



A 5-DAY EASTER DEVOTIONAL



Meeting the *Risen* Christ

JONATHAN LANDRY CRUSE

Introduction



EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS MET JESUS.

Now, if you're not a Christian, that probably sounds like a very bizarre claim. (Granted, many claims of the Christian faith can seem strange!) How can we have met someone who lived roughly 2,000 years ago? But believers throughout the ages know that a real, Spirit-born faith brings us into a living fellowship with Jesus. Our relationship to Christ isn't propositional or philosophical, but personal.

It's no insignificant thing to underscore that the Jesus we know is a *risen* Jesus. There was a time when people knew Jesus apart from the resurrection, but the staggering historical event of the empty tomb now defines the Christ of every Christian. In fact, we today couldn't know him apart from the resurrection, and more than that, he wouldn't be worth knowing at all were it not for the resurrection! After all, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Cor. 15:17).

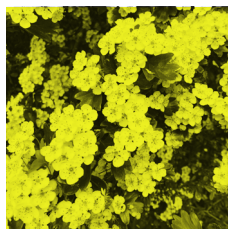
Since this is so, it's important for believers and seekers alike to acquaint themselves with what the Bible teaches us about Jesus after his resurrection. Most of the Gospel accounts deal with Jesus's life on earth before his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—and that's for good reason. The Jesus who ministered for three years prior to his cruel death on Calvary is the same Jesus that we await now from glory. He's the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb.13:8). The love, mercy, grace, authority, and power revealed to us in the Bible are still true of him and forever will be.

That's precisely why the few glimpses of Christ post-resurrection are gold for us. They remind our souls that even though he has entered into a glorified state—even though he has ascended into heaven—he's still the same Jesus we have come to know and love through the Gospel narratives. The five biblical texts in this devotional record encounters with the risen Christ, and they reveal that he is *for* us. They show what it means for us to encounter Jesus today, because the Jesus we come to know and believe on today is a risen Jesus.

It would be a good exercise at any time to acquaint yourself again with the Bible's revelation of the resurrected Son of God, the Lamb slain yet standing (Rev. 5:6). But it's perhaps especially meaningful around Easter to return to these portions of Scripture. As we reflect on familiar passion narratives, let us also remember where they're headed: to an empty tomb and a risen Savior who meets and speaks with his people, assuring us that we'll soon share in his victory.

Jonathan Landry Cruse pastors Community Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Kalamazoo, MI, where he lives with his wife and children. He is the author of *The Christian's True Identity*, *What Happens When We Worship*, and *The Character of Christ* (forthcoming).

The Risen Christ Knows Us *By Name*



Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

JOHN 20:16

UNTIL THIS POINT she was weeping over the loss of a friend. She was trying to come to grips with a future that looked entirely bleak. She had supposed she was speaking with a random groundskeeper. *Until he said her name.*

“Mary.”

Suddenly, Mary is brought back to reality. At that moment, the scales fall off her eyes, so to speak, and she’s able to see clearly again. At the sound of her name on the lips of her Savior, the whole world comes into focus. The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name, and they hear his voice (John 10:3). At that moment, she recognizes she’s not talking to the gardener at all, she’s talking to her beloved teacher—“Rabboni!”

What Mary is experiencing is unsettling, to say the least. She’s encountering a man who is alive—*again!* But to dispel fear or consternation, the resurrected Christ speaks a sweet word of assurance. “Doubtless much of the magical effect of Jesus’s word was due to the tone in which he spoke it,” says Geerhardus Vos. But in this single word spoken in this singular way, he “assure[s] her that whatever transformation had taken place, there could be and would be no change in the intimate, personal character of their relationship.”¹

It’s very important for us to realize that Jesus’s first words out of the tomb aren’t a speech or public discourse in front of the masses. Instead, his first words are a personal conversation with a friend. That’s because he’s a personal Savior, and that doesn’t change after the resurrection. Even now as the crowned King—who conquered death itself and thus rules over all the living—he’s still intimately interested in you and me. We joke with gifted or popular friends, “Don’t forget us when

you’re famous!” Jesus doesn’t. And he proves it right here by addressing Mary.

