

June 21, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

THEIR EYES WERE OPENED
Luke 24:13-35

J.C. Ryle wrote, “Of all the eleven appearances of Christ after His resurrection, none perhaps is so interesting as the one described in this passage.” (J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, vol. 4, “Luke,” Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, r.p. 2007, 498).

Philip Graham Ryken, introducing a sermon he preached on this text, said that of all the incredible events in history, of all the stories that we read about in the Bible from Moses to David and Goliath, if he could go back and witness any of them, it would be this one. “I would choose to travel the gospel road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, walking with two disciples on an Easter afternoon and listening to Jesus explain how everything in the whole Bible is all about Him” (Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, “Luke,” vol. 2, Phillipsburg, N.J., 2009, 643).

As spiritually, emotionally defeated followers tenderly prepared the dead body of their chosen Master and placed it in the cold, dark tomb, none of them thought about resurrection. It was the furthest thing from their minds. They had placed all their hope in Him whom they were convinced was the promised Messiah of God. They fully planned to be part of the restored Kingdom of God. But that afternoon, as they watched Jesus die, their hope disappeared like pools of blood soaking into the ground at the foot of the cross.

Even Peter, having witnessed the empty tomb with his own eyes, walked away wondering, marveling at what had happened. He did not rejoice but tried through human wisdom to come to grips with the evidence he saw.

A lot of people find themselves in such despair, such hopelessness when dreams are shattered and plans destroyed by

circumstances beyond their control. What can we say to encourage them? Do we tell them about our own bouts with discouragement and challenge them to keep their chin up? That is a rather lame attempt at help. Do we tell them to read a good, inspiring biography or a book about enduring trials? Suffering people can attest that such attempts at encouraging the defeated are generally futile.

So what do we do; what can we offer? What if we read the Scripture to them and tell them what it means and how it applies to life? Surely thinking people would respond to that idea with much doubt and skepticism. They might say, “Are you kidding? These people need help not religion.”

John MacArthur observed, “To understand Scripture is to understand everything from God’s perspective, which is the only true view. All of God’s purposes for humanity and all of His purposes in time and eternity can be known only to those who understand the Bible. Therefore, the greatest service that can ever be rendered to anyone is to explain to them the meaning of Scripture. (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, “Luke,” vol. 4, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014, 418-19)

That is why, when Jesus found two of His followers trudging along the Emmaus Road, with shoulders slumped and heads hung low, He didn’t punch them in the arm and say, “Hang in their guys. The night is always darkest before the dawn.” No, Jesus, the perfect counselor, interpreted for them the Scripture. The result? The downcast, hopeless disciples had their eyes opened and their hearts burned within them. Understanding the Scripture gave them hope. When you and I understand the Bible, we will have hope that no amount of human counsel, advice, instruction or sympathy can ever offer.

Perplexing Questions (vv.13-24).

A stranger met with a couple of Jesus’ disciples and wondered what their conversation was about? (vv.13-17) The two were talking about current events. *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 (vv.13-14).*

Luke let us know that the two followers of Jesus were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. At a brisk walk (3.5 m.p.h.) that would be a two hour trip. But it is unlikely these discouraged followers were walking briskly, which means they were looking at a long time of talking together. It is also unlikely that these two were numbered among the apostles since later in the text (v.33) they returned to Jerusalem to talk to the “Eleven.”

They were talking with each other about all these things that had happened (v.14). What had happened was not good at all. The term, *these things*, refers to the events of the previous week. That would be stuff like the amazing triumphal entry where raucous crowds hailed the King of the Jews. These things included the days spent listening to their Master teach pointed truth in the temple precincts. It referred to Jesus rebuking, refuting, uncovering the hypocritical religious leaders. In that setting, it must have appeared to the followers like Jesus and they were on a roll. Everything was coming up roses. The establishment of the kingdom had to be right around the corner.

We should be able to identify with times like that. We love the good days, the times when people are kind to us, when our job is good, when there is more than enough money to pay bills. We like days when we feel well physically and emotionally and when we are getting along well with the kids and our spouse. But every day is not a good day. How do we respond when an unexpected, major disruption to that tranquility pops up. So it was for Christ’s followers, that suddenly, everything they believed in and had hoped for was in tatters.

The great problem in the story is that two pairs of eyes were spiritually blind. *While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them (v.15).* Does it seem odd that Jesus drew near at that moment? Jesus’ appearance on the road was not coincidence or accident. This picture reminds us that Jesus loves His people and will do what is best for us. Meeting with two discouraged followers was the exact plan for omniscient Jesus. He had done the same kind of thing when He walked on the water in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. In your heartache, expect Jesus to show up. Pay attention. Keep looking. He is there.

