

# THE FINAL WORD

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, April 16, 2006

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“Facts versus faith”? The best faith is not at odds with facts, but founded on them. Faith usually includes many questions and not a few doubts, but steps beyond them to reach out to God. See how the first disciples of Jesus did it...

*Luke 24:13* That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles out of Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> Suddenly, Jesus himself came along and joined them and began walking beside them. <sup>16</sup> But they didn't know who he was, because God kept them from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> “You seem to be in a deep discussion about something,” he said. “What are you so concerned about?”

*They stopped short, sadness written across their faces.*

<sup>18</sup> Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.”

<sup>19</sup> “What things?” Jesus asked.

“The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “He was a prophet who did wonderful miracles. He was a mighty teacher, highly regarded by both God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> But our leading priests and other religious leaders arrested him and handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. <sup>21</sup> We had thought he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. That all happened three days ago. <sup>22</sup> Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. <sup>23</sup> They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! <sup>24</sup> Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, Jesus' body was gone, just as the women had said.”

<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “You are such foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. <sup>26</sup> Wasn't it clearly predicted by the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his time of glory?” <sup>27</sup> Then Jesus quoted passages from the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining what all the Scriptures said about himself.

<sup>28</sup> By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus would have gone on, <sup>29</sup> but they begged him to stay the night with them, since it was getting late. So he went home with them. <sup>30</sup> As they sat down to eat, he took a small loaf of bread, asked God's blessing on it, broke it, then gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

<sup>32</sup> They said to each other, “Didn't our hearts feel strangely warm as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” <sup>33</sup> And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem, where the eleven disciples and the other followers of Jesus were gathered. When they arrived, they were greeted with the report, <sup>34</sup> “The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter!”

<sup>35</sup> Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. <sup>36</sup> And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>37</sup> But the whole group was terribly frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

<sup>38</sup> “Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why do you doubt who I am? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do!” <sup>40</sup> As he spoke, he held out his hands for them to see, and he showed them his feet.

<sup>41</sup> Still they stood there doubting, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he ate it as they watched.

<sup>44</sup> Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me by Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. <sup>47</sup> With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of all these things."

I have been to the site where they think Jesus was so briefly buried. The tomb has two small compartments, one on the right for the body, one on the left for viewing, and perhaps for later burials. It was a powerful object lesson. And, indeed, it was empty.

French mathematician Blaise Pascal reasoned, "I see no greater difficulty in believing the resurrection of the dead or the conception of the Virgin than the creation of the world. Is it less easy to reproduce a human body than it was to produce it at first?"

And the creation itself votes for a resurrection, as J. Pearson suggested, "Every space of twenty-four hours teaches this much, in which there is always a revolution amounting to a resurrection. The day dies into a night, and is buried in silence and in darkness: in the next morning it appears again and revives, opening the grave of darkness, rising from the dead of night. This is a diurnal resurrection.

"As the day dies into night, so does the summer into winter. The sap is said to descend into the root, and there it lies buried in the ground; the earth is covered with snow, or crusted with frost, and becomes a general sepulcher. When the spring appears, all begin to rise; the plants and flowers peep out of their graves, revive, and grow, and flourish. This is the annual resurrection."

Whether you can see it in the creation or not, the subject of resurrection did not first begin with Jesus. Long before, Job had said: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And...in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). Much later, the promise was still around, when Daniel predicted, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Such promises were not referring to some vague "immortality of the soul," as taught in pagan religions, but to the resurrection of the body.

The chief priests and religious leaders were determined that Jesus was going to stay in His grave. They used every resource and power available to see to that. They secured the tomb by placing a seal on the heavy stone that had been rolled in front of it to close the entrance (Matthew 27:66). They also posted guards at the entrance of the tomb. These were not ordinary bodyguards, but the Roman army's elite special forces (*koustodia*).

In spite of all their human efforts, the Jewish leaders were unable to prevent Jesus from accomplishing what had already been determined and promised: "After three days I will rise again" (Matthew 27:63). They did not know that *nothing* in the physical realm can prevent God from accomplishing His purpose — that's what defines a miracle. You cannot stop a real resurrection.

Paul states that all who are baptized into Christ are baptized into his death, and that just as Christ was raised to a new physical life by the power of God they are to be raised to a new spiritual life in Christ through the waters of baptism (Romans 6:3-7). Some suggest this is not so; that a baptized believer remains the same as he was before his so-called "conversion." (If you were a dirty rat before, you're just a wet rat now.) But you cannot stop a real resurrection.

You can stop a fake, but not a genuine resurrection to a new life in Christ. God's incomparably great power is available to those who believe. "That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:19, 20).

If you deliberately decide in your heart that you will let your old self be buried and be raised to a new life in Christ, you have God's promise that you cannot be stopped!

Of course, if you are looking for an excuse for living the same old life day after day, you will find plenty to choose from. There are numerous people and things to blame. You can blame society, or your spouse or your children, or your parents, or your neighbors or hypocrites in the church. You can blame the wrong side of the tracks or the bed, a tough childhood, or bad breaks. If you are a fake, you will always have an excuse why you cannot change. Excuses are endless.

But if you want to be raised to a new life you will be. Nothing can stop you. If you are genuine, you cannot be stopped. *No one can stop a real resurrection!*

Well over three hundred verses in the New Testament are concerned with the subject of Jesus' resurrection. We are told that this event is a sign for unbelievers (Matthew 12:38-40), as well as the answer for a believer's doubt (Luke 24:38-43). It serves as the guarantee that Jesus' teachings are true (Acts 2:22-24; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20) and is the center of the Good News message itself (Romans 4:24-25, 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Further, the resurrection is the impetus for proclaiming that message (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 10:39-43), the key indication of the believer's daily power to live the Christian life (Romans 6:4-14, 8:9-11; Philippians 3:10) and the reason for the total commitment of our lives (Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 15:57-58). The resurrection even addresses the fear of death (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58; cf. Hebrews 2:14-15) and is related to the second coming of Jesus (Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7). Furthermore, this event is a model of each Christian's resurrection from the dead (Acts 4:2; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and a foretaste of the heavenly life (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

It is central, it is key, it is a model.

If you came to a crossroads and you saw there a dead man and a living man, which one would you ask for directions?

If you are seeking to know God, where should you turn?

If you are seeking Jesus, do not go to His grave. You will not find Him there.

I find it quite striking that once the disciples were convinced that Jesus had risen they never again visited His tomb (at least there is no record of it). Why should they? It was only a passing incident in the life and ministry of our Lord.

They did not make pilgrimages to it. They did not esteem it above any other place. They did not bury it beneath tokens of affection. They did not break off pieces of the rock to keep as relics. No, after that first Sunday evening, the disciples were done with the tomb. Why give their time to the veneration of a burial site, when they had the living Savior with them?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's FINAL WORD. He gives the final word to sin. He gives the final word to death. He gives the final word to all human weakness, misery and pain.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives God's final word. His righteousness overcomes our sin. His hope overcomes our despair. His joy overcomes our grief. His life overcomes our death. That is why, and that is how we are "more than conquerors in all these things." We have the final word in Jesus Christ.