

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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I WILL MANIFEST MYSELF (2)

John 14:21

This lesson is the second part of a study on the words of Jesus in John 14:21 where the Lord said, *I will manifest myself*. We saw the last time that when Jesus said, *I will manifest myself*, He was referring to His resurrection. *I will manifest myself* means ‘You will see me in my resurrected body, three days after my death.’ We also saw that the resurrection is the central point of Jesus’ teaching. Everything depends on it. Without the resurrection, there is no Christianity to talk about.

Jesus is alive

Throughout the whole NT, there is one theme that comes again and again. And it is the truth that Jesus is alive. Jesus lives. We can just take the book of Acts to see that. Every message preached by the apostles in Acts revolves around the resurrection. Already in the second chapter of Acts, they said in front of a crowd, ‘You put Jesus to death, but God raised him from the dead (Acts 2:23-24).’

Where were the apostles preaching when they made that statement? They were preaching in Jerusalem, the very place where, only a few days before, Jesus was put to death. They preached in front of the same people who saw Jesus being crucified. The disciples said plainly to them, ‘Jesus rose from the dead.’ ‘Jesus rose from the dead.’ And nobody, nobody, was able to refute that. If the authorities wanted to contradict them, there was an easy way to do it. Just take his body out of the tomb. ‘There is Jesus. There is his body. He is dead. How can you say that He resurrected?’ In a sense, crucifixion has an ‘advantage’ (if we can call that an ‘advantage’). It leaves the whole body intact. After the death of the person, the body is taken down from the cross and brought to the tomb. And they used embalming method in those days to preserve the body. Therefore, after three days, you can still identify the body of the deceased. The religious authorities could not contradict the disciples because the body of Jesus was not in the tomb anymore. They could not use it as proof of his death.

There might be some people who will say, ‘OK, Jesus rose from the dead. But maybe He rose in some spiritual sense. When He said, ‘I will rise again in three days,’ He did not mean physically, but spiritually.’ That is a fair argument, but people who argue like that did not read John 2:19-21. What did Jesus say in John 2:19? *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*. In v. 21, we are told plainly that *The temple he had spoken of was his body*. ‘You kill me. I tell you, in three days, I will come back to life again physically.’

So it is very clear. Jesus will rise again in a physical sense. It is his physical body that will rise again.

The resurrection proclaimed

Let me repeat something I said in the previous lesson. Suppose I pretend to be the Messiah. I will not be fool enough to make a statement that can easily be verified by saying that three days after my execution, you will see me alive again. Especially after being seen by so many people on the cross. Jesus was executed on a hill, outside Jerusalem, in plain sight. It was a big public event. Everybody was aware of his crucifixion. If I told a lie, a lot of people will know that I lied. They will be able to verify that I did not rise from the dead.

Also, people knew which tomb Jesus was put in. He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a very well-known political figure of the time. He was not some unknown person. The body of Jesus was not put in some unknown tomb, but in the tomb of a well-known person.

What is more, not only Jesus told the disciples that He will rise again, but He made the same claim to people who did not believe in him. On two occasions, He told his enemies, 'I will give you no sign, except one. I will give you the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39; 16:4).' We know the story of Jonah. In this famous account, Jonah got swallowed by a big fish. We are told that he was three days and three nights in the abdomen of that fish. Then he came out of the fish. He came back to life again. He was buried for three days. Then he rose again. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus gave that explanation: *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* 'In the same way, I will rise again after three days.' 'I will manifest myself three days after my death.'

Jesus indicated exactly what part of Jonah's life was going to be the sign. It is that part where he was in the fish for three days and three nights. And this, He said it twice to his opponents. The second time was in Matthew 16:4: *An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah.*

When Jesus was crucified, His enemies remembered what He had said. 'He spoke about the sign of Jonah, which we understand that He will rise again. Of course, we don't believe it, but just in case his disciples steal his body and say that He rose again, we really have to put a guard in front of the tomb.' So they went to see Pilate and they said to him in Matthew 27:63-64: *"Sir," we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead.* Pilate thought it was a good idea. So he agreed. He said, *You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.*

You see, by telling his enemies that He would rise, Jesus was in a way inviting them to eliminate all possibilities of doubt afterward. He wanted them to take very possible precaution. And that is precisely what they did. *So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard* (Matthew 27:66), to prevent anyone from stealing the body and telling people that He has risen from the dead.

This is the reason why, when the disciples proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus only 50 days later, no one dared to open his mouth to contradict them. They boldly proclaimed that Jesus was risen, right there in Jerusalem, in the very place where He was crucified. *This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses* (Acts 2:32). This was a very sensitive subject. If there were the slightest possibility of contradicting the disciples, you can be sure that somebody would have done it. But nobody did.

This is what we need to understand when Jesus said, 'I will manifest myself to you.' He appeared to people again and again. By John 21, He had already appeared three times to his disciples.

Jesus wants his disciples to know that He is alive. He wants us to know that He is real. And if Jesus is real, then the consequence for our lives is incalculable. If really, He had manifested himself to you, it is inevitable that your life will be revolutionized. Your life can never be the same anymore.

I will manifest myself. Emphanes. The basic meaning of ‘manifest’ is ‘to make visible to the eye.’ In a figurative sense, it means ‘to make known, to make clear, to make certain.’ Jesus wants us to have absolute certainty about his reality. There should not be any question mark, any doubt in our mind that He is real. And we have to know for ourselves. It is not because the preacher said it. It is not because a friend said it. It is because Jesus manifested himself to me and I saw him. It is much like Mary Magdalene who, after the resurrection, said, ‘I have seen the Lord (John 20:1).’ Mary Magdalene saw Jesus. The disciples did not see him yet. Although they heard other people testify that Jesus has arisen, Jesus still appeared to the disciples so that they could see for themselves that He was alive.

