

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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LUKE 24:1-53

The day you were hired... The day you got pregnant... The day you met your spouse... The day a parent died... These were landmark days in your life - days that made a difference. But they probably started out like all other days. It appeared to be a common, ordinary day. At breakfast that morning you didn't think something would happen that would change your life forever.

Likewise, when the disciples crawled out of bed on that first Easter Sunday they had no idea they were *mere minutes* away from a *miracle*. It seemed like an ordinary day. They never dreamed it would be the day that would not only alter *their* lives, but turn the course of all human history. Jesus would conquer death, and live to give new life to those who ask!

After that first Easter, in a sense nothing had changed... Rome still occupied Palestine - religious authorities still had a bounty on the disciples' heads – sin, death, and evil still ruled the world... Yet in another sense, after that first Easter, everything changed - a new stream had begun to flow that would cut an enormous channel and eventually catch billions of hearts in its undertow.

Luke 23 closes *at sundown* – Jesus is crucified, God is dead, and the world is a hopeless place... But Luke 24 opens just before *sunrise* – Jesus is risen, God has conquered death, and the world will never be the same...

Verse 1 begins, “*Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.*” “*They*” were the women who attended the crucifixion and escorted the body of Jesus to the tomb. These women went home for the Sabbath to prepare the spices to complete the burial.

And it can't be overestimated how bleak the situation looked... Jesus had breathed His last... There was no more pulse... The Savior was stiff... In addition, Judas was now a betrayer... The chief priests and Pilate were murderers... The disciples were cowards... It was a sad, sad scene.

If anyone had remained faithful it was these women. They'd stayed to the end with Joseph of Arimathea. They knew exactly where Jesus was buried. It's fitting, *the last to leave* the cross were *the first to arrive* at the tomb! God intended to bless their faithfulness. Those who were willing to share in the sufferings of Christ are the first to experience His resurrection power!

“*But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.*”

Keep in mind this was a heavy stone. Mark 16:3 tells us that the women were talking among themselves, “*Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?*” They knew they couldn't move it themselves - the stone weighed two tons. But when they arrive on the scene the stone had been rolled away.

John's Gospel says the stone was "taken away" – it's the translation of the Greek word "airo" – it caught air – it means "to pick up and carry away." Apparently, the two ton stone was blown off the entrance to the tomb. The force of the resurrection was so powerful the stone popped off the mouth of the tomb like a cork from a champagne bottle. - a two ton stone caught air.

Keep in mind the stone was not removed to let Jesus out. We know His resurrection body wasn't subject to the laws of nature. He had the capability to walk through walls. He appeared; then disappeared. The stone on the mouth of the grave was removed not to let Jesus out, but to let the world in so we could see that the tomb was empty. He was risen!

Verse 3, "Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed *their* faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!"

These are the words written on the door of the Garden tomb in Jerusalem, "*He is not here, but is risen!*"

There are famous tombs scattered all around the world... Hadrian's Tomb in Rome - Lenin's Tomb in Red Square - the Taj Mahal in India - Westminster Abbey in London - the Pharaoh's Tomb, the Pyramid of Giza in Egypt - the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in Washington DC... but the world's most famous tomb, the Garden Tomb, is empty!

I'll never forget my first visit to the Garden Tomb. It was a moving experience to be in the exact spot where they laid the slain body of my Lord. And I took advantage of the opportunity. I went in and out of that tomb several times. I looked the place over. I gave it a thorough inspection – and guess what? It's completely empty. There's not a corpse to be found. The most famous tomb in the world is an empty tomb! Jesus is risen!

But an empty grave was not all I noticed at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. As I walked away from the tomb I looked up and on the top of the wall surrounding the compound there was a barbed-wire barrier. Sharp, glass shards were cemented into the wall. It's a sign of tension, conflict, and war.

It hit me, folks who live near the tomb are familiar with the facts. Most probably believe the truth of the resurrection - they live next door to the proof! They know Christ has risen, but they've never experienced the risen Christ.

I wonder how many of us here tonight are in the same boat. We believe Jesus is alive, but we've never met Him. We're not aware of His presence.

Notice again the question the angel asked the women, "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" In other words, why look in a graveyard for a man who's alive? Why are you treating a living, breathing human being as if He were dead? Yet there are church's that are guilty of this every single Sunday. I've been to some church services that were more a memorial to a dead man than an experience with a man who is alive and well...

Imagine visiting the Lincoln memorial on February 12th, Honest Abe's birthday. You'd find a large crowd and a Memorial Service in progress... Someone would read excerpts of Lincoln's writings - *the Emancipation Proclamation or the Gettysburg Address*... Speakers would pull out points and make application to today - *equality for all men, and the importance of our national unity*... Someone else would remember and praise Lincoln's accomplishments - *how he freed*

the slaves and preserved the nation... Then we'd all be encouraged to follow his example... be honesty and courageous.

