

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES PRIOR TO HIS ASCENSION TO HEAVEN

Clearly the significance of the post resurrection appearances of Christ to His disciples and others prior to His ascension to Heaven is that they are at the heart of early Christian belief. The disciples could thus preach that Jesus was alive; that He had risen as He said He would, and that He was the Son of God as He claimed to be, which is one of the core doctrines of the Christian faith (CP Ac 1:1-3; Ro 10:6-11). Prior to His post-resurrection appearances, none of Jesus' disciples truly believed that He would rise from the dead until they had personally seen Him at His post-resurrection appearances (CP Mt 28:16-17; Mk 16:9-13; Lu 24:1-11; Jn 20:24-29). Mt 28:17 teaches that even though they personally saw Jesus, some still hesitated to believe it was Him. Even James, Jesus' half-brother who wrote the Book of James, did not believe that He was truly the Son of God until Jesus appeared to him after He had risen (CP Jn 7:3-5 and 1Cor 15:3-7). See also author's comments on Mt 12:46-47, Mk 3:20-21, Jn 7:5 and 19:25-27 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**.

Scriptures record that Jesus walked the earth for forty days after His resurrection prior to His ascension to Heaven, and during that time He appeared to the disciples and others on twelve separate occasions. It is difficult to harmonise those occasions positively as no gospel writer has recorded all His post-resurrection appearances. Certain appearances have been recorded by certain writers stressing the peculiarities of those particular occasions without denying other appearances on other occasions. Mark and John however do record that His first post-resurrection appearance was to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb early on the Sunday morning following His crucifixion (CP Mk 16:9; Jn 20:11-18). It needs to be noted here that while Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene as Mk 16:9 records, that in no way implies that she was a prostitute as so many Christians in the contemporary Church have been taught (CP Lu 8:1-3). Christ's gentle admonition to Mary not to touch Him in Jn 20:17 (KJV), was because Mary was clinging to Him and He did not want to be detained. He had not yet ascended to the Father, which He was about to do (CP Jn 20:17 with Mt 28:9). See also author's comments on Mt 12:46-47, 26:6-13, Lu 8:1-3, Jn 7:5, 20:17(a) and Jas 1:1 in his book **A Question and answer Study of the New Testament**.

Christ's next recorded post-resurrection appearance was to both Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" who accompanied her to the empty tomb (CP Mt 28:1-10). Scriptures do not identify the "other Mary" and it is pointless speculating who she was. Christ's third recorded post-resurrection appearance was to the two disciples He met on the road to Emmaus (CP 24:13-32). One of the disciples is identified in V 18 as Cleopas, who was married to Jesus' mother's sister, also called Mary (CP Jn 19:25). Jesus' fourth recorded post-resurrection appearance was to Peter, obviously after He vanished from the sight of the two disciples in Emmaus (CP Lu 24:30-34). Later, Paul also referred to this appearance by Christ to Peter (CP 1Cor 15:3-5). The fifth recorded post-resurrection appearance of Christ prior to His ascension to Heaven

was to the disciples in the upper room who were in hiding for fear of the Jews. It was still the first day of Jesus' resurrection – Sunday – in the evening, after Cleopas and the other disciple had returned to Jerusalem from Emmaus. Thomas Didymus was not present (CP Lu 24:33-40; Jn 20:19-24).

Jn 20:19 underlines the fact that resurrection bodies can enter rooms without using doors (CP also V 26). It is also worth noting here that the reason the disciples did not believe it when told of Christ's resurrection, was because they did not understand and would not accept it even when Christ Himself had repeatedly told them it would happen (CP Mt 16:21-23; Mk 8:31-33; 9:9-10; Jn 20:9). See also author's comments on Mt 16:21-23, Mk 9:9-10, Jn 20:9, 20:19, 20:22 and 20:23 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**.

Jesus' next, and sixth post-resurrection appearance prior to ascending to Heaven, was to the eleven disciples eight days later on the following Sunday in the upper room. This time, Thomas Didymus was present (CP Jn 20:26-29). Thomas' response in V 28 was not just an exclamation, but a testimony to his belief in the Deity of Jesus – that He is the eternal Lord God Almighty. Thomas was the first New Testament Christian to give the title of God to Jesus. Whether or not he put his hand in Jesus' side is not stated and the fact remains that he only believed because he saw. There is no special blessing pronounced on those who have seen God and believe as there is on those who have not seen Him and believe. Believers walk by faith not by sight (CP V 29 with 2Cor 5:7). See also author's comments on 2Cor 5:6-9 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**.

