

Seeing for Yourself • Luke 24

The *Jesus* film presents the life of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament gospel of Luke. It has been translated into 871 different languages and has been seen by almost six billion people around the globe. For many of those people it is the first time they have ever seen or heard anything about Jesus Christ. For one audience in an East Asian jungle it was not only the first time they heard the story of Jesus but it was the first time they had ever seen a movie!

Outside after dark the projector started up and the motion picture appeared on the screen. The crowd was attracted to the Jesus who performed miracles, healed the sick and loved little children. But when this good man was arrested and beaten by soldiers the crowd was outraged. They demanded that this cruelty be stopped. When the cruelty continued they attacked the missionary who was operating the projector assuming that somehow he was responsible for this cruelty and injustice. He had no choice but to stop the projector and explain that it wasn't over yet; there was more to come. So the crowd settled down and the film began again.

But when the film came to the crucifixion they lost control. People wept and wailed. The sounds were so loud that the film again had to be stopped until the audience calmed down. Again they were told that the story wasn't over and there was more to see.

When they were quiet enough to start again the film came back on and they watched the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out. A party started. There was singing, dancing, shouting and slapping each other on the back in celebration. The cheers and shouts of joy were deafening. So the missionary once again stopped the projector, but he didn't tell them to calm down. They were doing exactly what should be done when experiencing the resurrection of Jesus. Shout and jump and dance and celebrate!

The story they saw on film includes a group of women who came to grieve over Jesus' dead body. It is the same story we read in Luke 24:1-8:

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. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 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? 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.'" Then they remembered his words.

Up until that moment they had given up all hope. Desperation had set in. Dead was dead and they might just as well accept it because it was something they would not change. These friends and family

of Jesus didn't come with faith or high expectations. They came with grief, sadness and defeat. When they saw that Jesus' body was missing it never occurred to them that anything supernatural had happened. They didn't know what had happened.

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Two very bright angels appeared to them and just about scared them to death. Filled with fear they fell to the ground and put their faces in the dirt because they were so frightened by all that was going on. Then they heard these angels announce that Jesus was alive again. He had risen from the dead.

That seemed highly unlikely. It sounded impossible until they remembered that Jesus had

actually predicted that this would happen. They had seen his miracles. They had heard his teaching. They knew his character. What Jesus had predicted had come true!

For women and men of every generation this is what Jesus does. He brings hope to replace grief; he brings new life right out of death. For those who feel hopeless, the Easter resurrection of Jesus is the best news we could ever hear.

These women had to tell! They rushed into the city of Jerusalem to report to Jesus' other disciples who were hiding out in a safe house. In Luke 24:9-12 we are told:

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 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.

Have you ever told the truth and no one would believe you? You're all excited but no one seems to care? For Jesus to come back to life seemed too farfetched for any of them to believe. It just sounded to them like absolute nonsense. But Peter wondered, "What if it really happened?" Maybe it was true! So, on the outside chance, he ran to the tomb to see for himself.

Peter is like all of us who are naturally skeptical. The difference is that he was willing to check out the possibility even if he had his doubts. He went to the tomb and found it empty. It wasn't absolute proof, but it was enough to start him down the road to faith.

Luke 24:13-32 tells about a couple who one night were walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to their hometown of Emmaus. While they were walking a stranger came along and walked and talked with them. He asked what they were talking about. They were surprised to hear that he didn't know the big news. In verses 18-24 we hear

the following dialogue:

"Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" (the stranger) asked.

"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; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Then the stranger shared with them how this perfectly fit with all the Old Testament prophecies. The couple was dazzled by the stranger's information and insights so they invited him home for dinner. During dinner they suddenly realized that this was no stranger at all. This was Jesus! It was true. He was alive . . . and right there eating dinner and talking with them.

How could it take them so long to recognize and believe that Jesus was right there in front of them? Well, there have been lots of people like Cleopas who can look Jesus in the eye and somehow think he is someone else. There are couples who have Jesus come right into their homes but don't sense who he is. People have had conversations with complete strangers who were sent by God and they failed to recognize that God was the one who sent those strangers and spoke those words. There are stories of those who have been up close with Jesus and never recognized who he was. But that's what the Easter story is all about. It's about opening our eyes so that we can see Jesus for ourselves.

This couple from Emmaus was so excited that they practically ran the seven miles back to Jerusalem to report what had happened. They searched out Jesus' family and friends who were hold up

in that house and burst in and announced, “*It is true! The Lord has risen!*”

Everyone was talking at once. There were conversations, questions, excitement and, “*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’*”

Suddenly everyone was silent. They were startled, shocked and scared. They thought he was a ghost! But he was no ghost. Jesus was alive and Jesus was there and it was amazing to them. He said, “*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.*”

That was just like Jesus! He stepped right into their lives and their homes and showed himself up close and personal. When they saw his scars they jumped for joy and amazement. It was like that showing of the movie in the jungle when pandemonium broke out!

This Easter you are invited to come and see Jesus for yourself. See Jesus in the Bible. See Jesus in the Easter story. See Jesus in your prayers. See Jesus in your dreams. See Jesus in your home. See Jesus in the strangers God sends your way. See Jesus in the circum-

stances of your life. See Jesus. Experience Jesus. Believe Jesus. Accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord. He will transform your life from here all the way to eternity.

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the dictator Joseph Stalin wanted to eradicate Christianity from Russia. Peasants in the remotest villages were forced to hear long speeches by touring commissars denouncing Jesus Christ and substituting Karl Marx. After one such speech the commissar sat down, convinced he had talked them out of their faith and into his atheism.

At first the assembly hall was silent. Then a Russian Orthodox priest stood up in the back of the assembly hall and shouted out, “I have one thing to say to you. Christ is risen!” And with that the entire assembly immediately and resoundingly responded, “Christ is risen indeed!”

They had seen him for themselves. They had experienced him in their lives. They believed and no one was going to dissuade them.

This Easter . . . see Jesus for yourself and believe in him.

***See Jesus. Experience Jesus.
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