

Sermon Text: Luke 24:36-47 ³⁶ Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." ³⁷ But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. ³⁸ And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?" ³⁹ "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. ⁴¹ But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" ⁴² So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. ⁴³ And He took it and ate in their presence. ⁴⁴ Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Sermon Theme: Apostles Chosen to Lead the Mission Effort in the Early Church

- 1. Needed to be convinced of a risen Savior**
- 2. Needed to learn what Jesus' death and resurrection was all about**
- 3. Were to go out and proclaim to all nations the message of repentance and remission of sins through the risen Savior**

In the name of our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed;

With Jesus' victorious death and resurrection, our Savior perfectly completed the mission His Father gave Him, namely, redeeming the whole world of lost and condemned sinners from their huge debt of sin, the stranglehold of Satan, and the terrifying, unending death in hell. Now, the Lord Jesus turns to us and all other Christians to get the word out of His salvation both near and far. This is certainly a tall order! But lest we become overwhelmed by this, it is important to remember that along with Christ's command comes His power to carry it out.

During the early days of the Christian church, it was the apostles who lead the church in this mission outreach effort. Their taking the lead in mission work didn't mean them doing all the work. Sometimes folks have a tendency of thinking it is the professionally trained pastors, professors, teachers, and missionaries who are the only ones equipped to do mission work. Well, in the case of the apostles, they lead an army of regular, ordinary Christians who testified of the crucified and risen Savior during the course of their daily lives.

From time to time in our worship services we read and meditate on the Acts of the Apostles in a series of Scripture readings and sermon studies. We do this, because the book of Acts is filled with wonderful examples of mission work which we can learn from

and apply in carrying out our calling of spreading the message of life and salvation through Jesus Christ.

When we look in on the apostles the day Jesus rose from the dead, it is clear to see they were far from being ready to lead the church in mission work. Gathered together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, they were afraid to go anywhere. Oh, there were a few who ventured out, while the rest remained behind huddled together.

As we witness this scene in the pages of Holy Scripture, it should cause us to stop and take a look at ourselves in regard to bearing witness of Christ. Are we afraid to go outside the walls of our homes and the walls of this sanctuary to speak of Jesus and share our Christian beliefs? If so, are we hesitant because we are concerned about how people might react to us or because we are not quite sure what to say? Well, the apostles were fearful and they wouldn't have known what to say about the gospel of Christ in the early hours of that first Easter Sunday.

One major truth of the Christian faith the apostles needed to gain understanding of is that we have a living Savior. Although Jesus had previously told them a number of times He would have to suffer and die, and then rise back to life on the third day, for whatever reason they didn't expect to see Jesus alive again in this world. Even when reports came in on Sunday from the women and the two Emmaus disciples of having seen the risen Lord, they didn't believe them. That same evening when Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst, they couldn't believe what their eyes were seeing. The disciples thought they were seeing a spirit.

And so, Jesus had to appeal to their senses of sight and touch in order to convince them He was standing there before them in the flesh. He invited them to examine His body that bore the marks of His crucifixion and then to handle Him with their hands. And when these evidences didn't fully persuade the disciples He was physically alive, Jesus demonstrated to them He was not a spirit being by eating food in their presence.

How critical it was for the apostles and the other disciples of Christ to be completely convinced Jesus was truly alive again! This was necessary so that they could serve as eyewitnesses of the paramount fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection. They needed to be eyewitnesses for their own personal faith and they also needed to be eyewitnesses for the sake of our Christian faith and for all others who would believe in the risen Savior.

The apostle Paul testifies of the importance of Christ's resurrection, as he emphatically states the Christian faith hinges upon it. He declares that if Christ is not risen, we don't have a Savior. This would mean that our faith in Jesus is vain and empty, we are still in our sins, and we are hopelessly doomed to hell.

But since Christ did rise from the dead, this serves as a bedrock foundation for saving truths which we rest our faith securely upon and bear witness of to those who do not know their living Savior. Quite briefly, Jesus' resurrection proves that He is God, for no mere mortal can raise himself from the dead. Because Jesus is God, He was able to bear all the sins of the world and suffer the full punishment for them on the cross. His resurrection is also the heavenly Father's way of declaring to the whole world He accepted Jesus' payment for all their sins—past, present, and future, and therefore marks

their account with Him paid in full, forgiven of all our sins through Jesus Christ. And finally, Jesus' resurrection means that because He rose victorious from the dead in a glorified physical form, as believers in Christ we too shall be raised from the dead on the last day with perfect bodies and souls with which we will be living in the new world of heaven.

