

If our story ended with the crucifixion, the story of Jesus would be a tragedy. Paul writes, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” 1 Corinthians 15:17-20. So let us continue our triumphant story.

It was Preparation Day, the day before the Sabbath, so as evening approached Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council, asked for the body. With the help of Nicodemus, they buried Jesus in Joseph’s tomb and rolled a huge stone in front of the entrance. Some women followers watched how it was done. The chief priests and Pharisees put a seal on the stone and hired guards to be sure no one removed the body.

“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” Matthew 28:2-4.

Early, on the first day of the week, some women came with spices to anoint Jesus’ body. Maybe they did not know Nicodemus had bought seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes so he and Joseph could give Jesus a proper burial. Seeing the stone already rolled away they went and saw a young man (angel) in a white robe. “‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. **He has risen!** He is not here. See the place where they laid him.’ ⁷ But go tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” Mark 16:6-7. Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” John 20:2b.

Peter and John run to the tomb. John gets there first, looks in but waits for Peter to go in first. He finds the linen strips and the head cloth folded up by itself. John follows inside, sees it all and believes. Then the disciples went to where they were staying.

Mary Magdalene hangs around trying to find out where they had taken Jesus. Jesus appears and talks to her. Then Jesus talks to the other women and says, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Matthew 28:10.

Next, Jesus joins Cleopas and his friend who are going to Emmaus. Without revealing himself, Jesus asks what they are talking about. Cleopas explains that Jesus of Nazareth was a great prophet but the chief priests had him crucified. It is now the **third day since** this all happened and some of the women went to the tomb and found it empty. An angel told them that Jesus was alive. Jesus explained the scriptures to them. At the evening meal, they recognized Jesus.

Jesus disappeared. Cleopas and his friend go back to Jerusalem and tell those assembled that they had seen and talked to the Lord. Luke 24:13-35, condensed. Even though they were meeting in a locked room for fear of the Jews, Jesus stood among them. They thought they were seeing a ghost but Jesus showed them his hands and feet and said a ghost does not have flesh and bones. He even ate some broiled fish in their presence.

Thomas was not there at this meeting and said he could not believe it. But the next week, when they met, he was there and Jesus again came and stood in their midst. “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’”²⁸ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’²⁹ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” John 20:27-29.

Jesus later meets with seven of his apostles by the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) where they were fishing. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus tells them to put their net on the right side. They caught 153 fish in their net. They had breakfast together. Then Jesus asked Simon Peter three times a variation of, “Do you love me more than these?” Each time Peter answered, “Yes Lord, you know I love you. Each time the Lord told him, “Feed my sheep.” Peter must have realized it was the same number of times he had denied that he knew the Lord.

The ascension is near. Jesus asked the eleven to meet him on a mountain near Bethany. “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Luke 24:18-20. Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit but they were to stay in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from high. “While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.” Luke 24:51.

“Those present (in Jerusalem) were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Acts 1:13b-14.

When it says “brothers” I expect all four of them were there; James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. Did Jesus visit his brothers after his resurrection? We don’t know. There were several persons he may have visited. Paul wrote that Jesus appeared to Cephas, then the twelve, then five hundred brothers and sisters at the same time, then James, then all the apostles, then me. I Corinthians 15:5-8 condensed. That James could have been his brother James or the apostle James.

Possible extras do not matter. Jesus was crucified. On the third day, he was resurrected. Jesus’ resurrection was confirmed. He is now at the right hand of God. Jesus told Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John 20:29b. That’s us!

Jesus ascended and went back to the Father. That does not mean he is no longer active in caring for his church. Jesus plainly told the apostles, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.¹⁸ **I will not leave you as orphans**; I will come to you.¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” John 14:16-21.

Jesus continues by identifying the Advocate and some of the things he will do, “All this I have spoken while still with you.²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:25-26.

Jesus expands on His use of the Holy Spirit. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” John 16:12-15.

Just before Jesus ascends He tells them, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:49. They (about 120) stayed, and they prayed and they added Matthias as a replacement for Judas, who had betrayed Jesus. That brought the apostles back to twelve. A few examples of Jesus’ involvement will show that he did not leave us orphans.

Did the promised Holy Spirit come? In the language of my youth, we would say, “And did it ever!” “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:1-4. The results were fabulous. About three thousand responded and were baptized into Christ.

My next example is the story of Stephen, Acts chapters six and seven. Stephen is introduced as a good man, full of the spirit, and doing a great job, teaching the Jews. He was one of those who had helped the Grecian widows. But some Jews from Crete, Alexandra, Celica and Asia, who wanted to keep the Law of Moses, accused him of blasphemy against God. To the Sanhedrin, Stephen gave a great summary of their history, beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus. But when he said they had murdered the Righteous One, they became furious and stoned him. “Steven, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” Acts 7:55. “And Saul was there giving approval to his death.” Acts 8:1.

Jesus knows that the Gentiles are not being given as much attention as he wants them to have, so he takes steps to correct the problem. My next example is the conversion of Saul. Sometimes, the best way to handle an enemy is to make him a friend. Jesus knew a lot of good things about Saul, he was a Roman citizen, he spoke multiple languages, he was educated in the Law of Moses at the feet of Gamaliel, and he was a tireless worker in trying to destroy the Way. At this point, Jesus intervened.

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ⁵ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁶ ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Acts 9:3-6. At this point, Saul is blind and had to be led into Damascus. After three days Ananias was sent to Saul and restored his sight and explained his mission. Then Saul arose and was baptized. Jesus had converted a worker to the Lord. He changed his name to Paul. Paul became a hard-working, very productive apostle.

The next example involves Peter. “As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ ‘Aeneas,’ Peter said to him, ‘**Jesus Christ heals you.** Get up and roll up your mat.’ Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” Acts 9:32-35.

My last example is about the seven churches in Asia because, even at the end of our New Testament writings, Jesus is still concerned about the churches and is trying to help them correct some problems working through John, the apostle.

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.’”

Each congregation, represented as a candle stick, was told what they were doing right and what needed improvement and what needed to be changed completely. One church was told they were dead. Another was told they needed to change or he might have to remove their candlestick. But each church was told that those members who were faithful, or repented and became faithful, would be rewarded for their faithfulness. Sometimes we conclude that if a church has a problem, no one in that congregation will be saved. The seven letters to the churches in Asia do not seem to agree with that assumption.

The letters written to the seven churches in Asia are very serious and should be studied regularly. We need to consider what Jesus is thinking about us.

When God the father says, “It’s time.” Jesus will return and judge the world. We need to be ready.