This is meant to fill our hearts with great hope and confidence! In the world of the resurrection, our Savior will speak to us by name. And to know our name means he knows us. He knows our needs, our desires, our hurts, our weaknesses, our hopes, our joys, and our troubles. This is why he can wipe away every tear (Rev. 21:4) and cause our weeping to cease, as he does with Mary (John 20:15)—because he’s a personal Savior.

We’re learning from this episode what the risen Jesus does: He says our names. Perhaps that seems insignificant to you. Let me put it to you like this: The only way for you to be saved is if Almighty God in heaven hears your name on the lips of his beloved Son. There’s no entering heaven, the land of resurrection, unless the Resurrected One says to his Father, “I know her. She’s with me.”

Although in the world to come there will be a countless multitude raised to life eternal praising the Lamb that was slain, we shouldn’t think of it as some crowd of people filled with anonymous faces. Each will be known and named by none other than Christ himself. For in that place there is the Book of Life, with every name of every believer written down in permanent ink. Our risen Savior promises us in Revelation 3 that to the one who believes in him, “I will never blot his name out of the book of life. *I will confess his name before my Father*” (v. 5, emphasis added)—and this is what saves us. And so we sing, “My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands no tongue can bid me thence depart.”²

¹ Geerhardus Vos in his sermon “Rabboni,” <https://www.kerux.com/doc/0702A1.asp>.

² Charitie Lees Bancroft, “Before the Throne of God Above,” 1863.

The Risen Christ *Unlocks* the Scriptures



Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

LUKE 24:44–45

AS MY THREE-YEAR-OLD SON and I sit on the couch reading a book together, he can’t help himself but to ask a question about every other sentence. He wants to know why the characters do what they do, what motivates them, what will happen because of their actions, how the good guys will win and the “naughty guys” will lose. My answer is always the same, and is expressed with an undeniable exasperation after about the fourth time: “We have to keep reading to find out!”

There are certain stories that don’t make sense at all until their conclusion, and the Bible is one of them. That’s not to say that we can’t glean much from surveying the stories and wisdom of the Old Testament. But it isn’t until we turn to the Gospels that things start to come into brilliant clarity. It’s the person of Jesus Christ who remedies the great trouble called sin and death that has plagued humanity since the dawn of time and the opening pages of the Bible. Because of that, it’s accurate to say that it’s not only Jesus, but specifically *the resurrected Jesus*, who makes sense of the Scriptures for us.

That’s what the disciples learned in Luke 24. Two disciples are walking on a road to Emmaus discussing the recent events that have taken place in Jerusalem. Jesus approaches the men, but he’s unrecognizable to them. They begin to relay the exciting story to him, including a sincere statement of their desire for Jesus to be the Messiah—God’s long-awaited answer to how the story ends: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). But they seem to say this with a sense of disappointment. Why do they only hope that he could have been the Messiah? Where is their deep-seated conviction that he is the Messiah? They don’t yet believe the resurrection.

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. (Luke 24:22–24)

“Apparently those who went to the tomb had hoped to see Jesus; but they did not, and this threw doubt on what the women had said.”¹ Perhaps also the fact that they didn’t recognize Jesus—though he was walking right beside them—is further proof that they were overwhelmed with doubts about the news of the resurrection. But then comes Jesus’s reply:

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

Jesus began to show them that the Scriptures they believed their whole lives didn’t really make any sense apart from him, and apart from his death and resurrection. He essentially repeats himself over dinner in front a larger gathering of the disciples a few verses later. And that’s when their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). It’s Jesus in his

¹ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 369.

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post-resurrection glory that hands the key of interpretation to the church.

