real. The resurrection had happened. They were not seeing a ghost; they were seeing the Lord, someone they could touch and feed. They were not just experiencing a historical event, the life and death of a man called Jesus; they were experiencing the mightiest act of God, in rescuing humanity from its sins of separation from and rejection of God.

God's plan had happened and they were a part of it. The risen Christ described them as witnesses to these things. Witnesses are not just by-standers; they have a function. They are to tell what they have seen, what they have experienced, what they now know. Witnesses! About whom Jesus said: these truths that you know must be preached in Jesus' name to all of the nations beginning at Jerusalem. Jesus told them, "I am going to send you to be witnesses to the world, but don't go just yet. Wait until I can send you the Holy Spirit; wait in Jerusalem."

More directions! Go to the world; witness these things you know, the truths you now understand. But wait until the power of the Holy Spirit arrives. This time they followed the directions; this time they waited in hope, and in amazement and in joy.

This Scripture from Luke 24 tells us so much:

The resurrection was and is real.

The cross was necessary, so that we could see visibly, proof that God loves us.

The eleven were let in on God's plan; they were witnesses to God's greatest act.

They were told to wait for the secret sauce of Christianity, so to speak; the Holy Spirit was coming, and they would be empowered to do all that God was asking them to do—to tell the world, to show the world, to take the Good News to the world, so the Holy Spirit could act on each one who heard.

The urgency of God's task was shared with them—God had acted, the Messiah had come, the world needed to know, the world needed salvation; and it was all up to them. This call to repentance needed to be heard, the world was waiting. The church could not remain in the upper room; the eleven and the other disciples had a mission—go to the world, tell the world what you know, call on the world to listen and to repent, then get out of the way and let the Holy Spirit act.

That was then, but the events in the upper-room were not meant to stay there.

The events of Easter have happened, but they are not meant to be forgotten; they are meant to be shared.

Christ came to them when they were dispirited and defeated, and before he left, they were full of joy and amazed and ready to go.

The eleven were confused all day long on Easter, but before the night was over, they had become certain, and committed and charged. They had seen the risen Christ, he had come into their lives and everything was different.

So, what about today?

If the Risen Christ is still alive,

If the Holy Spirit is still with us,

If the witnesses have spoken.

What does it mean?

It means Easter has no end;

it is everyday now;

it is our time to touch the hands and the feet and to erupt in joy, and to go.

We know that in every life the truth must be presented, the truth of Easter, and the hearer asked: Jelly Beans and rabbits? Or a cross and an empty tomb?

It's time to choose.