

# Hearts on Fire

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Date: 20 April 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Listen to my eyes. Folks, if you've got a Bible nearby, please grab it, have it open at that passage in Luke 24. While the kids are taking a moment to get a busy bag, why don't you just turn to the person next to you and say hello and happy Easter.

Thank you.

Great. Shall we just pray before we think about God's word together from Luke chapter 24?

Let's just pray. Father, we thank you. Thank you that there is a message of hope and life for us right here. We thank you that we have time this morning to spend thinking about it.

Lord, we pray that the spirit who raised Jesus to life would give us life and hope and joy as we consider your words this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 1 : 52 ] Amen. I wonder what your hopes are for this afternoon. I know it's almost like I've invited you to imagine that the sermon's over before it's even begun, isn't it?

Bear with me a moment. What are your hopes for this afternoon? Some of us went for a walk on Good Friday. That was lovely, despite the rain. Maybe you're going for a walk.

Hoping a walk in the sunshine. That would be great. What about maybe just some fun? Some games? Something like that? Polish off the Easter eggs? Or just a rest?

Please, can I hide this afternoon? Some of you might be thinking. I think we can aim higher than that.

This afternoon, maybe even this morning. I think the Bible tells us that we can meet with someone who can set our hearts on fire. Skeptical?

[ 2 : 50 ] Luke gives us the account now of two skeptics. Walking down the road to Emmaus. And as a historian, he tells us that this happened on Easter afternoon.

So the very afternoon of the day that we're celebrating today. And he doesn't write, as a historian, a story for children. And he doesn't write something just to feed gullible minds.

He tells us something that really happened and that he is desperate that we know about. Because as they walk on the road to Emmaus on that Easter afternoon, these two skeptics meet somebody who set their hearts on fire.

And you know, that person is still alive and doing the same thing today. So let's wade into the story. Look with me at verse 15. If you go back to the original language, what it literally says is, Jesus came near.

Jesus came near. But they were kept from recognizing him. And he asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? And they stood still.

[ 4 : 03 ] Their faces downcast. Have you ever had a moment like that? Where your sorrow has brought you to a complete standstill?

Your hopes are down. They're obviously struggling to talk about it, aren't they? We know what that feels like. They're thinking, all of those things that I hoped for and wished for, and that they would just never happen now.

Why does it have to be like this? Now this has happened. Who will piece it all together again? For me. That's how the disciples felt.

That's how we feel sometimes. And then Jesus comes near. In the flesh. Really, in person. It's not a hallucination, is it?

You can't hallucinate somebody walking and talking with you for seven miles on a hike. That's impossible. That's what this was, the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus. Plenty of these around at the moment, aren't there?

[ 5 : 07 ] What happens when you break one open like I've just done? Even the chocolate ones. They're empty inside, aren't they? You might be happy with your chocolate, but still, it's always a

little bit disappointing when you break open the egg and there's nothing inside.

Some chocolate makers are getting wise, aren't they? And they're putting something in the egg. But I haven't yet found the egg that's completely solid all the way through. If you know who does those, let me know. I'm interested. Definitely interested.

It's disappointing. I think that captures how the disciples felt on that Easter day. Let down.

Disappointed.

Empty. At a loss. Their hopes are broken, aren't they? And they feel empty. What else was empty on that Easter morning?

The tomb was empty, wasn't it? And that is the good news of Easter. You see, emptiness doesn't have to mean no hope anymore. The stone rolled away actually means light into the darkness of the tomb for everybody.

[ 6 : 29 ] In that emptiness, just like in the empty eggshell, when you think about it, we see the possibility of new life. The offer of new life. And not in just theory or a nice idea that keeps us going, but in person.

In the person of the risen Jesus, who walks alongside us. So if you're a Christian here this morning, I just want you to know that Jesus has come near to you this Easter.

And he listens. He listens, just like he listened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Even though he already knows. He's God, isn't he? He already knows. What the disciples are thinking.

But he listens. And he hears. Maybe you don't recognise him. Maybe you don't feel his presence near you or see him next to you.

Nor did the disciples. But when the commentators have said, at the same time, his light is just inches from your darkness as he walks alongside.