Do you see the point? Until you believe in a Jesus who defeats death, the Bible will be confounding to you. Unfortunately, there are many so-called Christians today who believe in an impotent Jesus—one who is kind, gracious, and sacrificial, but not divine. One who gives us an example for how to love others, but who doesn’t pave the way to death-defeating victory. To buy into that kind of Jesus and open your Bible will be an exercise in futility. Even worse, trying to make sense of the world will be impossible.

How do we handle the many griefs and sorrows that meet us in life unless we believe in one who is both Man of Sorrows and King of Glory? How are we not overcome by despair at the presence of

evil in the world unless we see one who overcame ultimate evil through a cross and an empty tomb? And most especially, what are we to make of the sin of our own hearts, which the Bible tells us can lead only to death? The answer has to be found in Jesus Christ “who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

If you’re struggling with these sorts of questions, keep reading! At times you will be just as perplexed by the grief, evil, and sin that’s recorded in the Bible. How could things ever turn out for good? You have to keep reading to find out. And when you come to Jesus, by his Spirit your mind will be opened to understand the Scriptures.

The Risen Christ Wills Us *to Believe*



Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

JOHN 20:27

“UNLESS I SEE IN HIS HANDS the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25). Isn’t it sad that, 2,000 years later, these are the words we associate with Thomas? Jesus had appeared post-resurrection to some of the disciples, and when they relayed this information to Thomas, who had been absent from the meeting, he refused to accept their story. When we think of Thomas, it’s his stubborn and defiant statement, “I will never believe,” that rings in our ears. And so he has been dubbed by many as Doubting Thomas.

And yet, these are not Thomas’s final words in the story—nor his most significant. He speaks again, not words of doubt, but belief! “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Do we remember this statement as well?

How does one get from stubborn disbelief to a humble declaration of faith? What happens between verse 25 and verse 28? The answer is that Thomas has an encounter with the risen Christ.

We’ll all struggle with doubts at times, and when we do, we should think of Thomas. Not primarily because he was a doubter, as though we need someone in Scripture to commiserate with us in our fears and lack of faith. Rather, look to Thomas because he was a believer! Moreover, learn from this encounter between Thomas and his master that the risen Christ wants you to believe, too. Three things are worthy of note.

First, *Jesus cares about our doubts*. Jesus visits the disciples again, this time ensuring that Thomas is present to be a witness. Not only that, he draws Thomas into a conversation. He singles him out—not to shame him, but to welcome him into the wonderful world of belief. Jesus could have said, “Thomas, if you don’t believe like your friends, then you can leave. This club is for the

firm in faith!” If you lack assurance of salvation, remember that Jesus will never break a bruised reed or snuff out a faintly burning wick. He deals with our weaknesses—even the weakness and infirmity of our faith—with gentleness and care. He has compassion on those who suffer the affliction of a weak conscience or a timid heart.

Second, *Jesus provides means to strengthen our faith*. For Thomas, he invites him to touch the wounds left from the crucifixion. These tangible marks would assure Thomas that the man he saw standing before him was the very same man hanging lifeless on a cross just days earlier. We receive the very same thing as Thomas, since Christ has appointed a visible representation of his wounds to be memorialized until his return: the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:26). Just as Thomas was encouraged to touch the hands of Christ, we touch and feel the bread. As Thomas was encouraged to place his hand at the side of his Master, we likewise take the cup and remember the blood that poured out of his side.

Third, and most fundamentally, *Jesus causes us to believe*. We have missed the point of the story if we don’t recognize that Thomas’s exclamation, “My Lord and my God!” is a product of hearing the gracious words of his Savior. He doesn’t even touch the wounds—something we often forget! The call for Thomas to “believe” is what has rid him of all doubts and distrust. If you’re a Christian today, it’s because Jesus has spoken these very words into your heart as well. He has given us signs and symbols to confirm that word, yes. But our faith is not in the signs; our faith is in his word—a word which works powerfully with his Spirit to produce a full-hearted faith in us.

