

“THE BELIEVERS: INSPIRED BY THE CROSS”

The Impact of the Cross - Part 6

Luke 24:13-35

A teenage boy was about to turn 16, and he said to his father, “Dad, I want to get my drivers license on my 16th birthday.”

His father said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you three conditions.” He said, “One, that you keep your room clean. Two, that you improve your grades. And three, that you get your long hair cut off.” He said, “Boy, you need a haircut!”

So, the kid said, “Alright, I’ll think about it.”

So sure enough two months later his 16th birthday came, and he went to his father and said, “Okay, Dad, can I get my drivers license today?”

And his dad said, “Well your room is clean, and I appreciate that. Your grades have improved. But” he said, “I noticed that you never got that hair cut.”

And the boy said, “Ah, come on Dad! I did everything else!”

And the dad said, “No, you never got your hair cut.”

He said, “But Dad, Jesus had long hair!”

And his father said, “You’re absolutely right. And Jesus walked everywhere He went!”

For our Easter message today we’re going to take a closer look at some walking that Jesus did on that first Easter.

Now you have to understand the setting of our text this morning. It’s Sunday, and many people still haven’t gotten over the Friday crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. For three years He had mingled with the masses. Some days He devoted to teaching. Other days He devoted to healing. But every day He devoted himself to loving people unconditionally, as only the divine could. But those days had come to an end. And those who were closest to Him were having a very difficult time putting their lives back together. They had been convinced that He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world. But death upon a cross and a sealed tomb kind of had a way of changing their thinking when it came to seeing Him as the long-awaited Messiah.

But on that first Easter morning some stunning things had occurred. Several of the women had made a trip to the tomb, taking with them some spices. And when they got there, they saw that the stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away. And they also saw that the soldiers stationed to keep guard over the tomb were gone. And they went inside, and they

found that Jesus himself was gone. Peter and John had confirmed the story that the tomb was empty. But at this stage they were very skeptical of the ladies' story that an angel had appeared, announcing that Jesus Christ had resurrected.

I. THE ROAD TO EMMAUS. (Luke 24:13-27)

Well by now the Christian community was buzzing, searching for a logical explanation as to why the tomb was empty. **And on Sunday evening, two of Jesus followers began walking to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem.**

Take a look at Luke chapter 24, beginning with verse 13:

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (vv. 13-18)

These two men were *hopeless*, not inspired as they left Jerusalem.

And I want you to notice that by taking this journey these two men were moving *away* from the action. Instead of staying in Jerusalem where all this talk was taking place, they headed the opposite direction. And while they were talking out loud about the confusion surrounding these reports, who should come up to them but Jesus himself. Now the Bible says that "*they were kept from recognizing him*" (v. 16). So they didn't know that it was Jesus. And the Bible also says that they were "downcast." In other words, their downward glance communicated the condition of their hearts—they were grief stricken.

So Jesus struck up a conversation with them, and He begins by kind of playing dumb. He says, "Hey, what are you guys talking about?" And they kind of give Him a look like He's from another planet, and they say, "Are you the only one in all of Jerusalem who is unaware of what has taken place this weekend?!" Evidently there had been ongoing conversations between the people. Rich and poor, young and old, everyone was talking about this Jewish carpenter who had died.

But there was one more chapter in the book that still needed to be written in His life. Follow along with me on the screen as I read from Luke chapter 24, beginning with verse 19:

¹⁹ *“What things?” he asked.*

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

²⁵ *He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”* (vv. 19-26).

Now we can relate to their slowness and their misunderstanding. On many occasions we have played the role of skeptic, and we’ve done so quite well. Having a Messiah die the most humiliating death upon a cross is not the way that we would have written the script. But neither would we have allowed the King of kings to be born in a stable.

Have you ever been *skeptical* of God’s plan for your life?

Have you ever wondered if His timing was right? Or you come face to face with persecution, or adversity, and you think, “Why is this happening?” Well, that’s precisely where Christ’s followers were. They were asking that question, “Why are these things happening? Why was Jesus crucified?”

