

Luke: Promises...Fulfilled.
Sermon 4-21-2019
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Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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 took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” ²⁵Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. ²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Message:

Put yourself in the shoes of the characters of this story. Those who thought He was the Messiah. Those who had hoped that He was the true redeemer. For centuries, you and your people have been oppressed. You've always, for all of your life, known that the only way to make it in this world is to suck up to the powers that be. Imagine that you've cried out to God over-and-over again for a redeemer. Imagine that you've repented time and time again. Imagine that you were kept from God's forgiveness because you couldn't afford to sacrifice at the temple. Imagine trauma that your ancestors experienced when they were ripped from brother, from sister, from wife, from husband, from child, from mother, from father and from friend. How they were spread across the land at the feet of a more powerful empire in Babylon. Imagine how they felt that pain again when the Persians brought another generation back to Israel, back to Jerusalem, but even when they did that, it wasn't like the good-old-days. Things had changed in the time-lapse. It wasn't the same. Another reminder of the trauma of being ripped, of being torn, of being beaten and of being exiled by a more powerful people. The prophets cried out. The prophets called the people to repentance. The prophets prophesied for a savior. A redeemer. One that would make all this pain right. One that would restore Israel. One that would restore the people to God. Now imagine having this tentative hope, a hope that was held before when powerful speakers, prophets and healers walked the land. A hope that was dashed when these powerful speakers, powerful teachers, powerful prophets and powerful healers died or succumb to sin. They fell from grace. The collective consciousness of these people wants to hope that Jesus is the real deal. The collective consciousness wants to hope that He is the redeemer, but they've seen this before, to a degree. It always ends in disappointment. So why bother hoping? The Romans always win. The powers that be always win. Can you blame their skepticism? Can you blame their belief that Jesus is truly dead? We know the end of this story, but they don't.

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They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ ¹⁹He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But 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 took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’” The women found the empty tomb and saw a vision from angels saying that He was alive. Cleopas and his companion saw the tomb themselves, empty, and because they did not see Him or an angel, they assume something else. Those women must be crazy. The Romans must have moved the body. Animals must have eaten His body. It can’t be true that Jesus resurrected. We’ve hoped for such things before and they haven’t happened. I’m not going to believe it until I see it with my own eyes.

Let’s pause there for a second in our scripture. I imagine that most of us in this room has experienced a death in the family before. Maybe even a death of a dear friend. Let’s be honest, those kinds of close relationship deaths in our lives are traumatic. And I’m probably understating it. It’s devastating to the soul. So devastating that it causes us to do some uncharacteristic things. Maybe we say, “God, where are you? Why did you let this death happen?” I’ll talk about this more in-depth in a few weeks when we’re in the book of Joel, but sometimes death is so shocking to the soul that it causes a numbing effect. The very person we should turn towards, God, is the very person we flee from. Maybe we’re angry. Maybe we’re bitter towards God. Maybe we think we should have some words to say to Him, but we have no words at all. So we avoid belief and God all together. To the one extreme, in the midst of a devastating death, some of us renounce our faith. In our depression and defeat of the death, we may try to escape to our Emmaus. Frederick Buechner interprets Emmaus as “the place we go to in order to escape.” The death of Jesus was so devastating to these followers that they needed to get away. They need to go away to Emmaus. Can you blame them? Can you blame them for their skepticism that He is alive? When you’ve experienced something devastating in your life, what escape did you choose? Maybe it was getting drunk to numb the pain. Maybe it was pouring yourself into your children to avoid the pain. Maybe it was working 60 or 70+ hours a week at work. Maybe it was binging on Netflix or your favorite TV show. Maybe it was overeating.

Maybe it was throwing yourself into a house project to distract you from the pain. Let's be honest, death, a significant death, is devastating. We're all tempted to find our escape.

How does Jesus respond to this disbelief? “²⁵Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” He calls these followers “foolish” and “slow of heart.” As Jesus recalls everything that has happened since Moses and the prophets, He's saying, “Come on! Don't you see it. Look at what Jesus fulfilled! He did things 10 times greater than any previous ‘prophet’ and ‘teacher.’ He fulfilled all the prophecies. Three times Jesus predicted His death and resurrection and warns you all of it. And yet, you still do not believe that He will rise again?” They've chosen their escape rather than belief that He is alive. They have chosen their escape rather than seeing life on the other side of death.

“²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. [They now see Him.] ³²They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’” As Jesus recalled the scriptures from Moses and the prophets their hearts were burning within them. From the beginning to the end, Luke uses the scriptures to open the hearts of the people. Do you see? God makes these promises to us and to our lives in scripture. And here, Jesus is the embodiment and fulfillment of the scriptures. As we study the Word of God, our hearts will be enflamed and opened to the Spirit of God. We will understand and know God more. Our hearts will burn with passion. As Jesus breaks the bread and reveals Himself, He is saying that He is the fulfillment of all the promises that previous scripture foretold. Although we may doubt that there is indeed resurrection life, we can believe that what God promises will come true.

If you're still a skeptic among us, I can understand your skepticism. Approximately 2000 years later how can we claim that these things are true? How can we claim that the resurrection actually happened? Were the disciples and the women at the tomb duped? In an age of science, an abundance of knowledge and technology, is this still true? Historians and scholars have asked these critical questions and sought answers. There are three truths, objectively, that historians and scholars can agree upon:

1. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion.
2. Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.
3. As a result of the preaching of these disciples, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and grew.