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a

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fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation... [and] the testimony of the Spirit.¹

So we have every reason to pursue stronger faith. Doubting is dangerous, and Jesus doesn't wish it upon us. As Joel Beeke points out, doubting “‘distracts us from serving Jesus wholeheartedly,’ denies us ‘answers to our prayers,’ robs us of ‘the joys of our salvation’ and challenges our bedrock belief that ‘salvation is by

¹ Westminster Confession of Faith 18.2.

faith.”² This doesn't need to be our story, since the powerful Christ wills us out of the dungeon of doubt. Pick up your Bible, read his promises, receive his sacraments, be bolstered by the faith of the community of believers. “Don't feel your way into your beliefs; believe your way into your feelings.”³

² Joel R. Beeke, *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2017), 181, quoting John Stevens.

³ J. D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You are Saved* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 108.

The Risen Christ *Empowers Our Mission*



And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

CHRIST’S FINAL WORDS on the cross were “It is finished.” And yet his final words before the ascension are “Go.” Is this a contradiction? Is the work done, or not?

Of course, what was “finished” at the cross was the redemptive work of Christ necessary to secure our safe passage from heaven to earth. Sin is dealt with. God’s wrath is appeased. Reconciliation between God and man is secured. Christ was displayed as the one and only King of Glory (Ps. 24), even as he hung like a pathetic Man of Sorrows. But this marks the transition to a new era—an era where the truth of who Christ is must be preached to all peoples. It’s the era where the church must pick up the mantle as it were and now proclaim the excellencies of their Lord to the whole world (1 Pet. 2:9).

Don’t misunderstand. I’m not saying that at one time God did the work of salvation and now we must do it. Far from it. It’s his work through and through, forever and ever. It’s out of the great “it is finished” of the cross that we’re refreshed, strengthened, energized, and equipped to faithfully “go and make disciples.” Jesus himself underscores that reality for his disciples—and for us—in two ways in this commission. Let’s consider how the resurrected and ascended Christ transforms the way we think about missions and evangelism.

First, *he proclaims his authority*. This is the right starting place when we think about serving in God’s kingdom: *It’s not about us*. It’s not our initiative, it’s Christ who authorizes the earthly work of the kingdom. He’s the king after all. The commission follows the crucifixion and resurrection, which acted as a coronation for our Savior. Now, out of that royal state, he gives the citizens of his kingdom a work to accomplish.

A commission for the church without a commissioning king makes no sense. As R. B.

Kuiper explains, “Christ was crowned in order that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . .’ which was to be brought about by the universal proclamation of His gospel. In royal majesty Christ declared to His apostles: ‘As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you’ (John 20:21).”¹

It’s also not our gifts or talent that will bring the work to success. Having the authority is another way of saying he has the power—the ability. If we try for a moment to accomplish work for God apart from God, it will fail. But because Christ rules both in earth and heaven, what God wills on earth will be done as it is in heaven. John Stott writes,

If the authority of Jesus were limited in heaven, if he had not decisively overthrown the principalities and powers, we might still proclaim him to the nations, but we would never be able to ‘turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God’ (Acts 26:18). Only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ dare we go to all nations. And only because all authority in heaven as well is his have we any hope of success.²

Second, *he promises his abiding presence*. “And behold, I am with you always, even to the

1 R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centred Evangelism* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 62.

2 John R. W. Stott, “The Great Commission,” in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task: World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin 1966, Official Reference Volumes*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1966), vol. 1, 46.

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MATTHEW 28:18-20

end of the age." Isn't this a lovely, heart-cheering word? One would think an ascended Savior is incompatible with an ever-present Savior. But by his Spirit, it can be said that Jesus both rules in glory and is with us everywhere we go. As we submit in faith to his call to be his ambassadors, the entire world is opened up to us. There's no knowing where that call might take us. But to the ends of the earth—the end of the age, even—our Lord is with us.

