

Aim of lesson

This is partly an exercise in piecing together the resurrection narratives and partly an example of Bible Study. The aim is for the young people to appreciate the benefits that can come from looking in detail at the Bible, and trusting that it is the inspired word of God: more specifically, to gain confidence in the resurrection narrative.

Bible background

Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Preparation required

Piecing together the gospel records is not simple. To read any one account on its own would be to gain an incomplete understanding of what happened, and one needs to look at all four (and 1 Corinthians 15) in some detail to work out a harmony. Even then not every uncertainty is completely resolved, but the overall impression gained is one of real people under pressure, rushing breathlessly around in some bewilderment.

You will need to spend some time yourself looking at the gospel records and comparing them with the chart below. Some questions may remain, and you need to be prepared to deal with them during the lesson as they arise. For example:

1. Why does Matthew's account make it seem that Mary Magdalene and 'the other Mary' met the Lord together on their way to meeting the disciples, when it is clear from Mark and John that Mary met Jesus on her own, and Luke 24:22-23 indicates that they saw the disciples before the other women met him? The answer must be that all the gospels are summaries of the events, and many details had to be left out.
2. Were all the disciples together? In other words, did they all hear the women's account, and only Peter and John act upon it, as Luke 24:11-12 seems to imply; or were Peter and John in a different place, as John 20:2 implies. It is at least possible that Peter and John were in another house, as one might expect since they alone followed Jesus to his trial, but we cannot be sure.

There are some hints in the students' notes, before their blank chart. They are meant to be helpful! Make sure that you have read them and thought about them, even if you do not agree with them all.

Suggested outline of lesson

Harmony in diversity

Begin by considering examples of how witnesses can easily differ superficially when describing the same event. Test the class on something like:

- What the exterior of the building you are occupying looks like,
- What you said last week!
- Who was at a recent youth weekend.

And get across the point that it is possible for accounts of events to differ while being equally truthful. Indeed, if differing records can be shown to harmonise then their truth is established to a greater extent than if they had all been identical.

A look at the records

Ask each member of the group to look at a single gospel record (you could do the same for 1 Corinthians 15). Give them some small pieces of paper on which to write, for each event recorded,

- What happened?
- When?
- Where?
- References

They will need five or six pieces of paper each.

Then get them to lay all the pieces of paper on the table, collect together the pieces that describe the same event, then put them all in the 'right' order.

A harmonised account

When this is complete the young people will be able to complete the chart in their notes.

There is a completed chart below, which is on a page of its own so that if you want you can photocopy it for the young people.

Other points

These were not isolated incidents, but at times merge into one long appearance of the Master who “for many days”, appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses ...” (Acts 13:31). Also Acts 1:3,4: “To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying (AV eating) with them he charged them “...to wait..”(RSV).

The appearances were not made in a hurry. There were “many proofs” which were to extend eventually over nearly six weeks. Some of them ate and talked with Jesus at leisure, and in this way impressions became permanent, and disciples who were strained and bewildered became calm and confident.

In the early appearances of Jesus stress is laid on the importance of their meeting him again in Galilee. It seems likely that this was the pre-arranged meeting spoken of by the Apostle Paul, “he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:6). Also Mark, “he is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him as he told you.” (Mark 16:7)

He would not have met five hundred disciples all at once, by chance. It must have been after the lakeside meeting, which was the third group meeting. The meeting in Galilee is stressed as important in Matt 28:16-20. On the mountain to which Jesus had directed them he repeats what he has already told the Eleven and commands them to go unto all nations, baptising and teaching. The apostles were commissioned, along with an army of faithful witnesses, who were to form the nucleus of the new church.

Relevance to our lives

“If Christ be not raised, then your faith is vain, and ye are yet in your sins.” This foundation doctrine was to be readily accepted, yet was not given without “many infallible proofs”. We too must believe that, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.” It will transform us as much as it did those timid disciples.

Prayer

Ephesians 1:17-20.

Other suggestions for activities

Another exercise, or an alternative if for some reason this lesson is unsuitable, is to reconcile the accounts of the women who were at the cross and later at the tomb. There is a table summarising the information, and drawing some conclusions, in the students’ notes.

Events following the resurrection of Christ - a possible sequence

What happened?	When?	Where?	References
The women arrive at the tomb. Mary Magdalene sees the stone removed, and runs to tell Peter and John.	Just after dawn	Outside the tomb	John 20:1-2
The other women see two angels, one of whom tells them that Jesus is risen. The women run to tell the disciples.	Just after dawn	At the tomb	Matthew 28: 1-8, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12
Peter and John run to the tomb; Mary Magdalene follows.	Just after dawn	At the tomb	John 20:3-10
Mary Magdalene sees two angels at the tomb, and Jesus appears to her.	Morning	At the tomb	Mark 16:9-11, John 20.11-18
The other women tell the disciples what they have seen at the tomb, but are not believed.	Morning	?	Luke 24: 9-12, John 20:2-10
Cleopas and his companion leave to go to Emmaus.	Morning	Jerusalem	Luke 24:13-14
Jesus appears to the other women.	Morning	?	Matthew 28:9-11

What happened?	When?	Where?	References
Jesus appears to Simon Peter	Afternoon	Jerusalem?	1 Corinthians 15:5, Luke 24.32-35
Jesus appears to Cleopas & his companion, who return to Jerusalem and tell the disciples	Afternoon	Road to Emmaus	Luke 24.15-35, Mark 16.12-13
Jesus appears to the disciples and others, Thomas is not there.	Evening	Upper room	Mark 16:14-15; Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25, 1 Corinthians 15:5
"Eleven", including Thomas	Week later	Upper room	John 20:26-29
Jesus appears to Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John and two others	Later	Sea of Galilee	John 21:1-14
All disciples - more than 500	Later	A mount in Galilee	1 Corinthians 15:6, Matthew 28.7, 16-20, Mark 16.7
Jesus appears to James	Later	Galilee?	1 Corinthians 15:7
Jesus ascends to heaven.	Six weeks later	Mt of Olives	Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:44-51, Acts 1, 1 Corinthians 15:7
Apostle Paul	Much later	Damascus	Acts 9, 1 Corinthians 15:8