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Luke:24:44-53

"Until You Have Been Clothed With Power"

Did you ever feel confused, when one preacher shouted one thing and another preacher bellowed another, although each seemed to preach on the same subject? Well, I did. I remember getting confused, when I listened to different pastors preaching on the same subject.

It became even more confusing, when you were told innumerable times that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, while the preachers told you the opposing stories of the Bible. It got even worse, when you actually started to read the Bible: for example, the accounts surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you are a fan of the Gospel of John, you would know John was present at the High Priest's residence the night Jesus was arrested, along with Peter. John's account gives you the impression that he had connection with Caiapas, the High Priest, and knew one of the woman servants who guarded the gate (although I doubt anyone would have used a female slave to guard the gate of a very important person). John had a talk with this slave to admit Peter into the courtyard.

John also puts himself near the cross, along with the women who followed Jesus. Jesus addresses John directly to take care of his mother. But three other Gospels tell the readers that all the disciples got scared and ran away. We see them all huddled in a house in fear, behind the locked doors, the evening of the day Jesus resurrected.

I became confounded when I began to read other Gospel accounts, because, none of the three other synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark or Luke, seems to know the aforementioned exploits by John: it was only Peter who went to the empty tomb; it was only Peter who was at the High Priest's residence; it was only those women who lingered around the dying Jesus.

There is a large room for speculation, whether the young man, wrapped in linen, who followed Jesus after he was arrested, who ran away naked when he was grabbed, was John himself (Mark 14:51). If he were, his honor would have compromised significantly.

Matthew and Mark mention only one person, Peter, following Jesus in a distance to the High Priest's residence. John clearly remembers following Jesus, and later arranging for Peter to enter the courtyard to join him. John could not have done this, if he had run away naked. Luke omits Peter's following entirely.

It is unlikely that John, who was raised a lowly, young fisherman from the boondocks of Galilee, had a trans-class connection to the High Priest in Jerusalem. It is also unlikely that John was able to enter the High Priest's residence and help Peter come in, right after Peter cut off the ear of one of the Priest's slaves: he was one of them, you see. The reader of John's Gospel is led to wonder, if many things described in his Gospel did not happen, although John's memory of the events seems clear.

When Jesus resurrected and showed himself to the stunned disciples, he must have said many different things to them. That is, because, each Gospel records the account slightly differently, if not often in contradiction. The true wonder is how stunned people would remember anything at all.

What did Jesus tell his bewildered disciples after he showed his resurrected self to them? Did he tell them to return to Galilee and meet him there? Or, did he tell them to save their trip and stay in Jerusalem, until a certain event takes place? Which one is it, Galilee or Jerusalem? How can the disciples confuse two distinct locales separated by 100 miles? According to Luke, Jesus clearly stated to the disciples to stay in Jerusalem. There is

no mention of going to Galilee .

So, should this disparity give the skeptics the reason not to place too much weight on the written accounts in the Bible? Would it be reasonable to apply general discount to the authenticity of any controversial accounts in the Bible? Then what happens to the authority of the Scriptures? Can we still assert, as the writer had in II Timothy that the Bible is:

"inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (II Tim. 16, 17)"?

The answer is yes. For those who have faith in God, a few disagreements in the memory of the pioneers of the faith would hardly put a dent in the foundation of faith. The faithful would rather be motivated to study the Scripture more critically with greater determination to glean the testimonies of those who had gone before, those who had given up their lives for others.

It is like this presidential campaign. The opponents would rather sensationalize a detraction of a particular candidate into the major item of debate, than facing and debating the real issues that affect life.

If your memory is faulty, and cannot remember if real bullets flew or not on tarmac the moment your plain touched down, why should it be a big issue for your character?

If your pastor, who has long since retired, preached fiery sermons critical of the government, should it matter to your promotion to the position of the regional manager at HP, Varian, or Sun Microsystems, two years after the fact? If it had, wouldn't you feel that your civil rights had been violated?

Then again, why should one candidate's seeking endorsement of a pastor who is also fiery in his sermons escape the attention of the media and the scrutiny of the mass, while one old saying of another candidate's retired pastor still haunts the candidate? I guess that's what you get, RPWB, running for president while black. Someone is feeding non-issues to the sheep. Focus on the issues, America !

Likewise, what really matters is not the small disagreements in the detail of memories, but the testimonies of the writers. Whether Jesus wanted the disciples to stay in Jerusalem , or go to Galilee , it does not really matter to the testimonies. The writer, Luke, is trying to tell the readers about the power Jesus promised to the disciples. This is not the fictitious, magical power Luke is trying to conjure up, but the power that the disciples' collective experience confirmed its presence in their lives.

Because Jesus was not going to be with them, he promised to the disciples that he would empower them. This promise is also repeated in John's account:

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to 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 (Jn. 14:16, 17).

The Christian faith is not just about believing things. Belief in God is not the simple act of believing unbelievable things against all odds or against all reasons. The Christian faith assumes, instead, that the believers would engage in action, based on their faith. Engaging in action requires a focus, a determination, an effort, and the commitment. In another words, action requires strength to carry it out.

And it is precisely this aspect of power that Jesus is promising to his disciples. They will be equipped with power, so that they might engage the world and triumph. This is the power that did not originate from the disciples themselves, but the power that was given to them.

That was the message of the resurrected Jesus, and it did not matter where the disciples remembered Jesus to have said it, and it does not matter to us today

either. All that matters is that Jesus promised to send the power to his disciples, and they had received it.

Jesus appeared before the disciples who betrayed him previously. They all knew what they have done to him, and they were down in the dumps. Jesus never chastised them for betraying him, but instead, promised these seemingly useless disciples the gift of power.

God knows what the failed people need: they need the promise of affirmation and equipment of power, in order to rise up. And that is exactly what they have received.

When God invited us into the kingdom of God , God had in mind a few things for us to accomplish. God did not expect us to enter the kingdom of God and lounge about, bored. Christians are given a mission to accomplish. We are not required to carry extra tunics or money bags, because those are not the source of the power. The power comes from God, and God empowers those who are committed to the kingdom of God with the gift of the Spirit.

We human beings are cocksure of our own resources and talents, so that we believe that we could just go out and do things. If we had done that, we would be convinced that it is our resources and abilities that made things possible, that it is we who have accomplished things, and that we should rightfully take the credit for the work. Indeed, we often get the certificates of appreciation that bear our names on it.

When the committed Christians are doing God's mission, they know there is no certificate of appreciation coming their way. It does not matter who takes credit for what they have done. They do not need to boast of their accomplishments. That is because, God empowers them, and it is God's power that gets them going.

No matter which denomination one belongs, no matter what theology one subscribes to, no matter which candidate one votes for, there is one distinction that identifies one as a faithful disciple: one declines to take credit for what he or she has accomplished for the kingdom of God .

May each one of us be empowered in this manner.