Don’t be like the two disciples who could not see that Jesus had come to comfort them. Luke informed us that, though Jesus was right there with them, their eyes were kept from recognizing him (v.16). Jesus walked with the disciples but the disciples didn’t know that Jesus had even showed up. Their eyes prohibited them from recognizing Him. This “blindness” could be a reference to their spiritual condition. Eyes that are blind to God and His truth is our natural condition. Everyone is born unable to see who Jesus is. Everyone is born incapable of understanding their own spiritual blindness, their own spiritual death, their critical need for the Savior to deliver them from slavery to self, sin, and Satan.

But these were spiritually alive men who loved Jesus. Why were they spiritually blind? The passive verb indicates that something or someone kept them from recognizing Jesus. It appears that there was some kind of divine hindrance. That reality reminds us that we must never take our understanding God’s truth for granted.

At the same time, this could be a reference to actual, physical inability to grasp that this stranger was Jesus. It is possible that they just did not recognize the physical appearance of Jesus. Other texts indicate that Jesus’ glorified body was not quickly identified as His old body.

Also there was the very practical problem of emotional clouding of discernment. Surely the followers’ discouragement clouded every truth and made it difficult for them to grasp truth. Plus, they were not expecting Jesus, since they thought He was dead. We know from experience that when we are deeply discouraged, we do not perceive God’s truth, presence, and work in us as readily as we should. That truth allows us to bring up a warning. When you are sunk in discouragement, confusion, despair, don’t conclude that Jesus is dead or doesn’t care.

Things didn’t change much when the Stranger asked one casual question. *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 (v.17).* Jesus’ question appears to be casual, just making small talk. But Jesus never asked “casual” questions or engaged in small talk according to the Gospel record. Rather Jesus intentionally asked this particular question. Good teachers and good listeners ask pertinent and provocative questions. Obviously, Jesus was the best

teacher. The two disciples' immediate response proves that the question was indeed provocative. They stopped walking, stood still, looked sad, maybe even looking at this stranger with a certain amount of disbelief or disdain.

The response of those men indicates that they were incredulous. "Don't You know?" (vv.18-24) Something very bad happened to THE prophet and this "guy" didn't know anything about it? Even the wording of the text reveals that Cleopas was agitated and responded sarcastically. *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?" (v.18).*

Where was this stranger from? It appeared that he too had just walked out of Jerusalem to join them along the way. If he just came from Jerusalem, how could he be so ignorant? Ironically, Cleopas was the ignorant one who didn't know what was going on, who was blind to the fact that he was at the moment talking to Jesus! And most ironic is that Jesus was not "the only visitor in Jerusalem who did not know what had happened." He was the only one on earth at the moment who really did know in perfect detail what had happened in Jerusalem!

We are so like Cleopas. We are so foolish to hear the daily news, watch the video clips, read the blogs from the talking heads, come to the popular and acceptable conclusions, and then label the guy who isn't on board as ignorant. But he is the guy who is not swept up in the popular, acceptable trends because he is the guy who is reading His Bible and praying every day. And that practice causes him to interpret the events of this passing world in light of God's eternal truth. Maybe we should be slower to label people who appear to be out of the loop as ignorant. Anyone who is interpreting the events of life in light of God's eternal truth is far wiser than the experts whose solutions have never solved the sin problems of life.

And he 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" (v.19). Now both disciples explained what happened to Jesus of Nazareth – a prophet mighty in word and deed. One commentator calls this phrase "the beginning of the gospel according to Cleopas." The phrase, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in

deed and word before God and all the people" (v.19) is a reference to the gospel – the Good News about Jesus' work. It appears they quickly unpacked everything about the life of Jesus that we have been studying in Luke these many months.

Then they came to the crux of the "problem" as they saw it. *And how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him (v.20).* Notice their words. They told the "stranger" that their religious leaders "**delivered Him up.**" Aren't those the precise words Jesus had used multiple times to prepare the disciples for what would happen when He went to Jerusalem? Just days earlier Jesus had told His disciples, *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day" (Matthew 20:18-19).*

The horrible deeds of the authorities crushed the followers' hopes. They admitted, *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 (v.21).* The rulers had killed Jesus of Nazareth, who the disciples hoped to be the Messiah. They had forsaken normal life to follow Jesus because He, being Messiah, would redeem the nation of Israel (i.e. establish the Kingdom of God). Their hopes, dreams, and plans had not accounted for, allowed for such an end. They drew all these negative conclusions in spite of the fact that Jesus had used these exact words on multiple occasions to prepare His followers for the apparent tragedy that would come to pass. One would think that at least the term, "third day" would have jogged something in the followers' memories.

