

The Gospel of Cleopas

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- [0 : 00] We as Christians tend to take the resurrection for granted. Jesus Christ rose from the dead.! We celebrate on Easter Sunday.! It's celebrated, but it's an accepted and uncontested fact of Christianity.
- ! Or talk to a Muslim or any other religions, and you'll find the resurrection is a major stumbling block.
- Yesterday, my wife and I spoke to a Muslim and talked about today being Easter Sunday, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And he said, no, Jesus didn't rise from the dead.
- He wasn't crucified on the cross, and he went on to speak quite militantly about his Muslim beliefs. I suggest that we need to step back into the sandals of the first disciples to see how they came to grips with the resurrection.
- For you see, it wasn't easy for them to grasp it first either. In fact, it was impossible. What I want you to do this evening is to put yourself in the place of Cleopas.
- [1 : 20] I want you to see things as he saw them, to reason as he reasoned, and to appreciate what he finally came to appreciate.
- First, I want you to consider the gospel according to Cleopas. Look at the text. And notice that all the facts of the gospel are present.
- None are missing. He is as orthodox as anyone, this Cleopas. All right? We see in verse 19 the ministry of Jesus in word and deed.
- A man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. We have reference to Jesus' crucifixion in verse 20. The rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.
- We have the hope of redemption, which filled it with meaning. In verse 21, we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. We have a reference to Jesus conquering the grave in verses 22 and 23.
- [2 : 25] The women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning. When they did not find his body, they came back saying. And in verse 24, we have an apostolic witness to that event.
- Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it, just as the women had said. But him they did not see. The most significant and revealing statement here is found in verse 21.
- Look at it. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. This reveals the inadequacy of the gospel according to Cleopas.
- Cleopas had hoped, but now all hope was gone. What should have been the day of hope realized was a day of hope extinguished instead.
- Cleopas, like the rest of the disciples, were expecting Jesus as the Messiah of Israel to liberate, to free Israel politically from the tyranny of Rome and establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem.

- [3 : 33] Their vision was limited ethnically. It was limited geographically. It was limited politically. But most of all, it was limited spiritually.
- It was limited ethnically in that they believed that the Messiah would come only for the nation of Israel, the Jewish people. It was limited geographically in that it only had to do with the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
- It was limited politically because they thought it only had to do with Rome, their oppressors, their tyrants. But most of all, it was limited spiritually.
- Sorry. They had no vision beyond this life and this world. That was an adequate perspective. And therein lies the great need of the resurrection.
- Like Alice's looking glass in Alice in Wonderland, the empty tomb is our entrance to an eternal perspective on life. And where that perspective is lacking, we are as sad, downcast, and meaningless as Cleopas.
- [4 : 46] His dream of earthly prominence shattered. His life was meaningless. We had hoped. That's the futility of religion without the resurrection.
- The Muslim man that we spoke to yesterday, if you know anything about Islam, they rely on God being merciful.
- But they have no certainty, no assurance as to when they die and pass from this life into the life to come, that God will actually be merciful. I lived in Saudi Arabia for three years, and the very common saying amongst the Muslims there was, Inshallah, if God wills it.
- Do you know that you will enter into paradise? Inshallah, if God wills it. That's a deathly, inadequate basis on which to hang your eternal destiny.
- We had hoped, Cleopas says. His gospel was one of despair and emptiness. Shakespeare in Macbeth characterized life as a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.
- [5 : 57] Perhaps in more contemporary parlance, a construction worker I used to work with put it this way, life stinks and then you die. How he got up every morning, I have no idea.
- But despair and meaninglessness of Cleopas is indicative of the spirit of unbelief.
- If this life is all there is, then there's not much. Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians, with which I'm sure you're familiar.
- If the dead are not raised, if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. You hear that thought expressed today, no matter where you go.
- If this life is all there is, then live for the moment. Indulge yourself. Carpe diem. Seize the day. The odd thing is that it never satisfies.
- [7 : 01] Life remains a mystery. Unlike Cleopas, this world, this life, with nothing beyond, is meaningless.
- See this in our contemporary situation with what are referred to in popular media as deaths of despair.
- If you're not familiar with that, it's the suicide rate of particularly young people. And this is no different in Scotland than it is in the States.
- You realize that Scotland has the highest suicide rate of any part of the United Kingdom. The leading cause of death for those under 24. Deaths of despair.
- Young people see no purpose to live, no reason to live, no meaning to life. This is an affliction which is epidemic in our society, whether it's on this side of the pond or on the other.
- [8 : 09] No, the resurrection is indispensable. It's absolutely necessary in order for there to be meaning in life, purpose in life.

This is the great need of the resurrection. And second, I want you to notice that the resurrection is humanly impossible.

It's humanly incomprehensible. Here also, we take the resurrection for granted. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Yeah, I believe that. All Christians do.

That's not true. The disciples didn't believe it. Look at the text. Look at verse 1 in chapter 24. On the first day of the week at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.

The women weren't expecting a resurrection. They were going to anoint the dead body. And when they find out and go and tell the disciples, look at verse 11. Their words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

[9 : 13] Even Peter, in verse 12, after seeing the empty tomb, went away wondering what in the world has actually happened.

