

# The Resurrected Lord Draws Near

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back in our Bibles this morning to Luke's Gospel, 24, where we've read again just one verse just to help us focus our thoughts a bit.

! Lord, we need your help today. Both I as preacher and we as a congregation of listeners, we need to hear what you are saying to us, and we need your help.

Give us, therefore, clarity and certainty, and help us, Lord, with the work of the Holy Spirit today, confirming to us the things of God.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You know, it's funny on an Easter Sunday to start a sermon by talking about how, at times, the world and our lives can feel particularly hopeless.

I've been kind of maybe wondering a bit about that over the last wee while, just as you look at the way global conflicts seem to kind of spiral out of control a wee bit, and you end up thinking, what on earth is going on? How do we make sense of the world in which we live?

[ 1 : 41 ] The same can be true almost down to the level of our own lives. There can be times and experiences of confusion and uncertainty.

Sometimes it's mundane small things. If you're a visitor today and you manage to get to the island, maybe you're anxious about how you're going to get off because of the ferries. If you're from here and you're wanting to get away still the second week of the school holidays, maybe there's confusion over that.

It could equally be that there's profound turmoil in your life because of great sorrow and sadness. This week was a sad and difficult week for many of us in the Free Church, particularly in the Free Church ministry.

The last 30 years, Donald MacDonald, Dr. Donald, as we knew him, he was one of our lecturers in the seminary who passed away after a long illness with MS.

It seems a profound passing of the seasons and the time that is going on. And yet, we come to the resurrection.

[ 3 : 01 ] We come to this story of the disciples, Cleopas and the other, leaving Jerusalem on this resurrection Sunday. And that feeling of confusion seems to characterize, it's the best word, to characterize what's actually going on in their hearts.

Because as we read these verses, the temptation is to think they don't know what happened in the first 12 verses of Luke 24. You're almost tempted to say, well, maybe they didn't know that, you know, some of the women had been to the tomb and the angels had said he's risen.

Or that Peter and the other disciples had been to the tomb and seen it was empty. And that Mary Magdalene had actually seen the Lord himself and come with a report of it. And you're thinking, no, no, that's not the case.

They were familiar with all of this. They knew the whole story up to this point. And yet, as they're leaving Jerusalem to go out in the opposite direction of Christian fellowship, as we'll see, as they're leaving Jerusalem, Luke uses an interesting word where he says they were discussing this together.

The word that's used there for a discussion is a heated discussion. They were arguing about what had happened. And they were confused by all of this.

[ 4 : 29 ] And their confusion, its root is found in one simple idea. It is that they had given up hope. The cross for them had seemed too hopeless.

Jesus, who went to the cross, for them, had promised something other than what they had come to realize. And in the midst of all of that, there was absolute confusion in their experience.

And so that's where we have to start today, in what seems to be the hopelessness and the confusion of the cross. And perhaps for some people here today, that's where you are.

You're familiar with the Christian message. You know that Jesus died. And you know that the Christian teaching is that he rose again. And that our teaching is that he went and resides now in heaven with the Father after his ascension.

And that there is a promise that one day he will return. You know that story, that narrative, the point. But at the center of it all, there is the cross.

[ 5 : 42 ] And that is a bit confusing for you. It can be for a lot of people. When Paul spoke about saying he preached Christ and him crucified, he acknowledged that the message of the cross was to the Jews foolishness and hopelessness.

And something that was utterly despicable to the Gentiles. The cross is a place of weakness and apparent defeat. A God who dies?

What on earth was all of that about? And so, when we think about the cross, we have to begin by understanding what has actually happened in that place.

The victory of Jesus in the resurrection is a victory over death. And the cross served as a means of death for Jesus.

We need to be absolutely certain about that. The notion that somehow Jesus, as Muslims would teach us, that Jesus didn't really die at the cross.

[ 6 : 52 ] That a holy prophet of God could not possibly experience death. And would be whipped away at the last moment. Whisked away by sovereign power of God. And replaced with some kind of mannequin. It just doesn't bear out the truth.