Max Lucado describes that Friday when Jesus died by saying: “It was a day when man was at his worst, and when God was at His best.” That’s Good Friday. And the more you think about it, if there had not been a crucifixion there could not have been any resurrection—no atonement for our sins or the hope of eternal life after we pass away.

In our text Jesus says, *“...how slow of heart you are to believe.”* But He doesn’t just stop there. He goes on to give these two men irrefutable evidence that there was a reason why the Messiah had to suffer and die. And at this point they still don’t realize who it is that they are talking to. The crucifixion had become an obstacle in their understanding of God’s plan.

But look at verse 27. It says, *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”*

Jesus begins to teach them the *truth* about himself.

A Sunday School teacher tells the story of a little four-year-old boy who is sitting on the floor in class one morning, minding his own business, and building a tall tower out of blocks. And just about the time he'd completed his project a little girl, who was bigger than he, came over and with the swipe of one hand sent it all tumbling to the ground. She then walked away. Well, the little boy stared at the pile of rubble for a second, and then he began the building project all over again. And just as he'd completed it for the second time, here comes the little girl again. And with the swish of one arm, down the blocks crashed. She gave the little boy a scowl of contempt, and then off she went again. And just about the time he had it rebuilt for the third time, here comes the little girl to repeat the whole nasty process. The stunned little guy stared at the pile of rubble for a few seconds, glanced over at the little girl who was staring back at him with a defiant look on her face, and then he looked up at the teacher and said, "Hey, I think she did that on purpose!" What a perceptive child!!

Well to the disciples the crucifixion of Christ must have appeared to be the end. To the disciples it appeared that they were back at square one. They thought they were going to have to start the search all over again. The sermons, the miracles, and all the other building blocks seemed to crumble to the ground at the foot of the cross when Jesus said, "*It is finished!*"

But what seemed on the surface to be a demolition project upon closer observation was really a construction project, carefully engineered by the God of the universe in order to save the world. You see, God can take what appears to be bad and turn it into that which is good. And Jesus spent the remainder of that walk to Emmaus talking about the Old Testament Scriptures, trying to convince the men that the sacrifice upon the cross was no accident, that God allowed it for a purpose.

And you just have to wonder what prophecies and what different Scriptures it was that Jesus shared with them. Maybe He talked with them about how there were animal sacrifices that were offered on altars so that their sin could be atoned for – driving home the point that sin means death. Maybe He talked about Isaiah chapter 53, a passage that had been written hundreds of years before that day. Maybe He quoted that Scripture, saying, "*Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him.*" And as Jesus shared with them, instead of being turned off by the cross they were inspired by the cross, and God's plan for it.

And perhaps He concluded that walk by telling them of His very own interchange with Pontious Pilate just two days earlier. And He probably told it in the third person, since they still didn't know who He was. In John chapter 19 we have Jesus and Pontious Pilate standing eyeball to eyeball. And as they stand there Pilate is infuriated that Jesus won't speak up on His own behalf and defend himself. And Pilate gets right up in His face and says, "Don't you understand that I have the power to either free you or to crucify you?!" And Jesus looks back at him and says, "*You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above*" (v. 11). And in essence what Jesus was simply saying was this: "Make no mistake about it, Pilate.

You are not taking my life, but I am giving my life!” And there is a huge difference. That difference illuminates our understanding of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So much so to the point that we finally say, “You know what, I think God did it on purpose.” Good deduction!

We are too different from Jesus, and too similar to those two men walking on the road to Emmaus.

At times confused by the Scripture. In some ways we’re confused by the choices of our everyday life. And sometimes we choose to draw nearer to God, and at other times we walk away from the action and turn our back on Him. Oh, going to church is okay. That’s all safe and acceptable—especially at Easter. But Jesus? Well Jesus, He’s another story!

But maybe Jesus is looking at you on this Easter Sunday and He’s saying, “How slow of heart you are to believe!” And yet the evidence is so clear through prophecies, and through historical evidence, and through eyewitness accounts, and through changed lives. This Easter don’t walk away from the action; but take a step toward Jesus—the Messiah, the Savior of the world, God’s living Son. For anyone who walks out of His own grave is whoever He says He is!

II. THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM. (Luke 24:28-35)

But let’s look at our text further this morning and see what it is that causes these men to return to Jerusalem.

I want us to read aloud the rest of our text one verse at a time, beginning with Luke 24:28. This passage illustrates how the resurrection took the cross and changed it from a symbol of suffering and shame to an emblem of inspiration and hope.

We just saw how the two men walking to Emmaus were so disillusioned that Jesus had died. They did not believe the early reports of a resurrection. They were so despondent that they were heading back home to Emmaus. And as they were walking that first Easter Sunday afternoon Jesus joined them incognito and struck up a conversation.

I want you to read verse 28 aloud with me, and then each subsequent verse as I call it out.

Verse 28: “As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.”

Now notice, Jesus is a gentleman. He does not impose himself on people. If you don’t invite Him into your life, He will not force you. There’s a famous painting by Holman Hunt of Jesus standing at the door of a cottage and gently knocking at the door. Somebody suggested

to the artist that he made a mistake because there's no latch on the outside. But he said it was deliberate, that the only way Jesus can gain admittance is for us to open the door from within.

Verse 29: *“But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.”*

Now these two men did not know that it was Jesus, but they enjoyed His company. **Jesus always enhances our life.** But when you invite Jesus in, He never says, “No, I’ve got more important people to see. And anyway, your place isn’t good enough for me.” No. He just comes in. He said, *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone ... opens the door, I will come in and eat with him...”* (Revelation 3:20). A Billy Graham or a Mother Teresa are no more important than you. He plays no favorites.

Verse 30: *“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.”*

Every time in the Bible when you read that Jesus ate, He stopped and gave thanks. But there's something unusual about that verse to me. Jesus is a first-time guest at this house, but He acts if He's the host. He's the one who takes the bread. He's the one who has the blessing. He's the one who breaks the bread. He's the one who distributes it. And do you know what that symbolizes to me? **Jesus is not satisfied with being a guest in your life, but He wants to be the host.** He doesn't just want to be a resident; He wants to be the president. He wants to be the Lord of all.

Like you, from time to time we have overnight guests in our home. And often, to try to make them feel comfortable, I'll say, “Now just make yourself at home. This is your home for now. Here's the refrigerator. Here's the microwave. Here's the telephone. Here's the remote. You just make this your home away from home.” But you know what? I don't really mean that! There are some rooms, there are some closets, where they had better not go. There are places in our house we would be embarrassed for anyone to see. And if I got up the next day and found them going through my checkbook, I'd be a little upset.

We say to Jesus, “You come on in and take charge of my life!” But there's a sense in which many times we don't mean that. There are certain closets that we want to preserve for ourselves. We don't want Him to take charge of our checkbook, or the remote, or our Spring Break, or our classroom. But Jesus wants to be the host.

Verse 31: *“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.”*

Why do you suppose that all of a sudden they *recognized Him*? I've read some who suggest that Jesus prayed in such an intimate way with the Father that when they heard Him pray, they knew immediately who it was. But this passage says when He distributed the bread, they recognized Him. I take it that when Jesus reached out His hand with the bread His sleeve inched up His arm, and they looked and saw nail scars—fresh wounds in His hands. Boy, you talk about a showstopper! I think the hair stood up on the back of their neck. Chills ran down their spine. They lost their breath. And they looked up and they recognized that this is Jesus. And He was smiling at this point, saying, "I can't believe it's taken you this long to understand who I am!" And they were so taken aback that they couldn't speak. And all of a sudden Jesus disappeared. He didn't walk out, He just vanished. And there they sat.

Verse 32: *"They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"*

Don't you like that sentence?! **"Weren't our hearts *burning within us*?"** Haven't you been to church, or a Bible study, and you start studying the Scripture. And then all of a sudden it begins to apply to you, and you can just feel your heart being warmed and your soul being fed. And it's as though it's just for you. And later you look back and say, "Wasn't that a great night? Wasn't the Holy Spirit really at work at that moment?!"