[ 7 : 35 ] Maybe you're not a believer here this morning. Jesus comes near to you too. You don't recognise him. You don't recognise him. But he does. Because whenever you see out there a kindness and your heart says, yes, that's what we should be doing.

That's what this world needs. Or you see a real injustice, a true injustice and your heart goes, no. That isn't right. That isn't right. Then you are feeling God's heart.

And you have those feelings because Jesus and his words have shaped so many of the values of the country that we live in today. And we have some of those within us still. Even if we don't recognise Jesus as being nearby, he is.

But perhaps more importantly, when you know that you have done something wrong and that you need forgiveness for that, and you need to be set free from the guilt that that brings, that is also Jesus coming near to you, calling you to turn and walk the other way, trusting him.

So Jesus comes near to us. But secondly, in our story today, Jesus points the disciples to the good news, doesn't he, from the Bible. It's interesting.

[ 8 : 51 ] In the face of that sadness and difficulty that the disciples are clearly experiencing, I think we would want to reassure, wouldn't we? Offer some comfort. And Jesus, well, if he's there, he should really show himself.

That would be the obvious thing to do, but he does something quite unexpected. Let's look at verse 25 together. He said to them, how foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

So the first thing that Jesus does is he ticks them off. It should make us sit up and take notice, shouldn't it? And actually, if you think about it, it's just another evidence of how reliable this account is.

Because if you're going to make something up, then you make something up that makes you look good. Right? You don't make something up where the Savior of the world, first off, tells you that you're pretty silly.

Let's keep reading. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

[ 10 : 02 ] You see, they have all the pieces of the puzzle, the disciples, but they just don't know how to put them together. They don't know how it fits together. It's really interesting.

Jesus doesn't seem to need to show himself to them. He doesn't think that they need to see him. What he says is, guys, you've got to read your Bibles. And he makes the scripture come alive and he explains from the Bible how it all pieces together.

And why it has to be this way. He explains the good news, the Bible, all of it is about himself. Doesn't he? It's a bit like this little bit of genius from Ikea.

Have you seen this? Oh, not that one. Okay. We obviously don't have this slide. Ikea recently released a flat pack Easter egg. Do you know what it was?

It was a bar of chocolate. No instructions, though. That's always the problem with Ikea. That's a bit like this. They've got all the bits, but they haven't got the instructions and they just can't make it make sense at Easter time.

[ 11 : 12 ] Maybe it's a bit more like this. Imagine you're trying to desperately turn on the telly because you want to connect to something that's going on out there. Some real news or some story of hope that you just really need at the moment.

You're trying everything and it's not turning on and you can't find the remote. And there's someone in the room and they just say, Well, have you tried reading that? And they point to the manual. And you go through the manual and, of course, it works. And you turn on the telly and on the screen, who should it be but the person who pointed you to the manual in the first place? And suddenly you realize they were there all along.

That's what's going on here. See, unless you learn about Jesus from the manual, you will never recognize him as being right next to you.

And what does he say? He says, if you read the manual, guys, if you read the manual, you will realize that it has been God's plan all along, all along, to take human sadness and sickness and sin and place it all on Jesus.

[ 12 : 19 ] It has been God's plan all along that I, Jesus, should come and suffer and die in your place so that you could be forgiven, so that you could be alive for always, so that death and evil can be defeated.

It was God's plan all along that his love should triumph and his justice should be satisfied on the cross, so that we can be set free.

First from spiritual death by being reborn inwardly, and then from physical death by being raised just as Jesus was. You see, the resurrection, our resurrection, that is a thing, more than anything else, that makes sense of senseless events.

And that's what the disciples learned that day. And friend, unless you accept that good news from Jesus, about Jesus, personally, and you start walking next to him, as the disciples did, then, if we don't do that, we are just on a hopeless walk back to the darkness of the tomb.

Jesus says in John chapter 11, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

[ 13 : 44 ] Do you believe this? Do you? So Jesus points us to the good news from the Bible.

But finally, Jesus can set our hearts on fire. Let's look at verse 30. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

And then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

See, it wasn't that the disciples had had their eyes closed for seven miles, until they sat down at the table, and only then did they open it after grace.

