

"Walking to Emmaus"

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[0 : 00] Lord, we pray we may hear you speaking to us through your word.! Quiet in our hearts. Calm our minds that we may listen to your still small voice.

! Bring us closer to you in the words we hear,! and in our thoughts, and how we think them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Our reading from Luke chapter 24 opens at verse 13. Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

So what same day is Luke referring to? Well, if we go back a few verses to verse 1 of chapter 24, this is the same day that we call Easter Sunday, the first day of the week.

As you know, Jesus was crucified on Friday, rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day, and on the first day of the week, the women come to the tomb and the stone has been rolled away.

[1 : 03] Two angels share the glorious news recorded in Luke 24. Why do you look for the living among the dead? He's not here. He has risen.

It is that same day, according to Luke, that two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. Who does the two of them refer to?

Two of them. Well, according to Luke, the women who heard this glorious testimony from the angels gave a report to the eleven and to all the others.

The close followers of Jesus had been referred to as the twelve, but Judas had denied Jesus and betrayed him with a kiss.

Simon Peter had also denied Jesus and betrayed him. But Simon Peter had repented with tears. Judas, on the other hand, had experienced only remorse, and he hanged himself.

[2 : 10] So now they were eleven rather than the twelve. Please notice in Luke 24, verse 9, the women gave their testimony about Jesus being risen from the dead, not only to the eleven, but to all the others.

So Jesus had many more disciples than just the twelve. And Luke records at the beginning of the book of Acts that there were about 120 followers of Jesus.

So the two walking on the road to Emmaus were two of them. Two disciples of Jesus. One of these disciples is identified in verse 18.

His name was Cleopas. But we wonder about the other disciple. Who was he? We don't really know.

Some theologians have suggested that this was Matthias, the one who would later become the replacement for Judas. One of the twelve. But Luke doesn't really provide that information.

[3 : 19] These two had left the downhearted and confused band of disciples. The band of disciples who were afraid and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday.

The two men, as they traveled along, were also sad and disillusioned. The master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death.

A cruel, a degrading death on a cross. Jesus had been made a public spectacle, exposed to the jeers of all who passed by.

And only a week before, their hopes had risen to fever pitch when the excited crowds welcomed their master waving palm branches and shouting, Hosanna.

But now, now Jesus lay dead in a sealed tomb. Their hopes were dashed. The dream was over.

[4 : 31] Even the report of the women that Jesus' tomb was empty didn't raise their spirits. It only confused them even more. The two disciples walking the road to Emmaus summed up the situation very neatly when they said in verse 21, but we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to redeem Israel.

Human hope is a fragile thing. When it withers, it's difficult to revive. When someone we love and care for is overtaken by a serious illness which goes on and on.

Despair sets in. It almost becomes impossible to hope for recovery. We may even be afraid of hope because we believe that we couldn't cope with another letdown.

We had hoped. Cleopas and his friend had said, they were saying, we don't expect it now, but once we did. We had high hopes for the future and now those hopes are gone and all we have left is disappointment.

Perhaps you can identify with these feelings of these two disciples in some way. For each of us the cause of feeling down might be different.

[6 : 05] But it would be a rare person indeed who could claim that they've not been affected in life by disappointment or despair. So Cleopas and his travelling companion are out for an afternoon stroll making a getaway.

A getaway from the place where they had witnessed the destruction and the tearing down of their own private little world and all their hopes and dreams about the coming Messiah and the salvation of Israel shattered, dead and gone with the one they loved, the one they followed hanging on a cross and buried in a tomb.

You and I have been there haven't we? Sometimes when the hurt is so deep, sometimes when you just have to get away for a little while.

For some it's packing up the bags in the car and heading off somewhere for a little sunshine. Some of us just take a short walk in the country or along the beach.

Others may just go to a little out of the way place, somewhere, well, not so far away, but at least a place where they can be inconspicuous and fade into the background just for a little while.

[7 : 37] Occasionally, some folks might even go back to church, just to see if there's anything new to this new life business after all. Sometimes we feel that life couldn't be much worse when we take it upon ourselves to just get away.