Hebrews 4:12 says, *"The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, ...it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

And these two disciples said, "When Jesus joined us on the way we should have known it was Jesus! Nobody can explain the Scripture like that. Boy, when He talked about the Messiah dying on the cross my heart was warmed when I thought, 'Maybe that horrible apparatus of execution could be turned to a symbol of hope.' And when He talked about the Messiah coming back from the grave, my heart was burning within me. And I thought that maybe the women were right, that there is hope!"

Now just verse 33: *"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together..."*

Now why did they go all the way back to Jerusalem? They had just come from there. They had walked seven miles, they had to be exhausted, and it's nighttime. And it's dangerous to travel at night.

Well do you know why I think they raced back to Jerusalem? When you are overjoyed with something you want to share that joy with somebody who has the same passion that you do. And these two disciples, they didn't want to stay in Emmaus. No way! They wanted to get back there to Jerusalem with people who loved Jesus the way they did.

Verses 34 and 35: “...and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ Then the two told what happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.”

Wouldn’t you love to hear that *conversation*?! They’re racing to tell these disciples, and the disciples say, “Boy, you guys really missed it! It’s true! It’s true! Jesus is alive! He appeared personally to Simon! It’s true, and you missed it!”

“No, we didn’t miss it! We were on the road to Emmaus when this stranger joined us. We didn’t know it was Jesus. We invited Him into our house, we broke bread, we saw nail scars...!” And they’re just talking so fast.

Verse 36: “While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

And if you read the next paragraph there are phrases like: “They were startled and frightened ... filled with joy and amazement ... they couldn’t believe it ... they examined His hands and feet.” I would think so. I would certainly think so!

III. THE APPLICATIONS FOR US.

Now there are two lessons I want you to take home with you this Easter.

Number one: No matter how deep your despair, there is still *hope*.

These two men going to Emmaus had lost their hope. Shoulders drooped, faces downcast, no hope. But then they saw the risen Christ, and on the way back to Jerusalem they were exuberant and were filled with hope.

Are you walking to Emmaus right now? John Autry said, “Emmaus is anyplace you go, trying hard not to care that the bottom has dropped out of your world.” If that’s you, would you lift up your glance and look into the face of the risen Christ and realize that His is alive. Would you believe in miracles again. Would you hear Him say, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...*” (John 11:25). Would you claim that promise of Scripture, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13). Would you rekindle your hope and head back to Jerusalem to rejoice. Because no matter how deep your despair, there is hope. That miracle that God performed in that garden outside of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, some day He is going to do on a worldwide scale in every cemetery again. There is hope!

The second lesson is: No matter how disoriented your life, *invite* Jesus in.

These two men were confused. They invited Jesus into their home, and He straightened out their thinking, He transformed their lives.

Every once in awhile I hear somebody say, “Well I’m going to invite the Lord into my life some day. But first I’ve got some doubts I need to eliminate, I’ve got some habits I need to get rid of, and I’ve got some relationships I’ve got to straighten out. Then I’ll invite the Lord in.” But do you know what that is? That is pride—saying, “I’m going to do it all by myself.” Jesus Christ wants to come into your life just as you are. And He will straighten it out.

Martin Luther said he once had a dream in which He saw Jesus walking down the walk, coming toward his house. And he was delighted. But he looked at his house and it was in a shambles. And he thought, “I can’t entertain a royal visitor in a house like this!” And in his dream he tried to straighten up his house. But the harder he worked to try to get it straight, the more messed up it became.

Jesus was knocking at the door now. So he worked more frantically. But he still couldn’t get it straightened up. And finally, out of desperation for fear that Jesus would leave, he opened the door and he said, “Come on in, Lord! That is, if you can come into a place that looks like this!” And he turned and he saw that his house was in perfect order.

Friends, you can’t straighten out your life on your own. But when you invite Jesus Christ in the first thing He does is to cleanse all of your past sins, washing them away. And then He begins to give order to your thinking, and a purpose to your future. And with Christ in your life you can say with the song writer, “I will weep no more for the cross that He bore. I will glory, I will glory in the cross!”