

A Revelation on the Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-35

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 9, 2023

Introduction

- ❖ We're here this Easter morning to commemorate the greatest event to take place in human history. An event that occurred in time and space. Not in myth or legend. Not in imagination or wishful-thinking. **We're here to celebrate the historical, factual claim that Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead.**
 - That a man lived thousands of years ago in the region of ancient Palestine is nothing unusual. That he was known to be a great teacher and miracle worker 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 not unbelievable. **Historians can point to similar occasions of messianic figures, leading a radical movement, making bold claims, only to be swiftly squashed by the Roman authorities.**
 - But what is unusual and unique; what is considered unbelievable by people back then as it is today – is the historical claim of an empty tomb, discarded grave clothes, and a resurrection from the dead.

- ❖ **If this is all a lie or just make-believe – if the Resurrection did not occur in time and space – then Christianity completely crumbles.** Our religion rests on the objective nature of this miraculous claim. **Like Paul said, if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins** (1 Cor 15:17). Our faith would have been built upon a fiction. A compelling and inspiring fiction. But nonetheless, upon a fiction and not a fact.
 - This is a unique problem for Christianity. **Most religions don't depend this much on historical truth claims.** Take Buddhism, for example. If you took away the miracles attributed to Gautama Buddha – if you conclude that many of the stories we know about him are mere legends and not historical events – that wouldn't be a huge loss for Buddhism. **The miracles of Buddha were never essential to the claims of Buddha.** His teachings are what matter. In fact, you'd probably get more followers – in this secular age – if you downplayed the miraculous. You can be entirely secular and still embrace Buddhist teachings – without having to accept the supernatural.

- ❖ But you can't do that with Christianity. You can't take away the Resurrection and expect the Christian faith to still have any meaning and significance. **If there is no resurrection, then we're wasting our time here.** You've been wasting your Sunday mornings coming here.
 - Just think of all the sleep you've given up – for nothing. If you've ever given an offering – that was a waste of money. If you've ever avoided cheating or lying or doing what it takes to get ahead – because you were trying to please God and obey him – that was a poor choice. You could've been so much more successful in this life. **Because that's all there is – *this life*.**

- ❖ Again, Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then we (as 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 ended up breaking. **We staked everything on Jesus and came up short.** That would be true if there was no Resurrection. And we would be pitiful. We would be sad.

- ❖ And that's the very reaction we see in today's passage. **We see two pitiful and sad disciples of Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus.** As we study this text, let's consider three perspectives. (1) We'll look at life without a resurrection. (2) We'll consider how it's possible to look at Jesus without recognition. (3) We'll look at Jesus through the lens of Scripture.

Looking at Life Without a Resurrection

- ❖ Let's begin by taking on a perspective that many of you are unfamiliar with because you grew up in church always celebrating Easter and the Resurrection. **But to understand this passage – to put yourself in the shoes of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus – then you'll need to try to look at life without a resurrection.**
- ❖ The story picks up after the very public execution of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem. We're told that this is also after some female disciples stumbled across an empty tomb on Sunday morning and after a vision of angels told them that Christ is risen.
 - Later on – on that very day – 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.
 - Look at v17, *"He (Jesus) 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). **You could see the sadness in their faces.**
- ❖ You could also see the shock. They were shocked that someone coming from Jerusalem could be unaware of the very public events that just took place. They were staring at Jesus in shock and sadness.
 - 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. Past tense. **That suggests they didn't have this hope anymore.**
- ❖ And why should they? **At that moment, all they knew was Jesus's crucifixion.** All they knew was that their rabbi – the one they believed to be the Messiah – had been brutally executed. Their hopes were understandably shattered. Yes, they heard rumors of an empty tomb, but there could be a number of explanations for that.
 - So their initial reaction was *not*, "Empty tomb? Praise the Lord, Jesus is alive! He must be resurrected!" **No, they were sad and probably thinking, "Great, the authorities have killed our master, and now grave robbers have stolen his body."**
- ❖ Insult was added to injury. **This was a pair of pitiful disciples walking the road to Emmaus. And it's because they were looking at life *without* a resurrection.** They were looking at Jesus's life and ministry – at what he had sacrificed and suffered – all without a resurrection. Death was the end of him.
 - And then they looked at their own lives and ministry – at what they had sacrificed and suffered – and death would be the end of them as well. What a waste!