Jesus died there. He experienced the consequences of sin that were promised all the way back in the Garden of Eden when Adam first sinned.

And in Adam's first sin, he was told, On the day that you eat of that fruit, you shall surely die. And that day, Adam experienced death. Not the physical death of his body, the separation of body and soul.

But he experienced on that day a separation of death from the easy and living fellowship he had with God the Father. On that day, when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he didn't even have to wait for God's judgment to be announced.

Adam became terrified of God. Fearful of God's judgment. And so Adam, on that day, had hid himself. Concealed himself in the garden when God came looking to meet with him.

[ 8 : 09 ] And the terrifying and awful thing of the cross of Golgotha was that Jesus experienced that breakdown in fellowship with God.

He experienced a death of friendship with God. Where at the cross, he was no longer able to speak of God as his Father, but said, My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

And that experience of abandonment at the cross, that experience of a death of relationship was part and parcel of the awfulness of that event.

And the consequences of that broken relationship is itself physical death. Without God, our bodies just can't keep going.

They just won't. And so Jesus, at the cross, experienced then not only the death of that relationship, but he experienced then physical death as well.

[ 9 : 28 ] And in the midst of all of the brutality of the cross, you cannot lose sight of that. Now, for these disciples who are on the way out to Emmaus, for them, part of the confusion is they're thinking, well, they didn't doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

They seem to have placed all of their messianic hope on him because they say in verse 21, when they're explaining to this mysterious stranger who's come alongside them who they don't recognize as Jesus himself, they say, we had thought, we had not just thought, we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

We had thought he was the one who was going to restore the majesty of the kingdom of Israel. He was going to restore the potency of the throne of David. He was going to restore national heritage and pride.

He was going to bring everything back to the way we wanted it to be. And now, because he had experienced death, our hope is crushed.

For them, things were not as they wanted them to be. It's interesting as well that they don't deny the death of Jesus. They don't even deny the stories of the fact that the grave is empty.

[ 10 : 45 ] They treat them as idle rumor. For them, the resurrection story just cannot be true. It just can't be the case that Jesus is risen.

It is so far outside their experience. And so, a providence has come into their path, a situation has come upon them, which they just are unable to reconcile with what they had wanted, with what they had thought ought to be the case.

So they had their own conception of what God's work in their lives and in the lives of Israel and their people was going to be and what had actually happened was completely foreign to that.

And so today, maybe you're someone who knows the story of Christianity and knows what we believe, but you're confused by what happened at the cross. Maybe that's one group of people who are here today.

But equally, there's another group of people who could be here today and who are experiencing in their own lives an experience of God's providence that is disconnected, shall we say, disconnected from what their concept of God is.

[12:01] I mean, isn't God meant to be a loving and powerful God who can deliver us from all manner of problems? Isn't God a wonderful character who doesn't allow suffering or somehow, if he is somehow allowing suffering, then there must be a very temporary reason for it and it can be overcome very quickly and easily.

And yet, my experience is one of prolonged suffering. So why is God allowing this? Is that fair of him? Is it good of him? Is that true of a loving God? Is that his character? Is that what God does? Maybe today, your experience or the experience of someone close to you is so far from what you think it ought to be that it's leaving you just like these disciples were.

They know the story but they just don't believe it and they've lost confidence in the possibility of hope with such a God. The reason I say that is because I know it's common.

It's become common. Some people found, for example, the COVID pandemic far too difficult. It's hard to reconcile the burdens and the hardships of that season of life with what God is really like.

[13:27] Some people have been fed a diet of what I would actually call false hope but in the form of prosperity gospel teaching on YouTube and on the internet.

Word of faith teaching that says you just need to name it and claim it and God will give it to you.

You just need to hold out for things being the best they can be and believe in it and it will be so. As if somehow Christianity works on the power of positive thinking.

