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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Luke 24:13-35

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you for the incredible gift that we are celebrating today. That's the gift of the opened tomb, the resurrected Lord. Father God, we just praise you and thank you that your sacrifice of your Son was considered acceptable and because of that we can meet and gather and know that we are accepted. I pray this morning, Lord, as again we open up your book and we look into it, that you would give us the gift of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would increase our ability to understand what you did for us and how it has affected our lives, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Cleopas was a very, very unhappy man. It had been about three days since Christ had been executed by the Roman government at the behest of the Jewish authorities and he still couldn't believe what he had seen. And as far as these events go, it was -- it was a rather minor affair, I mean politically speaking this was not an execution of somebody of great note. I mean this Jesus was no great political enemy, he was no notorious criminal. He was simply

a thorn in the side of the Jewish religious leaders who eventually found a way around their own laws and the laws of Rome itself in order to have him permanently removed. Cleopas was one of those who had placed his faith in Jesus or so he thought. Luke's gospel describes a conversation that he is involved in that takes place shortly after Jesus has died and resurrected. This is Luke 24 starting at verse 13. It says: *That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.* Just imagine what an awful conversation this was. I mean Jesus Christ was dead, and it wasn't like the death of a friend or a relative, it was much, much more than that. This was the death of somebody that they thought was the Messiah. For three years now they had followed Jesus, they had heard of the great mighty deeds that had he done and how he had fed huge crowds and healed the sick and even raised the dead. I think it's safe to say that these two knew Jesus about as well as the disciples knew him which was not very much at all.

We've been studying the Gospel of John and we've repeatedly seen over and over again that the disciples themselves, they just could not see who it was, was living in their midst. Well, that was literally true for Cleopas. Verse 15 says: *While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went*

with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Now walking alongside them, Jesus overtakes them but they're kept from recognizing him. And he says to them, what are you discussing? Verse 17 says: *They stood still, looking sad.* In other words they just stopped dead in their tracks. They couldn't believe what they were hearing. I mean, to put that into context, imagine it's the day after 9/11 and the twin towers are lying in rubble and you're walking and you're in a subdued conversation and a complete stranger walks up to you and says, "Hey, what's going on?" Verse 18 says: *Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"* And he said to them, "What things?" You know, given the context, this question almost appears bizarre. In fact, the question is, it is so out of place, the two strangers, they stop right there and they say, "Are you a visitor to Jerusalem?" You can almost hear the pain or the anger in their voices. I mean they're saying are you a tourist or are you just ignorant? You see, these travelers, they were not just unhappy, they were existentially unhappy. This event that had taken place had challenged their very existence. You see, they thought that Jesus had the answer to the most fundamental question anybody could ever ask. *Jesus said to them, "What things?"* And they said to

him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Jesus had been their answer. And then Rome and the cross came and they snatched it all away. "But we had hoped that he was the one," they said. God said Jesus was the one, that he was the one to redeem Israel but God's redeemer was much, much bigger than the Israel that they had imagined.

John 1 says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.* See, God said that same Jesus they saw crucified was not only the redeemer of Israel, he was also the creative force that produced the universe. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* God also said that Jesus himself was the creative force that literally infused life itself into creation. He said "*in him was life.*" This term that we translate as the Word is the Greek word "logos." It means "that which gives meaning to." It's the word that we get "logic" from. In verse 14 of John 1, God tells us that the logos, the word, the one who gives meaning to, became a human being and that he then

began to live among us. He says in *John 1:14*: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* God says in Jesus was life. See, he wasn't just a creative source. He was the well that meaningful existence came out of. I mean, without Jesus we have an existence that Shakespeare summed up perfectly in the words of *Macbeth*:. "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." You see, life without the logos of life signifies nothing. Life with Jesus is not only eternal, its daily expression signifies what I'm here for and that is the glory of God. Jesus taught us that we were creatures created in the very image of God to give praise, honor, worship and glory to God. He taught us that we were designed by God for worship. In *John 4* he says: *"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* He said that worship is what we were put on earth for. In *Romans 12:1* he says: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship.*

You know, C.S. Lewis pointed out that praise and worship is programmed by God literally into our DNA. There's no creature programmed for praise like human beings are. Fish and birds and

grazers and hunters, they don't consciously praise anything because they're not human beings, I mean, they're not built that way. But we are. In fact only human beings are built that way. Only humans are designed by God to give praise, honor and glory back to their creator. And the horror, the real horror of human fallenness is the refusal to see that. I mean, do you ever notice that all of creation knows exactly why it's here with one exception? That exception is us. I mean birds fly and fish swim and cattle graze and hunters hunt, and they answer their own question of meaning by what they do. What do we do? I mean why are we here? Where do we find meaning for our lives?