(CP Jn 21:1-25). This is Christ's seventh post-resurrection appearance, and the third time He had appeared to the disciples. He appeared here by the Sea of Galilee – or Tiberius as it is also called in Scripture – to the seven who had gone fishing. This was after the second Sunday when Thomas testified to Christ's Deity. The disciples did not immediately recognise Jesus until John told Peter that it was the Lord, after Jesus told them where to throw the net so it would fill with fish. We also learn from this that Christians will still eat food in their resurrection bodies as Jesus did, for we will be like Him (CP 1Jn 3:2 with Lu 22:28-30, 24:30-31, 36-43). Jesus ate meat with the two disciples in Emmaus, fish and honeycomb with the disciples in Jerusalem, and broiled fish and bread here (CP Jn 21:12-14). Jesus was not raised up a spirit as so many Christians believe – He was bodily resurrected, which also proves the immortality of the soul and spirit. Only the body dies at physical death (CP Jas 2:26). See also author's comments on Lu 24:36-43 and Jn 21:12-13 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**.

It should be noted here before moving on that Jesus' purpose in asking Peter three times in Jn 21:15-17 if he loved Him is not recorded and is not pertinent to the study. Also, Jesus is not giving Peter primacy over the other disciples as some teach in commanding

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him to feed His lambs and His sheep. The disciples were all equal in authority as Scriptures clearly teach (CP Mt 20:20-28; Lu 22:24-27). In Jn 21:15-17 Jesus was simply giving Peter a threefold command to carry out his Apostolic duties for which he had been called (CP Eph 2:19-20). Christ's rebuke to Peter in Jn 21:20-23 teaches that Christian's should only be concerned with God's plan for their life, not another's (CP Jn 21:20-23 with Php 2:12 and 1Pe 3:15). See also author's comments on Mt 16:19, 20:28, 23:8-12, Jn 21:15, 21:15-17(a), 21:15-17(b), 21:18-19, 21:20-23 and Php 2:12-13 in his book **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**, and his study *Jesus not Peter the Rock upon which the Church is Built* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**.

Jesus' eighth post-resurrection appearance prior to His ascension to Heaven is again to the eleven disciples, but this time on a mountain in Galilee (CP Mt 28:16-20). What occurred here follows on from V 7 and 10 (CP V 7 and 10). *Doubted* in V 17 (KJV), means hesitated. Scriptures record that on another occasion Jesus appeared to "the twelve". This is a reference to the twelve apostles which includes Matthias, but not Paul (CP 1Cor 15:1-5). Although Matthias was not appointed to replace Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve Apostles until after Christ ascended to Heaven, he had always been one of Jesus' closest disciples, and he was an Apostle when Paul referred to them in 1Cor 15 (CP Ac 1:12-26). Following on His appearance to the twelve, Jesus then appeared to five hundred others of His followers of whom some had died, but others were still living to testify of the occasion when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian Church (CP 1Cor 15:6). This is Jesus' tenth recorded post-resurrection appearance. After this the risen Christ

was seen by His half-brother, James (CP Ga 1:19), and then by all the Apostles (CP 1Cor 15:7 with Mk 16:19-20; Lu 24:50-53; Ac 1:1-12, 26). That accounts for all Jesus' post-resurrection appearances recorded in Scripture prior to His ascension to Heaven – there are twelve in all. Last but by no means least He appeared to Paul – as Saul – on the road to Damascus. This was of course after His ascension to Heaven, but it enabled Paul also to preach a risen Christ, and the Gospel of Salvation (CP Ac 9:1-27 with 1Cor 15:1-34). See also author's comments on Ac 9:1-2 and 1Cor 15:1-2-11 and his study *Paul the Apostle – a Chosen Vessel unto God* in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 2)**.

After His death on the cross Jesus' disciples were discouraged and defeated. When He was arrested they all forsook Him and fled, except Peter. At His trial though, Peter denied knowing Him three times. Then they went into hiding for fear of their lives (CP Mt 26:56, 69-75; Jn 20:19). But after Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, a new dimension was added to their lives; their lives took on new meaning. They became bold and fearless in their witness to the resurrection power of Jesus to save and to heal; they rejoiced in persecutions they underwent for His name's sake. Most died as martyrs for the cause of the Gospel (CP Ac Ch 1-8; 12:1-2). Had the risen Christ not appeared to His disciples and others prior to His ascension to Heaven, His resurrection could never have been proved and Christianity would have ended with His death on the cross (see also author's comments on 1Cor 15:1-11 in his book **A Question and answer Study of the New Testament**, and his study, *The Resurrection*, in his book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith**).