No, it's that their eyes weren't working properly. They needed to be opened for them. Didn't they?

It's like Jesus sits down, and with his actions in the breaking of the bread, mirroring the breaking of his body, in his actions he says, open your eyes.

And then they recognize him. And then they look back, and they understand what's been going on in their hearts all along on the road. Jesus has set them on fire by showing them himself from the Bible.

[ 14 : 54 ] And that happens today. Just ask any of the Christians sitting around you. I was visiting a relative, who will remain nameless, a little while ago, and we'd had a meal, and we'd had a glass of wine, and it was time to go to bed, so we went to sleep.

And the lights were off. I tell you, it was pitch black where that person lives. Absolutely pitch black. And because I'd reached a certain age, and I'd had a glass of wine, it meant that in the night, I needed to get up and go to the toilet.

Pitch black. And of course, you're half awake, so there's a fuzz, isn't there? A mental fuzz. Anyway, I managed to swing my legs over the side of the bed, and get to the door, and turn left towards where the toilet was.

And I opened the toilet door, still pitch black. Couldn't see anything. I thought, okay, well, I'll have to just do this by feel then. And so I started feeling for where the toilet was, and where the toilet was, it wasn't there.

And so I thought, well, okay, I must have misjudged the distance between the door and the toilet. I'll just go a bit further. And I felt something, but it wasn't a toilet. It was sort of soft and warm.

[16:14] And I thought, this is a bit odd. So I felt a little bit further along, and I realised, in about a minute's time, that what I was feeling was a bed.

Don't worry, the story has a happy ending. What I should have done when I came out of our bedroom door is turned right towards the toilet, not left.

Why have I told you this? Omitting the gory details. Because, of course, it illustrates what we're trying to say, which is simply this. Unless Jesus switches on the lights in your heart, you may have everything you think you need.

A warm bed, safe place to sleep, a functional toilet, food on the table, loving family. Unless Jesus switches on the lights in your heart, it is going to end all kinds of badly.

Unless Jesus opens your eyes so that you recognise who he really is. Unless he opens the Bible so that you see him there.

[17:17] Unless he sets your heart on fire as you walk with him. Unless he sets your feet walking back to Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, where the church will worship him forever.

Unless that happens, friends, it is going to end all kinds of badly. That's what Jesus does. He sets hearts on fire as we walk with him. His words create faith.

If you were here on Wednesday night, you would have heard the facts about Jesus' death and resurrection. And as we said then, facts don't create faith. Jesus inspires faith as we meet him in the Bible, as we walk alongside him.

He sets hearts aflame. And he does that in quite ordinary ways. over a meal, in a conversation, in a church, in the same Bible.

One day you're walking down the road and suddenly you realise that Jesus has been there speaking to you all along. You just didn't recognise him for who he was before. He will.

[18:25] He will reveal himself to you if you ask him. He's speaking now through the Bible. Can you hear him? If you can, don't delay.

It won't get easier or more convenient. Don't wait till you're older because our hearts don't get softer. Don't wait until you retire because life has a way of retiring us, doesn't it?

Turn around like the disciples turn around. Realise who he is. put your faith in him. Maybe you're a Christian and you feel you've lost your fire.

Whatever hopes Jesus is going to resurrect, they're still dead right now for you. Look at what Jesus does. He takes defeated, depressed disciples who are on their way sadly back to their old lives and he sends them running back towards Jerusalem where all the danger is with hearts on fire.

And there he takes a bunch of defeated, depressed disciples who denied that Jesus was the Son of God or that they even knew him and he turns them into lions, doesn't he? Willing to die for the news that Jesus died and rose for us.

[19:51] So if your fire feels like it's dimming, read your Bible. Ask him to walk and talk with you. Ask him to set your heart on fire once more.

And remember his promise that we read and sung about earlier today. And behold, Jesus says, I am with you even to the very end of the age.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that in the person of the risen Jesus by your Holy Spirit you walk and talk with us today, especially in your word.

We pray for those whose eyes are closed. Will you open them so that they recognize you for who you are? Lord, will you set our hearts on fire, we praise for you this Easter.

Give us your grace. Give us your spirit. Thank you for your resurrection. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.