And that's so different from the real experience of our lives, isn't it? where so often the real experience we have is one where there's bitterness and sorrow and hard things that come into our path.

And we should not be mistaken. The disciples leaving Jerusalem that day were in that place of great and difficult sorrow. So much so, in fact, that they're leaving Jerusalem.

This is the thing I find really interesting about the story. The rest of the disciples are still gathered in the upper room. The rest of them are still gathered presumably even where they had been for the Passover with Jesus just a few days before.

[14:47] And yet, these disciples are heading out towards Emmaus. Why are they doing that? Well, I presume they're doing it because for them at that moment, the fellowship of the other disciples had become maybe a bit uncomfortable.

They're cutting themselves off as it were. They're going away in a different direction. And so, they're moving away from fellowship rather than into fellowship.

That's what the devil tempts us with when times are hard. When times get difficult for us, what the devil does is he says to us, you don't need to be in Christian fellowship just now.

That'll just depress you. That'll just be too much for you. That'll just be unhelpful. Keep your own company. They might not understand anyway how sorrowful you are, so stay away from them and have nothing to do with them.

And perhaps everything will pass. Yet it doesn't. The old stories of the coals of a fire that are taken away to a separate place that tumble out of the hearth and onto the floor.

[16:07] These coals, they don't stay burning and warm for long. They go out because coals need to be in the presence of other coals for a fire to burn and keep them going.

And so, this was a place of real hopelessness. And yet, what is amazing in God's providence is that it's into this most hopeless situation that Jesus comes.

In fact, I do wonder, in fact, is this simultaneous to the appearance of Jesus in the upper room or is it very in close proximity to it? When Jesus disappears at the end of this incident, when they're breaking bread together and they then, you know, Jesus then immediately afterwards as they're

talking about these things, a short time later Jesus appears in the upper room.

I wonder, is it simply the fact that Jesus in this place, in his great grace, goes to perhaps the most needy disciples first and appears to them? It's only afterwards that he appears in the upper room to the rest.

And it's out of his great love that Jesus appears. Not a million miles away from where these disciples are. It's not like he sends an angel to them to comfort them and to say something to them. [17:23] He comes himself in person. That's what verse 15 says to us whilst they were talking and discussing together. Luke almost puts attention on this. Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

That these disciples who are so dismayed, who are so sorrowful, who are so overwhelmed by this terrible situation that they find themselves in, at this very moment, Jesus himself comes close to them.

And he's very patient with them because we remember our doctrine. Jesus is God. God is omnipresent. He is all-knowing. He sees everything so he already knows what's going on in their lives and what's going on in their discussion.

He already knows the details of it but it's almost as if he pleads ignorance with them. He wants to hear from them themselves. What's the matter? Are you a stranger in Jerusalem that you haven't heard these things?

They're almost incredulous. They can't believe it. And so they start spilling out to Jesus all of the things that have confused them, all of the things that they found so difficult, all of the things that they found impossible to talk to, perhaps to Peter or to the other disciples but they're able to talk about it here amongst themselves, the two of them.

[18:39] And they spill all of this out to Jesus who they assume is actually just a stranger and Jesus listens to them patiently and gently and hears all of their concerns. I would say to you today if you're a Christian going through these perplexing, difficult valleys, excuse me, pour it out to Jesus.

Tell him the confusion of your moment. Or today if you're confused as well about the cross, if you haven't come to a place of faith yet and you're still in that place of anxiety and confusion and perplexion about what exactly does the cross even mean?

I would say talk to Jesus about it. Pray about it. Pray about that confusion and ask God what it all means. Because he is patient and he is willing to come down to the level of mere humans like us and who will patiently minister to us by coming alongside us and hearing our complaints and moans and understanding what it is that we are really battling through because he will listen to us.

And this Jesus comes alongside them, listens to what they're saying and then he begins to open things up to them. Verse 25, is it?

O foolish ones and slow of hearts to believe all that the prophets have spoken. The idea of the foolish ones there is a very gentle rebuke.

