

# Burning Hearts on the Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-35

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC Combined Service on April 5, 2015

## Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're commemorating an event that took place in the annals of history. That occurred in time and space. Not in myth or legend. Not in imagination or wishful-thinking. We're here to celebrate the historical claim that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead.
  - ▶ That a man lived thousands of years ago in ancient Palestine is nothing unusual. That he was known to be a great teacher and a worker of miracles who amassed a large following is nothing unique. Even to claim that he was handed over by religious authorities to be crucified by the Romans is nothing unrivaled. Historians can point to a number of similar situations.
    - What's unusual and unique, unrivaled and unrepeated, is this historical claim of an empty tomb, of discarded grave clothes, of a resurrection from the dead.
  
- ❖ **If this is all a lie or just make-believe, if the resurrection did not actually occur, then Christianity completely crumbles.** The religion itself rests on the objective truthfulness of such miraculous claims. It's very different from other religions.
  - ▶ In Buddhism, for example, if you took away the miracles attributed to Gautama Buddha, if you concluded they were all legendary and not real events, it wouldn't be much of a loss. **The miracles of Buddha are not essential to the claims of Buddha.** You might even get more followers in our secular age because now you can embrace Buddhist teachings without being tripped up by claims of the miraculous.
  
- ❖ But you can't take away the Resurrection – something so foundational to Christian faith and identity – and expect the whole thing to still have meaning for your life. It'll crumble.
  - ▶ **If there is no Resurrection, we're wasting our time here.** You've been wasting your Sunday mornings. Imagine all the sleep you've sacrificed for nothing. If you've ever given to the church – that was a waste of money. If you've ever avoided cheating or lying out of obedience to God – that was a poor choice. You could've gotten ahead in this life. **Because apparently that's all there must be – *this life*.**
    - Apostle Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then we (us Christians) of all people are most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19). Because we backed the wrong horse. We put all our eggs in a basket that broke. **We staked everything in Jesus and came up short.** That would be pitiful. That would be sad.

## Looking at Life without a Resurrection

- ❖ And that reaction is what we see in our passage. We see the pitifulness and the sadness of **1) Looking at life without a resurrection.**<sup>1</sup> The story picks up after the very public execution of Jesus of Nazareth. And after some female disciples stumbled across an empty tomb on Sunday morning and a vision of angels telling them that Christ is risen.
  - ▶ Later on that very day we're told that two disciples were traveling from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. They were in the middle of talking about all the events that occurred, when Jesus catches up with them on the road. But they don't recognize him.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm grateful to Tim Keller for this observation in his sermon, *Two Met Jesus*, preached April 13, 1997.

- ▶ And it says in v17, “*He said to them, “What is this conversation you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad.*” Some translations say their faces were downcast (NIV). They were sad and you could see it in their faces.
- ❖ It says they stopped in their tracks. On one hand, they were shocked someone could have just come from Jerusalem and not be aware of what took place. They stood still staring at Jesus in shock. But more so, they were just sad. They were downcast.
  - ▶ One of them named Cleopas speaks up and shares his version of these events and then he says in v21, “*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*” We had hoped. That suggests they didn't have this hope anymore.
- ❖ And why should they? All they knew at that moment was Jesus' crucifixion. Yes, they heard rumors of an empty tomb but there could be explanations for that. There were no reports of Jesus appearing to anyone (at least not yet).
  - ▶ So their initial reaction was not, “*Empty tomb? Praise the Lord, he must be resurrected!*” No, they were sad and probably thinking, “*Great, they killed our master, and now grave robbers have stolen his body.*”
- ❖ Insult was added to injury. **This was a pair of sad, pitiful disciples walking the road to Emmaus. And the reason is because they were looking at life *without* a resurrection.** They were looking at Jesus’ life, at his ministry and good deeds, at his sacrifices and suffering – all without a resurrection. Death was the end of him. And then they looked at their own lives, at their ministry and good deeds, at their sacrifices and suffering – and death would be the end of that too. What a waste!
- ❖ If the origin of life, your life, means nothing. If it happened by random chance. And if the end of life, your life, is nothingness. If you simply cease to exist. **Then it's a fool's errand to try to create meaning and significance to all that takes place in between.**
  - ▶ If we're just a bunch of cells, if we're just a mixture of chemical processes and electrical impulses, if we're just “glorified germs” in the end, then I'm sorry but those accomplishments you're so proud of mean *nothing*. That love you feel for your spouse or children – it's *nothing*. That career you're building, that respect and reputation you're gaining – in the grand scheme of things – are *nothing*.
- ❖ And if there is nothing awaiting me after death (just non-existence), if this natural world is all there is, if there's no continued existence of the soul in a supernatural realm, then that is a terribly hopeless worldview. **That way of looking at life offers me no hope to face the trials and difficulties that I experience in the present.**
- ❖ What reason is there to bear suffering in this life? If looking down the line, I can't see any alleviation of my pain or resolution of my problems, then why shouldn't I just give up? Death would be a welcomed friend. **Experiencing nothingness is better than experiencing pain.**