The Easter celebration just past means different things to different people. For many, Easter is merely the celebration of the Easter bunny, Easter lilies, colored eggs, and candy, and welcoming the coming of spring with its green grass, leaves budding out on trees and shrubs, and flowers blossoming. With Easter on the minds of so many, if we are talking with others about Easter and they don't know what Easter is about, we can share with them the blessed truths just mentioned concerning what Jesus' resurrection means to us and should mean to everybody else.

There are undoubtedly many in the world who know of Jesus and that He died on the cross. However, what most of them don't know is why Jesus had to suffer and die in this manner. And as we learn from our Scripture text, the disciples of Christ didn't as yet fully understand what Jesus' crucifixion was all about. And so, Jesus had to help them learn of this. In verses 44-46 we read, "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.'" The Lord Jesus reminded His disciples of what He had told them previously about His redemptive work and about the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him and His work. Through the use of God's powerful Word Jesus opened their understanding to know and believe that what was foretold about Him in the Old Testament was fulfilled by Him in bringing about the salvation of all mankind.

When folks hear reference being made to the Bible, there are those who are inclined to dismiss this book as being just a rule book of do's and don'ts. And it would appear there are many in our day who don't like to hear they are doing anything wrong in their lives. We might hear them say, don't tell me I am doing something wrong and I wouldn't tell you that you are doing something wrong.

Well, we know the Bible isn't basically a rule book. Rather, the central message of the Bible is that Jesus Christ is our promised Lord who came into this world to bless us with eternal life in heaven. The Old Testament foretold it and the New Testament reveals its fulfilment. Toward the end of the gospel of John the evangelist declares, "but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn. 20:31) What John writes here is not only the case with his gospel record, but also the whole of Holy Scripture, both the Old and New Testament.

There are to be sure do's and don'ts in the Bible. We know them as God's unchangeable moral Law, His commandments that apply to all mankind in every generation of time. Whether or not people like to hear the law of God and how it applies

to them, we are to make use of it in carrying out one aspect of our mission, that of calling sinners to repentance. Every sinner is in need of hearing the Law of God which exposes our sinfulness, convicts us for it and shows us our lost condition. Without this, none of us would recognize the need of a living Savior who takes away our sins and delivers us from our deserved punishment. So then, everyone is in need of hearing the do's and don'ts of God's holy Law whether it be in preparation of Christian conversion or keeping us in the Christian faith.

Will unconverted sinners like to hear their sinfulness exposed? Most likely not! Because of our sinful flesh who among us like to have our sins exposed?

Will we be able to convince sinners of their lost condition? This is not our concern, because we are not the ones who opens human understanding, convicts him of his sin, crushes his spirit with sorrow, and makes him ready to learn of his living Savior. God does that through His powerful Word.

When through that powerful Word the Lord brings low the sinner so that he despairs of himself and wants to learn of how he can be saved, that is when we have the opening to share the saving Gospel of Christ. We can testify of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus who took away all our sins by His sacrificial death on the cross and that because of Jesus's redemptive work God the Father declares us forgiven of all our sins.

As we share the Gospel of Christ, we want our hearers to know that God's forgiveness and eternal salvation is unconditional. God doesn't tell us to do this and that in order to merit forgiveness. No. He gives us forgiveness and eternal life in heaven as a gift full and free.

God simply calls us through His Word to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior for the remission of our sins. And even our response of repentance and faith is not something we manufacture. God through His powerful, Spirit-filled Word works repentance and faith in our hearts. As Christian witnesses, we are simply to share the Word of God and the Lord will do the rest.

What a wonderful blessing it is to know and believe in our living Savior, for He is life and salvation to us! What privilege we have to serve as ambassadors of Christ to bear witness of Him to a spiritually dying world. May the Lord ever keep us in the Christian faith and bless our efforts of spreading the message of salvation both near and far. Amen.