Verse 25, Jesus has to rebuke the disciples. For not believing the resurrection.

They didn't understand it either. It is humanly incomprehensible. As far as they were concerned, they were on their way home from a funeral. Not a victory.

In verse 37, look at the text. We didn't get that far in our reading. They were startled and thought they saw a spirit. When Jesus actually appears to them, they think he's a ghost. They still don't understand.

They understand that it's humanly incomprehensible. They didn't comprehend. On the one hand, this is the best evidence for the truth of the resurrection.

[10 : 17] That we have recorded for us their incredulity and their foolishness. Who would record that of themselves, except for the fact that it was true. But on the other hand, it calls for a radical revolution of thought about the resurrection.

The evidence for the truth of the resurrection is all here. The doctrine of the resurrection has been intellectually problematic since it occurred. People had difficulty believing it then. People have difficulty believing it now.

The evangelical theological society, whether or not you're familiar with that, it is a society of scholars. Evangelical, purported evangelical scholars committed to the study of the scriptures.

The evangelical theological society was filled, riddled with disbelief about the actual physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Norman Geisler, an author, now gone to be with the Lord, but from the States, actually wrote a book in response to an event at the Evangelical Theological Society called The Battle for the Resurrection.

Imagine amongst evangelicals, so-called, he had to battle for the truth of the resurrection. It is humanly incomprehensible.

[11 : 35] Most attacks, if you're familiar with them, on the doctrine of the resurrection, discredit the disciples' reports. They say the resurrection is something that was just dreamt up by them, dreamt up by them when unrealized political expectations fail.

But it betrays the foolishness of such reasoning. Cleopas realized his gospel was futile and life was meaningless. And all the disciples, far from expecting a resurrection, had difficulty accepting it themselves.

The disciples' own incredulity argues for the veracity of what is recorded. So on the one hand, that's it. But on the other hand, the humanly incomprehensible character of the resurrection demonstrates that the resurrection calls for a radical revolution in our thinking.

The disciples' minds are bewildered by this. They cannot comprehend it. It is beyond their ability, their finite human ability to comprehend.

The doctrine of the resurrection is more than something we hear about in church or memorize in catechetical studies. After all, the disciples have been taught by Jesus for three years.

[12 : 59] The resurrection, you see, demands that all of life, all thought, God, the world, and ourselves are to be interpreted in terms of the resurrection.

Jesus Christ calls you and me to take our minds into the tomb with him. And having come out the other side to gain an entirely different perspective on reality.

The truth of the resurrection can only be apprehended experientially. Its truth must be one that is personally experienced as its revolution takes its full course in the heart of an individual.

And I trust that that's something that has occurred in you. The problem, you see, as I talk with many people in New York City about these things, I try to convince them that their problem is not intellectual.

It's not a matter of the mind. Their problem is moral. It's a matter of the heart. The heart needs to be impacted by this. The heart needs to be changed by this.

[14 : 05] And therefore, it's necessary for the truth of the resurrection to be something that is divinely revealed. This is what Luke is teaching us here.

It's why the gospel of Cleopas is insufficient. What one needs and what Cleopas was lacking is a personal word from the living Jesus Christ, which would make the facts live also.

In each of the three episodes recorded here in Luke 24, it was the word of Christ that causes hearts and minds to turn from despair to joy, from meaninglessness to amazement.

Look at the text with me, if you will. Verse 6. He is not here. He is risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee.

His word. What did he teach? What did he say? Remember how he told you while he was in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.

[15 : 12] And they remembered his words. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Look at verse 25 and following. Verse 25.

He said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. Look at verse 32. They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scripture?

Do you see? It's a matter of the heart. It's a matter of the word of Christ, not just being audibly heard in one's ear, but penetrating through and penetrating down to the depths of one's heart.

That's what makes the difference. And then in verse 44 and following again. These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

[16 : 25] And then he opened their minds to understand the scripture and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

You may or may not be familiar with the reference here that Jesus is making. It's a Hebraism that is a Hebrew form of speech referring to the entirety of the Old Testament scriptures, the 39 books of what we know as the Old Testament.

In verse 44, he says, Everything in the law of Moses, that's the Torah, the prophets, the Nebaim, and the Psalms or the writings, the Ketuvim.

Jewish people refer to the 39 books of what we call the Old Testament as the Tanakh, the Torah, the Nebaim, and the Ketuvim. Tanakh. Tanakh.

All right? And Jesus is saying, Everything in the whole entirety of the Bible is pointing to me. It's all about me. From Genesis 1 through what we know as Malachi.

[17 : 38] All right? It's pointing to the coming of Jesus. The prophecies and the promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And Jesus is saying, All of that is about me.

That's my teaching. That's the scripture you know. And notice significantly in verse 47, Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

A little bit of a digression here. Important point. When you read the Bible, All right? Specifically, The 39 books of the Old Testament. You should read it Christologically.

You should read it with Jesus teaching here in mind. That he says it's all about him. So as you search the scriptures, Or read the scriptures, You're looking for clues, if you will.