The reason Cleopas was so downcast was that he saw the very one who gave his life meaning executed. What was he to do now? Well Cleopas's problem is our problem. You see without Jesus, without the logos, there's really no logic to our lives. There's just life itself. You know we're born, we grow up, we go to school, we get a job, we find a spouse, we get married so that we can have kids, who then grow up, go to school, get a job, find a spouse and repeat the pattern endlessly. We're born, we grow, we reproduce and then we die. I mean how is that any different from the animals that surround us? I mean without Jesus I'm just the smartest of the animals. Which may matter a lot while I'm living but it matters not a whit when I'm dead. And then the best that I can hope for is

that I am just like any other animal, I'm just fertilizer. But God says otherwise. God says: *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* Jesus came to bear that judgment for us. Cleopas and his friends, they just, they couldn't understand that. He said in verse 20: *Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*

Redeemers don't get crucified. Cleopas was downcast and distraught because his reason for praise was dead. He had hoped that Jesus was the one and now by dying, Jesus had failed to be that one. And so Cleopas's hope had died when Jesus died. Jesus was supposed to redeem Israel to usher in this new day when the nation would no longer be under the thumb of the Roman Empire. They had all seen these great miracles and the great power in the life of Jesus only to see that life snuffed out like that of a common criminal. I could probably still hear the words: *"He saved others yet he couldn't save himself."* And all the hope that they had invested in this Messiah now lay dead and buried. Jesus was life's answer. Now he's dead and gone. So Cleopas had good reason to be unhappy. But you see Cleopas was also highly uninformed. He was ignorant of the fact that God had a plan far grander than he had assumed. See, he only thought of Jesus as an earthly ruler of an earthly kingdom because he never connected the dots that God had sprinkled throughout the whole Old Testament. I mean Jesus himself preached

over and over again the kingdom that he was bringing and the good news that he was bringing and over and over again he made it crystallly clear that the kingdom of God was not political but spiritual and that there were two kingdoms which were at war and it was a war that started eons ago in heaven itself, and Revelation describes it. It says: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

Satan is hurled to earth and then he begins to systematically destroy the place where he's landed. And Jesus spent much of his time on earth undoing what the devil had already done. *1 John 3:8* says flat out: *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.* Cleopas, he thought Jesus's plan was far more political. He said we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel. He made the same mistake that many others do, he thought of Jesus as a political ruler alone. And you know others thought of him as a revolutionary, maybe as a teacher or a prophet but very, very few thought of him as a sin bearer, as a flawless substitute for his sheep. Like I said, Cleopas was sadly

uninformed. I wonder if Cleopas had ever heard what Jesus had said about his sheep. He said in *John 10*: "*I am the good shepherd, and I lay down my life for my sheep.*" Cleopas got the first part but he missed the second part, and that was the dying part. Did he hear what Jesus said well before he was arrested and crucified in *John 12*, Jesus said: "*Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast down out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Cleopas had seen Jesus lifted up from the earth, crucified just like he said he would, but he never connected the dots. He was distraught about Jesus's death because he was badly uninformed. All he saw was a tragic miscarriage of justice resulting in the execution of an innocent man. God saw the very same facts but from an entirely different perspective. Jesus was about to drive out the prince of this world by using the devil's own tools against him. You see, the prince of this world, that is the devil, he saw the cross as a public humiliation and a repudiation of Jesus by the very people he had come to save. God saw differently. God saw it as a public demonstration of his Son's substitutionary atonement for us. Jesus, the perfect one, offering himself as a sacrifice for his fallen and imperfect sheep. And you know both sides had a huge stake in the outcome. Jesus came to die in our place as our perfect substitute and if he had failed in his mission, if he had

ever sinned during his entire life or in his death, well then he wouldn't have been a flawless substitute for us and then his sacrifice would not or could not be accepted by a perfectly holy Father, and he would have remained in the ground dead forever. Cleopas looked at the cross and all the he could see was a dead Jesus. And that's what the whole world saw for three days until the angel announced: *"He is risen just as he said."* See, the resurrection that we celebrate today was the Father's proof that his Son's sacrifice had been perfect and that now our sin debt had been paid in full. The proof was an empty tomb. That rolled open stone proved that Jesus' perfection was accepted on our behalf. And the prince of this world Satan no longer could use our sin as his claim on us because now that sin was paid for in full. Jesus had turned the tables on Satan as God declares in *Colossians 2:14* which says this, it says: *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