- ▶ This is why I can at least respect the Jean-Paul Sartre's, Albert Camus', and Frederich Nietzsche's of the world. Because at least they had the gall to face the absurdity of their worldview. They looked at life without a resurrection and accepted the absurdity, the meaninglessness, the nothingness.
- ❖ But if you're not willing to go there, if expect your life to count and your relationships and accomplishments to matter, if you're looking for ways to endure your present trials and suffering, then you need life *with* a resurrection. **You need life where the possibility of Jesus' resurrection and your resurrection from your grave are real and reasonable.**
  - ▶ Resurrection makes all the difference. The hope of sharing in his resurrection gives a real reason to live or to love or to apply yourself in this or that life pursuit. **What you do now does matter beyond this life.** It *does* echo into eternity.
- ❖ What's more, looking at life *with* a resurrection gives you the hope and strength to bear even the worst of suffering with dignity. **And when it comes to death itself, it'll never be a welcomed friend but at least it won't be a feared enemy.**
  - ▶ Because Christ has defeated death and removed its sting (1 Cor. 15:55-56). For us who look at life with a resurrection, we can look at death – not as the sad conclusion to a life unfinished – but as the beginning of new and grander story. **C.S. Lewis said, for those who hope in the Resurrection, this life is only the cover and title page.** Upon death we begin “*Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.*”<sup>2</sup>

### Looking at Jesus without Recognition

- ❖ Yet for our two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they couldn't see this. At least not yet. They were struck with what we call spiritual blindness. The irony is that they're recalling to Jesus, in v24, how the disciples went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but “*him they did not see.*” And now they're staring right at him and still *they do not see.*
- ❖ They're 2) **Looking at Jesus without recognition.** He's right there in their lives and they don't see his presence. And you might be thinking, “*How is that possible? It's so obvious.*” And yet doesn't that describe us? Jesus can be present and working in our lives and still we fail to recognize him. We're all liable to make that mistake.
  - ▶ Now in v16 it says, “*their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*” So what's keeping them? More importantly, what's keeping us from recognizing Jesus? I think there are two possible explanations.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ **On one hand, they likely overlooked Jesus because of his plainness and ordinary appearance.** When Jesus appeared to his disciples, the clouds didn't part. Angels didn't trumpet his entrance. Splendor and glory did not shine all around.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 228.

<sup>3</sup> Credit to Tim Keller again for these two observations.

- ▶ Just like in his birth, he comes in humble, ordinary fashion. Jesus shows up in our lives in a way that we easily overlook. **We tend think if Jesus is real, if he's going to show up in our lives, then it'll be with fireworks.** We come to worship or to prayer expecting some sort of intense, mystical experience.
- ❖ And if that's not happening, if what we experience feels plain and ordinary, then we quickly conclude that Jesus must not be present – or worse, he must not be real. So there are many of you who don't think Jesus is speaking to you unless you hear a voice from heaven.
  - ▶ But what if he's speaking to you in that plain passage you've read for the umpteenth time or in that ordinary sermon your no-name pastor just preached? **By expecting only the extraordinary, could you be overlooking Jesus in the ordinary?**
- ❖ But there's another factor that keeps us from recognizing him. **Those two on the road to Emmaus, and the many on the broad road of life, are only looking for someone to redeem their circumstances while Jesus has come to redeem their souls.**
  - ▶ Cleopas said it himself. He had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. And by that he meant to redeem the nation of Israel from its political bondage to Rome. They were enslaved to Roman rule. The Jews were looking for a great leader to arrive to lead them out of political bondage. And many were convinced Jesus was the one.
- ❖ But then he ends up on a cross. And all that hope of redemption was shattered. Look again at what Cleopas says in vv20-21 and notice the irony. He speaks of, *“how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”*
  - ▶ They crucified him *but* we had hoped. Crucifixion shattered their hope of redemption. But the great irony is that crucifixion is the very means by which God redeems Israel!
- ❖ Again without the Resurrection you can't see this. **Understand that, before Christianity, the message of the cross was a Roman message that simply said: If you oppose us we'll crush you, terribly.** The cross was a message of oppression.
  - ▶ It's only after the Resurrection that the cross was seen in new light. **Christianity redefined the cross to now communicate a message of redemption, and not simply a message of redeeming your circumstances but of redeeming your soul.**
- ❖ You can be that lucky person for whom circumstances are great. For whom every door you've knocked on in life has opened. Every door of advancement in your education or career has swung open wide. Every relationship you've pursued has welcomed you in. And yet all the while your very soul could still be shut closed in bondage to sin.
  - ▶ Everybody needs redemption because everybody is born enslaved to sin. **But the great tragedy is that our spiritual blindness keeps us from seeing our spiritual bondage.** This is why so many people miss Jesus. Why they overlook him even though he is very much near and present in their lives.