Or you're looking for promises. You're looking for prophecies. You're looking how things are pointing to Jesus. Pictures, all right? Of Jesus. And also, very important, We should read the Bible missiologically.

[18 : 42] Not just Christologically. Look at verse 47. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Where is that found? Well, look back at the beginning of verse 46. Thus it is written. Thus it is written where? In what he just told us.

The Torah, the Nebaim, and the Ketuvim. The law, the prophets, and the writings. So what's found in the law, the prophets, and the writings? Not just pictures. Not just prophecies.

Not just promises of Jesus Christ. To be sure, they are there. But Jesus says the missionary message of God is to be found there as well.

That repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. Very important that we read the Bible both Christologically and missiologically.

[19 : 40] Mission is not something that begins with Matthew chapter 1 verse 1. Mission is not something that begins when we get to the Great Commission. Mission is not something solely confined or begun in the pages of the New Testament.

Here Jesus teaches that's the message in the entire Bible is one of mission. God is on a mission. God is on a mission to redeem sinners. To call sinners to himself.

To preach repentance that they should turn from sins and they should trust in him. And why is that critically essential? It's critically essential if you are to understand the life that you live and the life that you've been given.

Apart from which, it's futile and meaningless. That's what is Luke teaching us.

Life does have meaning. It does make sense. And its meaning and sense are only found in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 36] And he is found only on the pages of sacred scripture. Peter put it this way. Praise God who has given us, in his great mercy, has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that gave birth to hope. That gave birth to meaning. That gave birth to purpose.

That filled life with something more than mere existence. What was it that Jesus explained to them?

The redemption Messiah would accomplish was not political. But spiritual. And consistent in the forgiveness of sins.

Now the mystery of the empty tomb is solved by Jesus himself. Christ, by his death on the cross, bore in his body on the tree the sins of his people.

[21 : 43] And those sins have gone into the grave and are buried with him. When he arose, the sins of his people and their old sinful natures remained buried in that tomb.

Brothers and sisters, if you are a Christian, critically important to realize that. That those sins are paid for. It is finished. The penalty has been paid in full.

And in Micah, God says through the prophet, he has thrown them into the depths of the sea. And if you will, he's put up a sign saying, no fishing allowed. It's over and done with.

It's taken care of. Divine justice has been satisfied. Now there's new life. Now there's a clean slate. Jesus has conquered death so that we may live.

He is the resurrection and the life. And in his death, you died. And in his resurrection, Christians have been raised to newness of life.

[22 : 46] When the disciples understood the true meaning of what had happened, what was their response? And if I could be personal, what should be your response?

What should be my response? If you grasp what Luke is here recording and what Jesus is here teaching about his resurrection, then it calls for a response from him.

As a matter of fact, it calls for a response one way or the other. Either your mind is so clouded and obscured by sin that you do not comprehend or grasp the message that has been preached to you this evening.

Or you do grasp. You have, by the grace of God, wrapped your mind around the truth of what Jesus is here teaching. And in either case, it calls for a response.

If you've not grasped it, then Jesus calls you to repent, to turn from your sin, to turn from your sinful thinking, to turn from your sinful inability to see life as he sees it.

[23 : 54] And to understand life as God has taught us we should understand it in the pages of his word. On the other hand, if you do, then the response must be, go and tell.

Go and tell. Go and tell. Look at verse 9 in our text. Returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and all the rest.

Go and tell. Look at verse 35. Then they told what had happened on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of bread. Go and tell.

Verse 33. They rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven with those who were with them gathered together. And verse 48. Verse 48.

You are witnesses of these things. It is incumbent upon Christians. It is incumbent upon those who have come to understand the truth as it is in Jesus.

[24 : 55] Who have come to recognize that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and have found new life in him. It is incumbent upon you. It is incumbent upon me. It is incumbent upon one and all to go and tell others.

To go and tell others. Why? Because the scriptures are to be read Christologically, remember? And missiologically. God is on a mission.

God is on a mission to save sinners. God is on a mission to reclaim sinners from death and from Satan and to reclaim them to himself.

And God is on a mission and he calls his church to be on mission with him. Riddle me this. Does God have a mission for his church in the world?

Or does God have a church for his mission in the world? Let me say it again.

[25 : 54] You didn't catch it the first time. A little twist of words here. Does God have a mission for his church in the world? Or does God have a church for his mission in the world?

You see, if you think that God has a mission for his church in the world, then it's just one among many things on the agenda of the church.

One among many line items on the budget of the church. One among many activities on the activities of the church. But when you rightly, I submit to you, understand that God has a church for his mission in the world.

It revolutionizes how you think. What it means to be a Christian. What it means to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ. What it means to be enlisted in his cause.

You see, the church is not a place to go. The church is a people who go and tell others where they can find life in Jesus Christ. Where they can find forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 03] Where they can find reconciliation. Where they can find pardon. Where they can find peace in Jesus Christ. If you've been given a new birth into a living hope through Christ's resurrection.

Can you do any less? Then go and tell. A world in darkness and sin. And suicide. Never needed anything more.

Let's pray.