[20:18] But the idea of the fool in the Old Testament is the one who simply just denies the work of God. The fool is the one who in his heart has said there is no God.

And Jesus is saying you need to remember in all of your confusion at the moment you're forgetting God. And so beginning in Moses and all of the prophets he begins to show them the necessity of Christ suffering these things.

He begins to show them the necessity of the cross. Now we're not told what emphasis Jesus drew out from the Old Testament on this occasion.

but we can imagine what that would have been. Perhaps it is the fact that there is a necessity for a sacrifice to provide a covering.

And so that idea of a sacrifice providing a covering it doesn't begin on the teaching of the law on the Day of Atonement it actually begins on the Day of the Fall in Genesis 3 when Adam and his wife Eve are ejected from the garden having tried to make coverings for themselves from fig leaves God provides for them a better covering in the form of an animal skin that he fashions into a garment for them.

[21:37] God clothes them covers them from their nakedness and their shame and their exposure as they're cast out of the harmony and peace of the garden into the wilds of the sinful world that has now unfurled itself because of Adam's sin.

Perhaps it's that God will provide a lamb a substitute again it's there at the beginning in Genesis where God says that the seed of the woman will one day bruise the head of the serpent and he will

bruise his heel there's that sense of God sending a redeemer of some sort but then there's more than that you go into the story of Abraham just a few chapters later in Genesis and God provides a lamb when Abraham goes up the mountain to sacrifice his son perhaps it's that God will provide a remedy for salvation it's there in the story of Noah we were looking at that a couple of weeks ago where God carries Noah through the flood and God remembers his covenant with him and his promises to him but the book of the law the books of Moses just the book of Genesis alone in the first 20 odd chapters there's loads of detail there about how the Messiah would have to suffer these things and it's there in its proto-form there at the beginning of the books of the Torah and then the prophets simply expound on that and explain more and more what God's redemption is going to look like and why it is so utterly necessary because we are so utterly sinful we can't save ourselves and so God has to do something to save us and it culminates ultimately in God sending his son to die in the place of sinners the Christ of the anointed

Messiah and then he enters his glory and that idea of glory in Luke's gospel it's a wonderful study you can go in and have a look through it yourself today perhaps but the idea of him entering his glory in Luke's gospel is bound up in the cross there is no glory without the cross itself it's a key theme in certainly Luke's theology it grows out of Paul's theology as well it's necessary for Christ to suffer in order to enter the glory so the path to glory is through the cross not sidestepping it not getting around it not getting away from it but through it it is necessary and these disciples are left in that position where you know their questions the things they've been arguing about are being addressed the things that they've been uncertain about Jesus has very gently taken them to the scripture and shown them very openly on the pages of scripture and said this is how it all fits together there's a reasonableness to our faith as Christians it carries an internal consistency it makes sense when people mock and deride

Christianity one of the things they often say is your faith is a blind faith it doesn't believe in anything concrete it is nothing certain except you would turn around and say hang on a minute there are literally hundreds if not thousands of years of written recorded history in the Bible that find their culmination and their climax and their fulfillment in the cross of course it makes sense dozens of writers approved by God down through the centuries all pointing us towards the same moment when God's own son would come and bear the sins of the world at the cross and then furthermore they need to grapple with the resurrection itself death could not hold him it has no grip upon him because he is the perfect sinless one he is the one who emerges triumphant from the dark realm of Sheol and who comes back with victory and gifts to share with us to pass on and one of them is in fact his own presence because the wonderful thing is when these disciples they urge

Jesus this unknown stranger they urge him to come in with them for supper that night and to stay with them because the light's getting on and so Jesus stays with them and what's fascinating is it's in that moment of close intimate personal fellowship that their eyes are opened because Jesus took bread and blessed it and gave it to them and their eyes were opened and they recognised him in that so I find it fascinating their trajectory remember is away from Jerusalem away from fellowship with the rest of the disciples away from probably the upper room where bread had been broken together and these two disciples are now finding Jesus in the breaking of bread together what they discover is fellowship restored is fellowship entirely renewed and God is found there we can't pause or escape rather this reality that the path of real progress and maturity in the