Friends, you and I, if this is the case, have been to Emmaus many times. Emmaus is the temporary hiding place, the momentary distraction, the change of scenery.

So these two disciples are walking on the road, talking about the events of the past few days, and this is where the story takes an interesting turn.

Verses 14 to 16. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.

But they were kept from recognizing him. Jesus, the risen Lord, catches up with them on the road, but notice, they were kept from recognizing him.

[8 : 57] What does that mean? Did Jesus look different after his resurrection? I don't think so, because other disciples recognized him instantly, even doubted thing.

Thomas recognized him. So what's going on here? They were kept from recognizing him.

Apparently, what's happening isn't natural. Something supernatural is going on.

But if we look at the rest of the story, I think we'll understand why they were kept from recognizing Jesus at first. Verse 17. Jesus asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along?

They stood still, their faces downcast. And we get the impression here that they were almost speechless, shocked, wondering, where has this man been?

Then Cleopas expresses his thoughts in words, verse 18. Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem? Do you not know the things that have happened there in these days?

[10 : 12] You can almost pick up a little amazement in Cleopas' voice. Jesus asked Cleopas to share his thoughts. What things? And what do we hear in Cleopas' answer?

Disappointment, discouragement. Cleopas calls Jesus a prophet, powerful in word and deed. But he doesn't call Jesus Messiah.

He doesn't say the women saw angels who said Jesus was alive. But rather he says, they came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.

So Cleopas and the unknown disciple are not walking along the road to Emmaus rejoicing that Jesus is the Messiah and that he's risen from the dead. No. They are doubting.

They're doubting if Jesus was who they really thought he was. And how does Jesus respond?

Verses 25 and 26.

[11 : 21] He said to them, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

Why doesn't Jesus just say, it's me, Jesus, I'm risen from the dead? Perhaps for the same reason the disciples were kept from recognizing him.

At first, Jesus had something very important to share with them. What would have happened if Jesus had announced it's me, Jesus? Those two disciples would have been so excited they wouldn't have listened to a word more that he said.

But Jesus has something very important to share with them. In fact, it's probably the most important sermon that was ever given. We know, of course, stranger was Jesus.

But at that time, the disciples didn't realize that. It's a wonderful image. Jesus walking along the road with his confused disciples, sharing their troubles.

[12 : 40] Suddenly, this 2,000-year-old story is brought into the present. when disappointment and despair fill our lives. Then Jesus is the unseen stranger walking along beside us, listening to us.

And if we're willing to hear his voice, revealing himself to us, opening our eyes to see him and recognize who he is. Cleopas and his friend talked about the cross, their bewilderment, their sorrow.

Jesus reassured them. He helped them. How did he do it? He pointed them to the scriptures. Luke tells us in verse 27, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

Jesus must have given Emmaus travelers the best lesson in the Old Testament, reminding them how sin came into the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, how the prophets foreshadowed a savior who would be a bideant even to the point of death.

He may also have reminded them of Abraham, how he almost sacrificed his son, and how the heavenly father did sacrifice his son for the sin of all people.

[14 : 17] No doubt he would have referred to Isaiah's description in Isaiah 53 of the suffering servant of God who was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

It's not that these men didn't know the scriptures, but that their understanding was clouded by the idea the Messiah would come with glory and power and rain down fire on their enemies.

Jesus disclosed the truth about himself in this Bible study with these two disciples. Yet you and I have access to the completed scriptures that now include the four gospels, all the letters of Paul and the other apostles.

And Jesus wants to disclose himself to us, which he does powerfully and completely through the scriptures. Friends, the Bible is not a dead book of history or moral law.

It's the word from the risen Lord that's alive. It's powerful, sharper than a double-edged sword, leading us to understand our need and Jesus' presence and power to save us and transform us.

[15 : 39] As followers of Jesus, we need to approach the word of God as the voice of God to speak and teach his truth to us. When we live in the world and the word and make it the source of our daily listening and prayer, then the scriptures lead us, they shape us, they conform us into the likeness of Jesus.