- ❖ So let's say you're checking out Christianity because you're going through some relationship problems. Maybe I can find a sense of peace. Maybe I can learn to be a less bitter and more forgiving person. Maybe I can find a healthier relationship in church with a godlier person. **But all you want is for Jesus to redeem your circumstances.**
  - ▶ **If that's all you want, then the cross will make no sense at all.** What's a dead prophet going to do for you? As your relationships continue to frustrate, you'll end up like Cleopas saying to yourself, "*I had hoped he would redeem.*"
    - I had hoped Jesus was going to solve all my problems. I thought he was going to heal all my broken relationships, or help me get out from under this mountain of debt, or cure all my sicknesses. *I had hoped.*
- ❖ You're looking at Jesus without recognition. **You're not recognizing who he is and what he has come to do. He has come first and foremost as a Redeemer of souls.** Yes, he has come to heal relationships – but his primary focus is on your broken relationship with the Father, which he heals by bearing in his body God's just wrath against your sin. Yes, he'll help your debt – that is, your sin debt by paying it off with his own blood. Yes, he has come to cure – namely, your sin sickness by giving you a new heart that longs to trust and obey.
  - ▶ Until you recognize your deeper bondage of the soul, you will not recognize Jesus for who he is and what he has come to do.

### Looking at the Word with Clear Eyes and Burning Hearts

- ❖ So how do we get the eyes to see Jesus? How is the spiritual blindness removed? If you read the other accounts of the Risen Christ appearing to disciples, you might get discouraged and think that's not fair. These guys got to see Jesus face-to-face.
  - ▶ Doubting Thomas didn't believe until the Lord appeared and let him touch the wounds in his hands. I'd respond in the same way given the same opportunity. But we don't get that opportunity, so how can I ever share in the faith of these disciples?
- ❖ But don't you see the difference in this resurrection appearance? **In order to get them to see and believe, Jesus doesn't say to them, "Guys, come on, look at my face." No, he says, "Guys, come on, look at Scripture."** What does Scripture say?
  - ▶ Read vv25-27, "<sup>25</sup>And he said to them, "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?*" <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."
  - Wouldn't you have loved to be a part of that bible study? **To listen to the Incarnate Word of God interpret the Written Word of God demonstrating how it all bears witness to him.**
- ❖ Later that night, after he broke bread and blessed it – like when he fed 5,000 (9:16) or when he served the Last Supper (22:19) – it says their eyes were opened. They finally recognized him. But in fact this revelation began earlier that day. In v32, they say, "*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*"

- ▶ So it was the opening of the Scriptures that began to warm their hearts with saving faith. It wasn't because they saw the visible Christ. But because they saw Christ in the Scriptures. I think that was intentional. **They were kept from recognizing Jesus until Scripture was opened, so that their understanding of the Cross and Resurrection would be rooted in Scripture and not in personal experience.**
- ❖ Like I said before, I know some of you are waiting for some ecstatic religious experience before you'll become a Christian. You want a vision of Jesus like these disciples. And until then you can't bring yourself to believe.
  - ▶ But do you see what this story is intending to say? It's saying you can have the blinders removed. **You can begin to see Jesus with clear eyes by looking for him in the Scriptures.** Beginning with the books of Moses and then working through all the Prophets, Jesus showed how all the Old Testament ultimately points to him (Lk. 24:44; Jn. 5:39; Acts 3:18; 8:35)
- ❖ Imagine Jesus expositing Genesis 22 and showing how the call to sacrifice **Isaac** shadows the substitutionary atonement he just accomplished. Or hear him explain Exodus 12 and how he's the **Passover Lamb** who was slain so that God's judgment could pass over us. Or how he's the **True Manna of Heaven** that truly satisfies the soul (Ex. 16:4; Jn. 6:35). He's the **Bronze Serpent** who will heal us if only we look to him (Num. 21:9; Jn. 3:14-15)
  - ▶ He probably taught how the tabernacle and temple pointed to him since he's the **True Dwelling Place** where you meet with God (Jn. 1:14, 18; 2:18-22). I'm certain he explained how he's the **True Prophet** greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22), and the **True Priest** greater than Aaron (Heb. 7:23-25), and the **True King** greater than David (Mt. 22:41-25).
    - He's the **Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53** who was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities (Isa. 53:5). He's the **Psalms 22 sufferer** who literally cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Ps. 22:1; Mt. 27:46). He's the **seed of Eve** who will crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), and he's the **offspring of Abraham** through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25).
- ❖ He's in every story. He's on every page. All of Scripture bears witness to Jesus (Jn. 5:39). When you open your Bible and God opens your mind (Lk. 24:45) and clears your eyes to see this for yourself, something is ignited in your heart. A burning warmth begins to fill it. You know what that is? That's faith in Jesus. That's love for Jesus.
- ❖ What if Jesus is in your life right now? What if he's speaking to you? **Why are you waiting for the clouds to part open when there's a Bible open in your lap? The Bible speaks today and it carries the voice of Jesus.** And he's saying it was necessary for him to suffer these things – to suffer once for our sins – that he might bring us back to God.
  - ▶ And now he is risen. He has entered his glory. And he beckons you to come. Is your heart burning within you? That's him working. That's him calling. Won't you come?