This gives us courage not just for witnessing across the world, but also across the street—perhaps even across the dinner table! "It will take boldness to speak of Christ to strangers. Yet often more boldness will be needed to face

friends and family than an unruly mob."³

Jesus isn't standing behind the battle lines, relaxing comfortably at headquarters while he barks orders to his mass of soldiers. It's his power, proven in the resurrection, which guides the ministry of the church. It's his presence, always abiding with and in us by the Spirit, that comforts and soothes every fear and anxiety we have about serving in God's kingdom and spreading his word. We should always be ready to go for him, knowing that he always stays with us.

³ Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 204.

The Risen Christ Protects *His Church*



And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

ACTS 9:4

SAUL OF TARSUS is on his way to a city north of Jerusalem, with a warrant for the arrest of anyone who dares worship Jesus as Lord. But God has different plans for him. A blinding light and a booming voice from heaven stop Saul in his tracks: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul can’t fathom who this voice could be. The glorious light would suggest God, but shouldn’t God be applauding his efforts to stamp out this Christian faction and promote the true Jewish faith? But when he asks, he gets this astounding reply: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).

Though there’s much to unpack here, for the purposes of this study we will focus on one aspect of this amazing encounter: the fact that Jesus tells Saul that he’s personally being persecuted. He doesn’t say, “Why are you persecuting my church? Why are you persecuting my people? Why are you persecuting my friends?” Jesus so identifies himself with his church that if something happens to them, it happens to him. He told the disciples just as much: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Matt. 25:40).” And now he’s teaching the same lesson to Saul. Saul is being taught the doctrine of union with Christ, which he would go on to teach to untold millions through his epistles, the New Testament letters to the early churches. As just one example out of dozens, we could look at Colossians 1:18, “And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

The apostle Paul is teaching what he first learned on that Damascus road: that whatever happens to Christ happens to the Christian, and vice versa. Why? Because Christ and his church belong to one body. They cannot be separated.

This scene conveys the deepest security for

the church. At the ascension of Jesus, the church could have panicked: their master was gone, who would help them now? But we know this isn’t how the ascension works. From his throne in glory, Christ is watching all things unfold. He permits all things to unfold. Nothing gets by him. What cause do we have for despairing—at the state of the culture around us or the hostility Christianity is experiencing in the West—when we know that Jesus isn’t dozing in glory? He’s alert, aware, and ready to intervene on behalf of his people. If need be, he’ll rend the heavens and come down—as he does with Saul.

But interestingly, here he rouses himself in grace. He doesn’t condemn Saul; he converts him. And then he commissions him! He tells him to head to Damascus, but now with a different purpose: to serve the church he once intended to destroy.

We learn from Jesus’s intervention on the Damascus road that he’ll confront all the church’s enemies. But we also see that sometimes he does that not by crushing them, but by melting their hearts. At times Jesus protects his church by actually turning her enemies into the church’s own friends, servants, and soldiers. If you’re a Christian today it’s because Christ has conquered your heart. “Every conversion is represented as a conquest,” writes Alexander Whyte.¹

Dear reader: You want Christ to conquer you now by melting your heart in repentance and faith; don’t wait for him to conquer you in judgment at his second coming. Revelation makes it clear what will come of the rebellious sinner on the last day, and why: “The Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are called, chosen,

¹ Alexander Whyte, *An Exposition on the Shorter Catechism* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2004), 91.

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and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). The church receives the perfect protection of the almighty reigning and ruling Lord Jesus Christ. The safest place to be, even in a world filled with persecution and trouble, is in the church.

If you're an enemy of God today, there are two options: you can be crushed, or you can be converted. Let the story of Saul of Tarsus be proof to you that it doesn't matter how zealously you may have hated the things of God before,

and it doesn't matter how serious your sin has been. If Christ can save Saul, he can save you. Saul would go on later in life to reflect on this when he wrote of the grace of the gospel: "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16).