Seeing God

We have to understand that the Lord will not manifest himself to a person who does not have the desire to see him. Unless a person has a sincere longing to meet with God, the Lord will remain unseen. That is the assumption of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:8, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* The point of that statement is that the pure in heart are people who want to see God. And their longing will be granted to them. They will see God.

For Moses, this great servant of the Lord, there was one thing that he desired in his life above all else. It was to see the Lord. And he did ask God directly the permission to see Him.

Exodus 33:13: Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.

‘Show me your way,’ *emphanes.* In the Septuagint, it is the same Greek word as in John 14 for the word ‘manifest.’ Moses was saying to God, ‘If I had found favor in your sight, manifest yourself to me that I may evidently see you.’ Was Moses lacking in faith that he had to ask God to reveal himself? Quite the contrary. It was the expression of his love that he already had for God that motivated him to make that request.

In v. 18 of Exodus 13, the request becomes more specific. *Please, show me Your glory.* And the Lord granted Moses what he asked for. ‘You will see my glory.’ The Lord appeared to Moses in a veiled way, because ‘no one can see God and still live’ (v. 20). Even though it was in a veiled way, it was in a manner sufficient for Moses to have his request truly answered.

Infallible proofs of the resurrection

Back to the NT, we find in 1Corinthians 15, a list of Jesus’ appearances after his resurrection. The list is not complete, we must say. Jesus appeared to more people than what is listed in 1Corinthians 15. But the list is interesting. Here is Paul’s description of Jesus’ appearances after the resurrection in 1Corinthians 15:3-9.

*1Corinthians 15:3. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (and here comes a list of appearances),
5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.
6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.*

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,
8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.
9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I
persecuted the church of God.

Notice v. 6. Paul points out that Jesus appeared to 500 brethren at one time. Think about that. Five hundred people at once! And he said, 'Most of these brothers are still living.' Why did Paul write that? Paul mentioned that so that people can check for themselves whether Jesus' resurrection really happened. 'Most of the witnesses are alive right now. You can go and talk to them. Ask them if they saw the resurrected Christ. They will tell you everything about it.'

In Acts 1:3, Luke talks about 'infallible proofs' of Jesus' resurrection.

*Acts 1:3. To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many **infallible proofs**, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

What are those 'infallible proofs'? Jesus showed that He was alive by appearing to his disciples during forty days, speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Again, the ultimate proof of his resurrection is the testimony of eye witnesses, of people who saw him with their own eyes.

Now notice the following verse. Acts 1:4.

Acts 1:4. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me."

I would like to draw your attention to the words 'staying with them.' In other translations, we have the words 'while eating with them.' It can mean 'to spend the night with, to live with, to have meals with.' You see, Jesus did not just appear for a few moments, and then suddenly disappeared. He appeared to the disciples on several occasions. He actually fellowshiped with them. He lived with them. He spent the night with them. They sat at a table, ate together and talked for hours and hours. The disciples were able to interact with Jesus. During one conversation, Jesus even asked them to touch him. 'Look at me. Look at the wounds in my hands. I was crucified. Put your finger on the scars of my hands. I want you to know that I am not a ghost. I am real. I told you, you will see me again.'

That is first hand experience. It is no wonder the disciples went out after those forty days burning with the desire to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. 'We have seen the Lord. We have touched him with our hands. God has raised Jesus to life. We are all witnesses of that fact. That is why we are preaching to you.'

A spiritual manifestation

The disciples had a direct experience of the resurrected Christ. But what about us? You see, they had forty days to be with Jesus. He was there, physically, with them. They ate together. They spent time together. They talked for long periods of time. Sure, they can say that they were witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. But what about us? Where do we fit in?

Remember what we said in John 14. 'He who has my commandments and keeps them, I will manifest myself to him.' Jesus made a general statement. He did not say, 'This promise is only for the apostles. For anyone else, I'm sorry, it doesn't apply to you.' No, He said, 'Anyone who has my commandments, I will manifest myself to him.'

But the question is still before us. How does Jesus manifest himself to us today? Jesus is no longer in the world. He was physically with the disciples for forty days after his resurrection. But now, Jesus has ascended on high. As the Bible tells us, He is at the right hand of the Father. He cannot be

with us in the same way as He was with the disciples after his resurrection. That means to say that He will not reveal himself physically to us, because He is no longer in the world. But spiritually, He will. He will manifest himself to us spiritually.

What do we mean by a spiritual manifestation? If you know what a spiritual revelation is, then you know that Jesus can manifest himself to us today spiritually in a way that is every bit as real as when He was physically on earth. We can put it like this. When Jesus revealed himself to Paul, was He still on the earth? Of course not. Jesus has already ascended to be with his Father. But his revelation to Paul was one that was every bit as real to Paul as though he has seen him physically. In fact, in the list of Jesus' appearances in 1Corinthians 15, Paul makes no distinction between the earthly resurrection appearances of Jesus and his own vision of the Lord. He said, *Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also...* (1Corinthians 15.7-8). 'He appeared (spiritually) to me, Paul, just like He appeared (physically) to all the other apostles.' Paul makes no distinction between the spiritual and the physical. For Paul, the spiritual revelation he had on the Damascus Road is every bit as real as the physical appearance of Jesus to the apostles after He rose from the dead.

The promise is there. If you honestly search Jesus, He will manifest himself to you. Then your heart will be burning with fire. Like Job (Job 42:5), you will be able to say, 'Once I heard of him with the hearing of the ear. Now I have seen him. I have seen his glory with my eyes.'