- ❖ If the origin of life – of *your* life – means nothing. If it happened by random chance. If the end of life – of *your* life – is nothingness. If you cease to exist. **Then it's a fool's errand to try to create meaning and significance to all that takes place in the 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 your children – is *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 you after death (just non-existence); if this material world is all there is; if there's no continued existence of the soul – then that is a terribly hopeless worldview. **That way of looking at life offers you no hope to face the trials and tribulations that you're bound to experience.**

- ❖ What reason is there to endure hardship in this life? If I can't see any alleviation of my pain or any relief to my suffering, then why shouldn't I just give up? Death would be a welcomed friend. **Experiencing nothingness is far better than experiencing pain.**
 - I may not agree with the philosophy of a Nietzsche or a Jean-Paul Sartre – but at least I can respect their courage to face the logical conclusion of their existentialism. **They looked at life without a resurrection and accepted the absurdity of it all.** They looked at life without a resurrection and resigned themselves to the nothingness.

- ❖ But if you're not willing to go there; if you want your life to count and your relationships and accomplishments to matter; if you're looking for ways to endure your trials and tribulations – then you need life *with* a resurrection. **You need life where the possibility of Jesus's resurrection – and *your* resurrection – are real and reasonable.**
 - Resurrection makes all the difference. The hope of sharing in the resurrection gives you a real reason to live and to love; to serve and to sacrifice. **What you do now *does* matter beyond this life.** It *does* echo in 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 defeated death and removed its sting (1 Cor 15:55-56). For those of 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 was the one who said that – for those who hope in the Resurrection – this life is only the cover and title page.** Upon our 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.*”¹

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Last Battle*, 228.

Looking at Jesus Without Recognition

- ❖ But for these two disciples on the road, they couldn't see it. At least not yet. **They were struck with a form of spiritual blindness.** They were walking and talking *with Jesus* about these events surrounding Jesus – and they're clueless as to who he is. This leads to the second perspective in this text – **looking at Jesus without recognition.**
 - He's right there in their lives, and they don't recognize his presence. And you might be thinking, "How is that possible?" It's so obvious. How can you miss Jesus? And yet doesn't that describe us? **Jesus can be present and working in our lives and still we fail to recognize him.** The truth is that we're all liable to make this mistake.

- ❖ Now in v16 it says, "*their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*" **But who or what was keeping them from recognizing Jesus?** Why couldn't they see what should've been obvious? And what's more pressing for us to answer – **who or what keeps us from recognizing the obvious presence of Jesus at work in our lives?**
 - On one hand, we could say it was God. In that moment, for a good reason, God kept those disciples from recognizing Jesus. If you can believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, then it's no stretch to believe that he could temporarily obscure the vision of these two men – preventing them from recognizing Jesus.

- ❖ But we could go further. **One reason we often don't see what should be obvious is because of unexamined assumptions.** In other words, all of us have unexamined presuppositions that can end up skewing how we interpret the evidence before us.
 - That's what happened to these two. They were provided with eyewitness testimony from multiple credible sources. But they explained it away. Why? **I'd argue because they were predisposed *not* to believe in a resurrection.**
 - We just assume that people back then were prone to believe in the miraculous. That a resurrection would've easily fit within their plausibility structure. But the truth is – those early disciples were just as surprised and skeptical as we would be if we heard about someone rising from the grave.