Poor Cleopas. I mean he only saw a man named Jesus nailed to a cross. And what he saw as tragic defeat God saw as the greatest

triumph in human history. So we ask how could Cleopas have missed this so badly? Well, we know how unhappy he was and that certainly could have affected his judgment. We know that he was certainly uninformed about God's plans and intentions, but how he missed God's prophetic word is simply a mystery to me. You see, God did not leave us to guess what his plan would be. In fact he stated it repeatedly and prophetically from Genesis to Revelation in the Garden of Eden right after the serpent had successfully tempted Adam and Eve. Listen to what God said to the serpent. He says: *"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."* At the cross all of that came to pass. You see at the cross, the serpent did strike Jesus's heel, but Jesus crushed his head by removing his power over us. Now that prophesy was given right after Adam and Eve fell and that was thousands of years before the cross. Cleopas had to have heard that the Messiah was going to suffer. He had to have read Isaiah 53 which was written seven centuries before Jesus was even born. And instead of predicting a triumphant political leader wresting Israel from Rome's grip, it speaks instead of a rejected sin bearer taking on our sin. *Isaiah 53:3* says: *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with*

grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. I mean I ask Cleopas, who could that have been but Jesus? Wounded for our transgressions? Bruised for our iniquities? The chastisement that brings us peace is upon him and he's led like a lamb to the slaughter? Cleopas had to have seen all of that unfold before his eyes.

And *Psalm 22* is even more specific and it was written 1,000 years before Jesus was born. It opens with the very words that Jesus cried out from the cross, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" And then it goes into a graphic description of what happened at the crucifixion. *Psalm 22:7: All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"* A

thousand years later that exact mocking is coming from the high priests who had Jesus arrested. We see it in *Matthew 27:41*:
"Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." Didn't Cleopas hear that? Psalm 22 goes on to say: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. One thousand years after this Psalm was written these incidents happened exactly as they were prophesied. John 19:23: When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things.

Didn't Cleopas see the soldiers cast lots? I mean, didn't he see how they pierced his hands and his feet? Couldn't he put two and

two together? When that Psalm was written ten centuries earlier, Rome didn't even exist as a power and crucifixion itself had not even been invented. Now surely Cleopas had access to the Psalms. Surely he could read about the cross and the garment and the piercing. And these are dots that are the size of beach balls. So why didn't Cleopas connect the dots? You know his blindness is almost comical. I mean if you go back to the text that I read at the beginning of this message you find a very unhappy and uninformed Cleopas and friends telling the Jesus he couldn't recognize how disappointed he was in Jesus. We pick up the conversation again. *And he said to them -- this is Jesus -- and he said to them, "What things?" And he said, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But 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. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 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."*

See what we have here, what we really have here is overwhelming evidence that not only was Cleopas unhappy and uninformed, but he was filled with unbelief. I mean he starts off by telling the Jesus that he doesn't even recognize that this Jesus who so bitterly disappointed him was a powerful prophet in word and deed who had been crucified and buried. That's a dot. He then tells Jesus that he's heard that the tomb is empty. It's another dot. That he's also heard there's eye witness accounts of an angel announcing that Jesus is alive. Another dot. That he's also heard other eye witness accounts saying friends have found the tomb empty. Another dot. And yet he never connects the dots. He thinks isn't all of this just so awful. You got to remember also Jesus overtook them. They were the ones who were silent, downcast and defeated. They were the ones who rebuked Jesus's feigned ignorance of the events that had just taken place. Now they find it's Jesus's turn to rebuke them. *Luke 24 says: And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was is 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.* Jesus tells Cleopas, you know, the dots were there in front of you all the time. *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,"* he said.

Now you know I've been awfully hard on Cleopas and I think that's really quite unfair because Cleopas is us. Those words that Jesus spoke were not just for Cleopas; they were for us as well. You see, we have far more dots than Cleopas ever had. We have the whole of scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, we have the whole of history, all of science and all of the failed attempts of skeptics to prove that the tomb really wasn't empty. So why doesn't everybody believe? Well, the answer is simple. We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are. We become the final filter that determines if we'll accept things as they really are or as we really are. Case in point. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Here are the Pharisees and they see with on their eyes a man so far dead that he was literally starting to rot and they see him risen from the dead and they conclude not that Jesus is God but that his power is such a threat that he now has to die. We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are. And there's still a war going on between the kingdoms. And part of the fallout of that spiritual warfare is the spiritual blindness all of us have inherited from Adam. Cleopas didn't believe for the same reason that others don't believe and that is they can't. I mean Cleopas literally couldn't even see the Jesus he was speaking to because God wouldn't let him see. Verse 16 says: *Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.* But the same is true for everyone who is outside the kingdom. And it's not God who is blinding them, it's

