

# Easter Evening 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] And now I want to spend a few minutes looking at the passage. And it's a wonderful passage. We have this Easter weekend. It's full of beauty and irony.

So we're going to jump straight into it. So what have we got? We've got two people. One of them's called Cleopas. We don't know the name of the other person. And they're walking away from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus.

And they're talking about all they saw in Jerusalem. And what they saw was the crucifixion of the person they had put so much hope in.

And it was a horror. The sights and the smells and the scream. They had been so hopeful. This guy, Jesus, he was the one.

But he didn't deliver. He died. Messiah is supposed to take over and rule, not fail. And certainly not fail in such a humiliating way.

[ 1 : 02 ] So there's two folks that are walking home. And they are confused. And they're disillusioned. And they're trying to process it all. And on the way, they're joined by a stranger.

It's the risen Christ. They don't realize it, but he sort of joins in step with them. Now, how could they have not known him, you ask? It's a good question. Look at verse 16.

Their eyes were kept from recognizing him. See, God had something to teach them. So he kept them from seeing who the stranger was.

So the stranger says to them, what are you guys talking about? Verse 17. They stood still looking sad. They kind of, you know, Jesus' questions stop them in their tracks.

They just kind of, they stop and they're like, there's only one thing to be talking about. There's one thing to talk about. And then Cleopas says to the stranger, how can you not know what's going on, random stranger?

[ 2 : 05 ] And the irony is, of course, the only person who actually knew what was really going on was the one who Cleopas thinks is a bit thick, who's not really with it.

So at this point, you'd think this is the perfect Hollywood moment. This is the, you know, I am Gandalf the white moment, right? Jesus throws back his hoodie.

It's, aye, we're back on track. But no, Jesus holds back. And there's a good reason for this. He wants to draw out of them what they understand about what happened in Jerusalem so he can set them right.

Now, the next section of our passage is verses 19 to 21. Cleopas tells the stranger his version of what happened. Let's read a couple of verses from there.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty indeed, and word before God and all the people, the chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

[ 3 : 05 ] But we had hoped, and there's such sadness in that line, isn't it? We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

After this, Cleopas says to the stranger, you know, we've heard about these women who have said that the tomb is empty. And Cleopas doesn't know. Is this, you know, is this like, is this good? Is this bad? He doesn't know.

He's just really confused. So this is Cleopas' version of what happened. And he's not wrong about a lot of it. I mean, Jesus is amazing.

And he has these fantastic words. And he did astonishing things. But we'd hoped he'd redeem us. We had hoped.

But he was killed. As Cleopas understood it, when it comes to redemption, there is no room for pain. There is no room for suffering.

[ 4 : 01 ] There's certainly no space for the cross. Most likely, Cleopas thought redemption meant freedom from the Romans. So Jesus cleverly gets to the heart of their disillusionment and wants to turn them around.

Verses 25 and 26, Jesus says to them, And that's the central question, isn't it?

Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer for redemption? And the disciples thought, no. No, it's not necessary. And they're thinking, this is not how redemption works.

We want to get rid of suffering. We don't want somebody to enter into it. We certainly don't want to have to go after them as well. They thought the cross was the end of redemption, not the means of it.

So how did Jesus change their hearts? Remember, he still hasn't revealed himself at this point. He's still incognito. So what did Jesus do? Well, he opens the Bible to them.

[ 5 : 14 ] Let me read verse 27 to you. And beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them all other scriptures, the things concerning himself.

Jesus leads a Bible study while they're walking home. Probably a really good Bible study. Probably the best Bible study in human history. Now do you see, they were kept from seeing Jesus so that they could know him through the scriptures.

Folks, the Bible is all about the Lord Jesus. It is meant to bring us to Jesus. It is meant to bring Jesus to us.

This is God's way. The Bible is God's way of finding him. Now, we don't know what Jesus took them to in the Bible on that two-hour journey.

Perhaps they went to Genesis 3, which says that the seed of a woman would be bruised by the devil before crushing the devil's head. Maybe Exodus, which shows us that God delivers us through the blood of a lamb.