And amazingly, we too today can have access to the same kind of Bible study Jesus had with these disciples as we open, read, reflect, meditate upon and ask Jesus to teach, to lead, to shape us according to his word.

And when we read the scriptures to seek Jesus, he discloses himself to us. And then the risen Jesus meets us. This two-hour walk to Emmaus must have seemed just like five minutes.

The two disciples could feel their despondency, their sorrow, and the sorrow they felt in their hearts change into understanding and hope.

as the stranger, explained that Jesus' death was all a part of God's great plan of salvation.

[17 : 09] On our journey, when despair can sometimes dominate our lives, Jesus walks with us just as he walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus.

He points us to God's word of promise in the Bible that tells us we are God's dearly loved children, and he'll stand by us through thick and thin.

He turns our despair into hope. In verses 28 and 29, we read, as they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further.

But they urged him strongly, stay with us for it's nearly evening, the day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them. I love the King James translation of verse 29, it says, but they constrained him,

saying, abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent, and he went in to tarry with them.

Lovely words, aren't they? And then in verse 30, we read, when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

[18 : 39] Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. As Jesus broke the bread, they recognized him.

Was it the way he broke the bread? Or did they see the nail prints in his hands? Or was it now God's appointed time for the veil to be lifted?

We're not sure, but this much is certain. when Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, they recognized him.

You know, it's a joyful experience when a person recognizes Jesus for who he really is. Not just a prophet, powerful in word and deed, but as Messiah, Savior.

Not just the Savior of the world, but our personal Savior. Cleopas and the unnamed disciple experienced that joy when they recognized him as more than a prophet.

[19 : 48] He was their Messiah, their Savior, their risen Lord. And as he broke the bread and gave it to them, it dawned on them who the stranger was.

It was their master, their master raised from the dead. Jesus himself had ministered to them in their time of sadness. Now they knew why a change had come over them as they walked the road.

Now they knew why their despondent hearts had been changed to hearts filled with hope and renewed faith. Jesus had revealed himself to them in his word and through the breaking of the bread.

I'm sure we can almost imagine Cleopas and his friend standing in amazement, perhaps embracing in great joy, asking each other, wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?

Their world had come together. They had experienced something of the grace of God. because of his love for his disciples, graciously Jesus came and met them on the road to Emmaus.

[21 : 11] Graciously he cleared away the fog of confusion, he showed to them the heart of God and his plan for salvation and finally he revealed himself to them.

He was alive, risen from the dead and at the moment the stranger reveals who he was. He vanishes from their sight.

But he's not gone. He's still visible to those who have the eyes of faith. The road to Emmaus is really a symbol of the Christian life.

This story is about ordinary despair and ordinary Monday morning blues. It's a story about meeting a stranger, hearing his words of comfort, sitting down at a table, sharing a meal.

This is a story really about the meaning of Easter for us. It enables us to see that the risen Lord gives hope, he gives joy. It enables us to see the world not as a place of death, decay, and darkness, but as a place of light, waiting and longing for God's final victory.

[22 : 29] This story about the walk to Emmaus is a story for everyday life now. Perhaps some of us are walking the Emmaus road right now, or we'll walk it in the future.

And in those times of despair, let's remember, we're not walking alone. The unseen stranger, the risen Jesus is walking with us.

Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus is the Savior. He's the hope of the world. Let's walk it with Jesus. Let's walk in the light and in faith with him.

Walking with Jesus, our road will become a great highway of companionship, conversation, belief, and hope, and joy.

let's pray. Heavenly Father, you led the two disciples on the Emmaus road from the known to the unknown. You walked with them in their grief and despair.

[23 : 37] You listened to them. You understood their needs. You gently guided them through the scriptures, helping them to understand what was going on in the world.

Lord Jesus, you used the usual to reveal the unusual. You transformed their weak hearts into burning hearts. Help each one of us to find our ordinary situations transformed by your incredible presence.

Be our companion on the road which we travel. And may we too be your disciples ready to follow, willing to share the good news of the gospel with those we love and with those whom we ought to love.

And we ask this in the name of our risen saviour Jesus. Amen.