What's the proof for these truths? Non-biblical historical sources can confirm that the resurrection of Jesus was preached about shortly after Jesus' crucifixion and death IN Jerusalem. So it wasn't preached about in some obscure place, but the very place where Jesus met His death. A hostile place. He was preached about shortly thereafter. Secondly, there are Jewish arguments AGAINST Christianity that admit to the tomb being empty. Whenever it's not in the best interest of the opposition to make this admittance, then it must be the truth. The women or the disciples weren't lying because their opposition admits to the same truth. The tomb was empty. Third, the Gospel of Mark, our earliest written gospel uses source material that is within 7 years of the death and resurrection. So it is too close to the actual event to be considered folklore or legendary. Fourth, the burial of Jesus is extremely reliable by outside sources. The fact that Joseph of Armithea is named in multiple sources makes this more likely to be true. So it's not as if Jesus was buried in another tomb or the women went to the wrong tomb. He was buried in a specific tomb that they found empty. Fifthly, the empty tomb was discovered by women. This is unheard of in the ancient world. If this story was folklore or legendary, it would have been found by the disciples and told by men. That covers the truth of the empty tomb.

The second truth, "Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ." Just because they saw Jesus, doesn't mean they actually did. There are three arguments here. One, they were lying. Two, they were hallucinating. Or three, they really saw the risen Christ. Many people will die for a lie that they believe is the truth. BUT, will 11 people die for a lie together that they believe is the truth? Will the countless others who saw Jesus ascend to heaven also die for this lie who believe it is the truth? Don't you think that at some point with that many people in on the "lie" someone would reveal the lie? From a probability standpoint, it's more plausible to believe that what they saw was true. So was it a hallucination? Well...again, think about this from a probability standpoint. When people have hallucinations, how often do people have the same exact hallucination? Almost never. So for this many people to have this same exact hallucination and to testify about this hallucination in the same exact way is also just as unreliable. It's more probable that what they saw in Jesus' resurrection and ascension that it was true.

In response to the last truth, “As a result of the preaching of these disciples, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and grew.” Think about this, if the resurrection was a lie, how is it that over 2 billion people in the world believe in Christ today? How is it that over 2000 years later this thing is still going? Shouldn’t that be testimony enough to say that the resurrection actually happened? Or even think about this, would we have the Word of God, the Bible, if the resurrection never occurred? NO. And if you want to dig into the reliability of the Bible, well...it gets even better. There was this group of Jews called the Masoretes in the ancient world. They were tasked with making sure that the Old Testament that we know today would be recorded over-and-over again to make it through the centuries. And these guys were incredibly meticulous. If they made one tiny mistake, they would throw the whole thing out. They made sure every detail of our old testament today was reliably passed through the centuries. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the reason this was such a big deal was that they pre-date our previously held Oldest Old Testament by a 1000 years. The quality of the manuscripts of the Old Testament surpasses all other ancient manuscripts. Whereas the Old Testament is excellent in its accuracy, the New Testament is very good. Around the similar era when the New Testament was being written, there were writings by Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, and Tacitus. Of the original manuscripts of these writings, we only have 7 original manuscripts of Plato’s writings. We have 10 original manuscripts of Caesar’s writings. We have 20 original manuscripts of Tacitus’ writings. We have 49 original manuscripts of Aristotle’s writings. And then it jumps to approximately 2000 of Homer’s writings. And guess how the New Testament compares? Just in the language of Greek alone, we have 6000+ original manuscripts. In other languages, we have 24,000 original manuscripts. The closest comparison is Homer at 2000. The New Testament is astronomically more accurate than Plato’s writings. By percentage, the New Testament is considered 99.5% pure. Are you still a skeptic of the Resurrection’s truth and the Bible’s accuracy? If you’re ever looking for a good read, I recommend reading “The Case for Christ” by Lee Strobel. Lee was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune and educated in law by background. “The Case for Christ” documents his journey from skeptic Atheist to surrendering believer in Jesus Christ. Each step of the way he tries to prove that Christianity is false and I’m sure you can guess what happens.

If we go back to our text, these followers of Jesus were terribly distraught that Jesus died. They couldn’t believe that He would rise again because they were so disappointed so many times before. But as they found out, Jesus IS the real deal. He is the Messiah. Death does not hold Jesus back. That He has risen indeed. The question for you today is, do you believe God’s promises to be true? Do you believe that what the scriptures foretold and tell us today are fulfilled in

Jesus Christ? Do you believe that there is life on the other side of death? As Paul tells us many times over throughout his letters, we can't have this new life in Christ if we aren't first willing to die with Christ. While death comes with depression, sadness and disappointment, the other side is so good. So awesome. So wonderful. It's new life in Jesus Christ. I hope you can see today that we have every reason to believe that the resurrection is true. We have every reason to have hope in Jesus Christ. We have every reason to believe that what the Word of God tells us is true. Let's stop waiting for God to fulfill His promises. Rather, let's live with conviction and true belief that our Messiah, our Savior, Jesus Christ, has risen indeed! That His promises are fulfilled! That we can live in the fullness of life in Jesus Christ! Amen!