[ 27 : 16 ] Christian life is a path of real fellowship with other believers in which is found fellowship with Jesus and it's actually the fellowship with Jesus that spurs us on and that enlivens and enfreshens us and so when Jesus breaks bread with them they then the consequence of Jesus breaking bread with them and them realising Jesus is in this look what he's just told us and we have to what they then realise is we have to share what Jesus has told us with others and the first place they want to go is go back to the other disciples that they've just left they want to get back into Christian fellowship with these disciples to embolden them to encourage them to bless them just as Jesus has blessed them so what Paul writing in the New Testament in one of his letters he talks about the importance of us comforting others with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted this is what it is to live as a Christian to walk as a Christian to go on as a Christian in a disciplined way led and taught by Jesus ultimately it is to share that blessing with others and to encourage them and to build them up that's why I was saying to the kids this morning the hope of the resurrection is a hope that we dare not share

Christ is risen and this changes all of the dynamics of the church and everything of our experience and everything that we are going through hard and difficult and dark places that we have to walk they are all transformed because Jesus has come into them with us and because we discover the fellowship of Jesus with us in these dark places that we must therefore be bold and say to others Christ is there to be found and Christ is there to comfort you in the dark places you have to go to particularly the places of your own sin particularly the places of your own failing the places of your own inadequacy the places where you have stumbled and fallen completely short Christ is there for you his cross has paid for that sin and now we get up and we rise with renewed strength it might feel like it's on broken wings but you know what

God has healed you he's healed you through his son Jesus who has come and ministered in your experience and so the disciples they run back to Jerusalem they run and when they get back they hear the stories the Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon and then they say well he's appeared to us as well and he made himself known to us in the breaking of bread that simple fellowship of Jesus that miracle of the life of Jesus now it's revealed I think bizarrely not in grandiose miracles and angels singing in the sky but rather it's revealed in the simple things these simple places of love and fellowship and companionship where Jesus comes alongside and encourages us on the way and so today I would ask you whether you are in that place of confusion whether you are in these places of sorrow in the darkness of hard experiences

I would urge you to find that Jesus is there already and that he has come alongside you and that he is showing you the truth and he is showing you the way because he is ultimately the life of your hope see him for who he is and love him and worship him and follow him and he will lead you to good places let's pray heavenly father we thank you today for the presence of your son Jesus we thank you that although he is enthroned in heaven and at your right hand he still sends the holy spirit to convey to us the presence of almighty God that he still comes alongside us himself in his word and that he speaks to us that we hear from him and we hear from him words of life and blessing and hope and so Lord fill us today with that confidence in who you are who your son is and what he has done and the work of the Holy

Spirit as it goes on in our lives and we ask these things in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing in conclusion in words of Psalm 16 this is Sing Psalms verses 8 to 11 the last four stanzas this is the confidence that David had in knowing the Lord was with him I often suggest this as we're singing the Psalms that where David uses the word of the Lord the name of the Lord Yahweh we can clearly and fairly and with absolute consistency substitute in the name of Jesus if that's how we want to understand it before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering so although David is writing prophetically in the Psalm about the resurrection ultimately of Jesus there is a sense in which that is also true of us that our bodies when we die will rest in the grave but not without hope because

[ 32 : 58 ] Christ is risen and there is hope for us and so death will not have its hold over God's people forever but there is hope for the children of God who have Christ at their hand at their side with them and who will lead them ultimately through death itself and to the path of life divine ultimately so we are rooted in these verses because we are rooted in Christ and that I hope is true of each one of us today that we would be rooted in Christ Jesus and therefore find our hope in him so before me constantly I set the Lord alone let's stand to sing to God's praise before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand

I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your holy one to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine please shall thy know at your right hand joy from your face will shine now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and always Amen to to to to to!  
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