- ❖ In first-century Judaism, there were two major camps – the Sadducees and the Pharisees. **Now Scripture tells us that the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection** (Lk 20:27). They were more like modern-day liberal theologians wholesale denying the miraculous, rejecting the supernatural. They didn't believe in angels or demons, heaven or hell, and of course, the idea of a resurrection.
 - **But the Pharisees, on the other hand, did believe in all of that.** But when it came to resurrection, they saw it as a future, corporate reality tied up with the end times. In other words, it was a concept reserved for a great last day to include all of humanity. To claim a resurrection would be to claim the end has come. **So for a Pharisee, a resurrection of an individual man taking place in the middle of history would've made no sense.** That would've been theologically inconceivable.

- ❖ **So if these were the two dominant viewpoints among first-century Jews, then you can see how these two Jewish men were predisposed *not* to believe in a resurrection.** It's not surprising that they ignored the evidence presented before them.
 - Their sadness – coupled with their suspicions of a resurrection – led them to conclude that Jesus's body was likely stolen and that the report coming from those women was the product of their extreme grief or an overreactive imagination. That's how they explained it away. **Because their unexamined assumptions had predisposed them *not* to believe – they couldn't see reality staring them in the face.**

- ❖ Friends, it's due time we examine some of the assumptions we have about Jesus. Now I think it's a fair assumption that many of us do believe in a resurrection – in the Resurrection of Christ. **But even though we consider ourselves believers of Jesus, we often fail to recognize his presence in our lives.** He can be walking alongside us, and we miss him.
 - That's because we operate out of certain presuppositions. **We have unexamined assumptions about what it looks like when Jesus appears to us on the road of life.** When he shows up, we assume it will be spectacular. We approach our worship or devotions, expecting intense, mystical experiences filled with great zeal and passion.
 - And if that's not happening – if what we experience in our walk with Christ feels plain and ordinary – then it's tempting to conclude that Jesus must not be present. Or worse, he might not be real. **But by expecting the extraordinary all the time, could we be overlooking Jesus in the ordinary?**

- ❖ When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the road, the clouds didn't part. Angels didn't trumpet his entrance. Glory did not shine all around. **Jesus often walks alongside us in a way that we often overlook.** We expect the fierce windstorm, the mighty earthquake, the raging fire, but when Jesus comes, it's usually in the sound of a gentle whisper (1 Kg 19:12).
 - **Maybe you feel like Christ has abandoned you.** That he's no longer working in your life. That he's left you alone because you've neglected him or disobeyed him. **But what if he's right there walking this road of life with you, and you're just not seeing him?** What if your assumptions about him need to be reexamined?

- ❖ Which leads us to another factor that likely keeps us from recognizing Jesus. **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 Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. By that, he meant to redeem the nation of Israel from political bondage to Rome. **The Jews were looking for a great leader, a messianic figure, to free them from Roman rule.** And many were convinced that Jesus was the one. He was their Messiah.

- ❖ But then he ended up on a cross. And all hope of redemption was lost. Look at v20-21. Cleopas says, *“how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”*

- ❖ They crucified him; but we had hoped. **In other words, crucifixion shattered their hope of redemption. But the irony is that the Crucifixion turned out to be the very means by which God intended to redeem!**
 - Without the Resurrection, you can't see this. **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.
 - **But the Resurrection redefined the Roman cross. It now communicates a message of redemption.** And not simply a message of redeeming your circumstances but of redeeming your soul.

- ❖ **Maybe some of you are interested in Christianity because you're going through some difficult circumstances.** Maybe you have relationship problems in your family, in your marriage. Maybe you're dealing with financial troubles or with a physical ailment. So what you're looking for is healing – emotionally or physically. You're hoping for redemption – from your financial troubles or your relational mess. **But do you recognize in all of that – you're only seeking Jesus to redeem your circumstances?**
 - **If that's all you want, then his Crucifixion will make no sense.** Because what's a dead prophet going to do for you? As your relationships continue to frustrate; as your financial troubles continue to mount; as the sickness continues to spread – you'll end up like Cleopas saying to yourself, *"I had hoped he would redeem."*
 - **I had hoped Jesus would change my circumstances.** I had hoped he would heal my broken relationships; he would get me out from under this mountain of debt; he would cure my sickness. *I had hoped.*