[ 6 : 18 ] Maybe Leviticus, which talks about the atoning sacrifice and the whole sacrificial system. Maybe Isaiah, which tells of a suffering servant who will be pierced for our transgressions.

Maybe Psalm 22, that says that a saviour will die a God-forsaken death, pierced hands, pierced feet, and that people would gamble over his clothes.

And we're just scratching the surface here. We don't know what the Bible study looked like. But what a wonder it is how God reveals himself to us, isn't it?

Through the beauty of his word, through story, through history, through parables, through songs, through proverbs, through poems.

It's amazing. And I hope you know this about the word. When I was young, a young Christian, I just used to crave supernatural experiences.

[ 7 : 18 ] I thought this is where I would find assurance and confidence. And there's nothing wrong with supernatural experiences. But I'm glad now that the Lord has pointed me towards his word.

Because on any day of the week, I can open up Psalm 2 or Psalm 110 and know that God is speaking to me about Christ.

Now, all that to say, the Old Testament is full of the gospel. In it, we see the terribleness of our sin. In it, we see the great and deep love of God.

And of course, in the end, the combination of these two things made the cross inevitable. Now, I've been talking about the Bible and understanding it.

And in case you think I'm saying, you know, faith is just a mental thing. It's just cerebral. Let me remind you of verse 32. At this point in the story, it's later on Christ has revealed himself.

[ 8 : 14 ] In verse 32, those two travelers say this, Did our hearts not burn within us? Will he talk to us on the road? Will he open to us the scriptures?

I love that. It's a wonderful line, isn't it? As they understood the meaning of the cross and that suffering was part of redemption, as they understood why Christ must suffer because of our sin, their hearts burned within them.

They had this visceral response. Their hearts burned. When Blaise Pascal, the 17th century mathematician, surrendered his life to Christ, he wrote the word fire on a piece of paper to remind him of that feeling.

And when he died, that piece of paper was found sewn into his coat. When John Wesley, the 18th century theologian, was describing his conversion moment, he described it as this.

He said his heart was strangely warmed. When Thomas Cranmer unveiled the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, he wrote a manifesto in the preface.

[ 9 : 21 ] And in it he said, He said the purpose of worship centered on Christ was to cause worshippers to be inflamed with love, inflamed with love. He said the truth of the gospel should set our hearts on fire.

The truth of the cross, the reality of the resurrection should burn in our hearts because it means Jesus paid for our sins. We are forgiven.

We have peace with God. Our future with God is assured, and it's personal, and it's unimaginatively beautiful.

Edgar Allan Poe. His most famous work is probably the very dark poem called The Raven. It's about a guy who breaks up with a girl, and he's thinking, Will I get her back?

Will I ever be happy again? And as he's sitting there mourning the loss of his relationship, a raven flies into his room and sits on the bust of Athena and looks at him and just repeats one word over and over and over again.

[ 10 : 36 ] Do you know what that word was? Some of you know the word was nevermore. Nevermore. That's what the raven says to him. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore.

It's a very dark poem. It's getting across the idea that life is irreversible. When things are gone, they are gone. Health, death, youth, when it's gone, it is gone.

But the resurrection. But for the resurrection. It's God's promise that he will make all things new, and he will restore the world.

He will restore you personally. You will have the body and mind you always wanted. It's the greatest promise in the world. Just think about that.

Doesn't that warm your heart? And you don't have to just believe me. It's all in God's word.

[ 11 : 37 ] Isn't that tremendous? Isn't it wonderful? We're going to sing now. We're going to sing in Christ alone. And there's a wonderful line in it.

In the final verse. Here it is here. Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand.

That means that even if you turned up to this Easter service feeling spiritually lethargic, there's no fire in your belly at the moment, even then, it reminds us that Christ has us.

He has a hold of you, and he will carry you into eternity with him. That's the power of the cross.

That's the power of the resurrection.

Let's sing. Let's sing.