Furthermore, the two guys explained that something perplexing has happened in connection with this travesty of justice. Some of the women from the group found the tomb empty. *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 (vv.22-23).* They went to the tomb as expected the morning after the Sabbath. They unexpectedly found the tomb empty – no body. They saw angels who talked to them, which is always unexpected.

More than the women, some of the men from the number of disciples also found the tomb empty. *“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”* (v.24). Men they had fellowshiped with and who they trusted verified the women’s story. *“So there you have it, sir. That’s why we look sad!”* It is obvious that Cleopas and his friend did not have faith that the tomb had to be empty. So the gospel according to Cleopas was deficient, false, because the real “Good News” is the story about the perfect, innocent, murdered, buried Jesus rising again the third day.

Affirming Answers (vv.25-35).

Jesus Christ, loving and desiring to help His faltering followers, interpreted the Scriptures for them (vv.25-30). He answered the men’s question, “Don’t you know what happened?” and their following explanation with a question: “Was it not necessary?”

Before we criticize the disciples, we need to admit that often we are slow to believe Scripture. *And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”* (v.25). Jesus faulted His followers for not believing what they claimed to know. We, too, must believe all that the prophets have spoken. We must believe the whole Bible, not just our pet verses, because if we don’t know Scripture, we will not understand what is “necessary.” Jesus asked, *“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”* (v.26).

The disciples were convinced that the suffering and death of Jesus proved that He was not the hoped-for Messiah. The reality is that Jesus’ suffering and death PROVED that He was the promised Messiah. If they had believed all that the prophets said, they would have known this. Job said, *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth”* (Job 19:25). Moses wrote in Genesis 3:15 that the “Seed” of the woman would destroy Satan, not be destroyed by Satan. David promised that God would not leave His Holy One in the grave or allow Him to see corruption (Psalm 16:10). Belief in their Scripture would have answered the hard question about the perplexing situation.

Having established the authority of Scripture, Jesus went on to answer even more with Scripture. *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself* (v.27). The Law and the Prophets are sufficient to reveal the Christ. The gospel is stated plainly enough in the Old Testament. That truth is illustrated by Abraham entrusting himself to God’s promises (without the New Testament), and righteousness was put on His account. How much more plainly does the full Bible unveil the gospel as we are taught by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also answered the question about His resurrection through demonstration. Luke wrote about a very practical request. *So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them* (vv.28-29). Remember that the two disciples still didn’t know who they were talking to. But they were willing to show common hospitality and courtesy by strongly urging Jesus to stay. Being in His glorified body, Jesus didn’t need housing for the night. The Lord and Master conceded to the humans’ request in order to help their faith grow.

At the meal, the Christ demonstrated the Christ. *When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them* (v.30). As the guest, Jesus would not have been in a position to do this. But, as He often did, Jesus capitalized on the opportunity to reveal His identity to them.

The inevitable conclusion for those men is the most wonderful news that Christ the Lord is risen indeed! (vv.31-35). They came to the wonderful truth through open eyes and burning hearts. *And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight* (v.31). This does not teach that the men opened their eyes by their own wisdom or amassing of knowledge. Rather, the passive voice verb means that a power apart from themselves opened their spiritual eyes completely.

The disciples experienced the same thing all of us experience when we come to faith in Him. No one comes to Christ in faith believing by their own wisdom or motivated by their own desires. Jesus had taught: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”* (John 6:44). In His glorified body, Jesus was able to

vanish as soon as the disciples grasped the truth of His resurrection by faith.

Also, they were convinced the “stranger” was Jesus when their hearts burned. *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 Scriptures?” (v.32).* Again it was not that they somehow created heart burn or a warm and peaceful feeling. The truth Jesus unpacked about Himself caused a supernatural, spiritual warmth in their eternal being.

What do followers of Christ do when their spiritual eyes are opened and their hearts are warmed by the truth? We tell the good news! These men ran back to Jerusalem with some very good news and heard equally good news. *And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together (v.33).* They undertook another two hours back to Jerusalem, at night, with good news. Immediately upon entering the group of 11 disciples, the 11 said to these two, *“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (v.34).*

Entering the room to tell the news that they had seen Jesus, the disciples were met with the news that Peter had seen Jesus. *Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread (v.35).*

The gospel is Good News. The reality that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and is risen from the dead is the best news in all seasons, all eras of human history. It is easy for us to get so bogged down with the problems and issues of life. It is so easy for us to begin to think about all things within the tiny scope, little box of passing life. It is great for us to break out of the box and remember that because Christ lives, this life is very brief and eternal life is very long and perfect.