- ❖ But could it be that you're looking at Jesus without recognition? **Could it be that he has been with you this entire time – walking with you on the road of life – and you didn't see him (or see what he's doing) because you were focused on your circumstances.** When all along he was focused on redeeming your soul.
 - Yes, Jesus has come to heal relationships – but his primary focus is on healing your broken relationship with God. Yes, he has come to rescue you from debt – that is, your sin debt by paying it off with his own blood. Yes, he has come to cure you – namely, from what plagues your sinful heart – by giving you a new one; by making you a new creation. **Until you recognize the deeper bondage of your soul, you will not recognize Jesus for who he is as the true Redeemer.**

Looking at Jesus Through the Lens of Scripture

- ❖ So how do you get the eyes to see Jesus for who he is? How is your spiritual blindness removed? **If you read the other resurrection accounts where the Risen Christ appears to others, you might get discouraged and think, "Hey, that's not fair."**
 - Those early disciples got to see Jesus face-to-face. Doubting Thomas didn't believe until the Lord let him touch the wounds in his hands. So you're thinking, "I'd respond in the same way if given the same opportunity. But I don't get that chance, so how can I ever share in the faith of these disciples?"

- ❖ But don't you see how this particular resurrection account is so different and so encouraging? **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."** This leads to our third perspective – looking at Jesus through the lens of Scripture.
 - Look at v25, "²⁵And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷And 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, explaining how it all bears witness to him!**

- ❖ We're told in v30 that, later that evening, Jesus ate with them, and "*When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.*" **And in that moment, as he broke that bread, their minds were flooded with the memory of the Passover they just observed.** Where Jesus took bread and broke it and made a direct connection between his own body and the sacrificed Passover lamb (Lk 22:19)
 - So as they saw him reenact that moment – but now on this side of the Cross – a lightbulb went off. The text says, in v31, that "*their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.*" They recognized that the Redeemer came to redeem – not through military victory – but through being sacrificed like a Passover lamb.

- ❖ The blinders were fully lifted. But the two disciples start to realize that this revelation had begun even earlier that day on the road to Emmaus. 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 in the flesh. But because they saw the prophesied Christ in the Scriptures. I think that timing 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 the Scriptures and not just in personal experience.**

- ❖ And that's relevant to us because, on this side of heaven, you'll probably never see the Risen Christ face-to-face like these two. You won't have the privilege of an eyewitness encounter like Mary or Peter. You'll probably never have a mystical, ecstatic experience of Christ. But you won't be worse off for it.
 - **Because the point of this resurrection account in Luke 24 is that the blinders didn't begin to lift until their eyes were looking for Jesus *in the Scriptures.*** That's when their hearts began to melt and faith began to form.
 - In v27, we're told that Jesus – beginning with the books of Moses and then working through all the Prophets – showed them how the Old Testament ultimately bears witness to him (Lk 24:44; Jn 5:39).

- ❖ I can picture Jesus expositing Genesis 22, showing how the sacrifice of **Isaac** foreshadows the substitutionary atonement he just accomplished. Or hear him explain Exodus 12 and how he's the **Passover Lamb** that was slain so that God's judgment could pass over us. Or how he's the **Manna of Heaven** that truly satisfies the soul (Ex 16:4; Jn 6:35). He's the **Bronze Serpent** who can heal us if we look to him (Num 21:9; Jn 3:14-15)
 - He probably talked about 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 sure 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 cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46). He's the **seed of Eve** who crushed 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 him** (Jn 5:39). When you open your Bible – and God opens your mind to see these things for yourself (Lk 24:45) – 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.

- ❖ Do you wish for Jesus to be in your life? Do you long to hear his voice? **Why are you waiting for the clouds to part open when there's an open Bible in your lap? The Bible speaks today and it carries the voice of Jesus.** He's saying it was necessary for him to suffer these things that he might cover our sins and bring us back to God.
 - And he is risen and has entered his glory. And now he beckons you to come. Is your heart burning within you? That's him working. That's him calling. Won't you come?