Satan and his minions. *2 Corinthians 4:4* says: *The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* *1 Corinthians 1:18* says: *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* You see, your non believing friends, neighbors and relatives, they all think in some way, manner or form that the cross is foolish, that we're unfortunate or at the very least unimportant because they can't see otherwise. They can't see that the cross is the pivotal event that divides believer and non-believer. But you know, if that is true then there's a logical question. The logical question is why tell anybody about Jesus? This is hopeless. Well, Jesus tells us why in *Matthew 19:26*. Jesus has just met a very rich young ruler who wishes to follow him. And he tells him, okay, this is what you have to do. You need to sell everything, give it all to the poor, lay up treasure for yourself in heaven and come and follow me. And the ruler goes away sad. We've all heard this story. And Jesus goes on to say: *"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."* And he says that and the disciples are absolutely stunned. I mean, everything they had ever thought, everything they ever learned or were taught says that wealth was an evidence of God's blessing. I mean here Jesus is turning the entire concept on its head. He's

saying that wealth is often times a curse. That was way too much for the disciples. In *Matthew 19:25*, it says: *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"* They're thinking if the wealthy aren't blessed of God, then who in the world is ever going to enter the kingdom of God? It says: *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Jesus was unequivocal. No human being is capable of leading another human being into the kingdom. But Jesus himself said: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up at the last day."* See, it's impossible for any of us to lead anyone into the kingdom by our own power, but here's why we still preach the gospel. Jesus said, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* You see, the God of this age, Satan himself, is still at work today and he works mightily to make sure that you don't ever connect the dots. I mean he also wants you to think that even the dots are ridiculous. And he's been wildly successful. I mean for many, the whole idea of a God man bearing my sin is just foolishness. And no matter how hard I try, I cannot make you believe Jesus is who he says he is, that he is God in the flesh, the good Shepherd who came to earth to ransom his sheep with his blood. I can't overcome the god of this age who's far more powerful than I am, but I can introduce you to someone who is far more powerful than that god. And in fact, he

may be overtaking you right now. In fact, he may be walking and talking to you this morning just like he did with Cleopas and his friend. They were essentially unhappy, uninformed and unbelieving when Jesus overtook them because they thought the meaning of their life had died. Perhaps you feel that same sense of meaninglessness. Perhaps you've asked yourself, "What am I doing here?" "What is the purpose of my life?" Cleopas had the joy of life restored because God elected to show him that the Logos, the very one who supplies meaning to life itself had gone to the cross to purchase eternal life for his sheep. It was Jesus himself who opened up the whole word of God to show that everything that had taken place was exactly as God had planned it. Verse 27: *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Cleopas says: *"Didn't our hearts burn within us as he opened the scriptures to us?"* And you know why his heart was burning? I mean his heart was burning because the meaning of life which he thought had died was not only very much alive but was there among them proving and demonstrating that life in the kingdom was the only life that had meaning. The Logos who gives our life its only logic had risen from the dead, and he was now walking beside them.

Notice something else about what took place here. Notice that it was Jesus who overtook Cleopas and his friend. It was Jesus who

pursued and overtook them. Perhaps that same Logos is pursuing you. And when he does, the very first thing that you're going to notice is perhaps for the very first time the dots will begin to line up. You start to think perhaps the foolishness of the cross is not so foolish after all. And when you start thinking that, understand you don't get that on your own. You see, it is impossible to come to God on your own but you're never alone. Jesus said, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."* You see, if this gospel makes sense to you, it's because God is visiting you just like he visited Cleopas. But don't think it's anything out of the ordinary when it comes to God's grace.

Paul Trip writes this, he says: "In Luke 15, the Pharisees came to Jesus and ridiculed Him for 'receiving sinners.' They were wrong. Jesus does not receive sinners, He pursues sinners. He pursues sinners like a shepherd pursues a lost sheep, like a woman pursues her lost coin, like a father runs after his lost son." Jesus runs in pursuit of sinners. Now if Jesus is overtaking you and you don't know what is next, talk to me, talk to a friend, talk to a deacon or an elder, we would love to help you enter into his kingdom. And if he has already overtaken you, if he has given you his life and his Logos, which is the meaning of life itself, then we do what comes naturally to the creatures he designed for this in

the first place, we praise Him, we glorify Him and we worship Him.
Let's pray.

Father God, we just celebrate today the incredible gift that you have given to us. We celebrate today the open tomb. We celebrate today the fact that the price has been paid, that we stand perfected before you now in Christ. On our own, Lord, there is nothing, absolutely nothing to recommend us to you. But in Christ's blood we stand perfected as his brother. We thank you for that gift and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.