But there's one thing you'd never be asked to do - it would be ludicrous - you'd never be invited to come forward and meet the President himself. "*Ladies and gentlemen, here he is... Abraham Lincoln!...*" Naaa, that's not going to happen. In fact, if that occurred you'd be running for the doors.

Yet a lot of church services are no different. We read the words of Jesus... We apply His teachings to our lives... We recall His past accomplishments, and learn by His example... but that's where we stop! No one takes seriously that we can sense and know the Savior. Our worship is more a *eulogy*, when it should be an *encounter*!

The message of Christianity is that Jesus Christ is alive!

You don't go to a graveyard looking for Jesus. He can be experienced in real life. Later the Lord Jesus tells His disciples before He ascends into heaven, "*And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*"

Don't just sing songs about him, sing songs to him.

Make your prayers a dialogue, not just a monologue.

Follow a living person not just a stoic example.

And don't just work *for the Lord*, work *with him*.

You and I, living in the 21st century can enjoy a relationship with a man who actually lived in the 1st century - the carpenter from Nazareth is alive!

The Angel continues, "*Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'* And they remembered His words." What sailed over their heads so many times, now finally clicks.

"Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."

The disciples wrote off the testimony of the women as wild hysteria. Sadly, Jews in the first century didn't consider women reliable witnesses. In a Jewish court a woman's testimony wasn't even inadmissible evidence. Apparently, the disciples didn't give much credence to these women.

Verse 12, "*But Peter arose and ran to the tomb...*" You get the impression Peter was looking for any inkling of hope.

He "*ran to the tomb and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.*" I'm sure Peter wanted to believe! Peter had failed His Lord. He thought it was over. But could it be, could it be true that Jesus was alive? What would it be like to see Jesus again?

Sunday morning had begun with a startling surprise!

"Now behold, two of them (two disciples) were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem." Emmaus was northwest of Jerusalem. Today its on the freeway that links Jerusalem with Tel Aviv, but in Jesus' day it was at the end of a rocky, dusty road. Emmaus is about a three hour walk from Jerusalem.

“And they talked together of all these things which had happened.”

There was much to talk about. These two disciples had probably been with Jesus for most of His 3½ year ministry. With *each miracle* their hearts had been fueled with more excitement. *Each teaching* had produced a new reverence for His wisdom. *Each day* they'd fallen deeper in love with the Lord.

These disciples had been sure Jesus was more than a mere man! They were confident He was Messiah. Their imaginations had run wild with visions of His future Kingdom. They never dreamed it would end this way.

Now their hopes are sacked. They were eye-witnesses to the crucifixion. These two disciples are wandering home confused, disillusioned, in a state of shock. All they know for sure is that it was over – finally over. They're returning to the hopeless lives they'd known before... *back to Emmaus*.

“So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.”

There were multiple reasons they didn't recognize Jesus... We know Jesus bore scars. He showed Thomas His hands. Perhaps facial scars obscured their recognition. He'd been beaten beyond recognition.

I'm sure their failure to recognize Jesus may've also had something to do with a little supernatural screening. God threw a veil over their eyes until they had fulfilled the prerequisites. To meet the risen Christ you have to be ready...

Verse 17 “And (Jesus) said to them, “What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?” Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?” *“Man, where have you been? Haven't you read the Jerusalem Post? Haven't you been watching Fox News? 60 Minutes did an expose”*

“And (Jesus playing coy) said to them, “What things?” So they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.” And notice the saddest word in their statement, “*Jesus... who was a prophet...*”

Jesus was in their past tense. Apparently, they no longer believed.

This had all been so confusing. They'd been forced into an intellectual quandary. If Jesus was mighty in deed and word how did He get trapped? If He was a prophet of God why did God allow Him to be crucified? It just didn't make sense...

And some of us tonight, are in a similar boat! We're confused about our circumstances. We've got our own questions. As one historian said of Christopher Columbus, *“When he departed, he didn't know where he was going. When he arrived, he didn't know where he was. And when he returned, he didn't know where he had been.”* That's how these two men on the Road to Emmaus felt. *Does that describe you tonight?*

Verse 21 is sadder still, “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.” Again, they say, “*we were hoping... He'd redeem Israel.*” Apparently their hope had died. Not only were they *intellectually confused*, but they *emotionally crushed*. They felt Jesus had let them down personally. All the disciples had staked their future on Jesus - and He'd given in without a fight - why didn't He work a miracle and try to escape the cross?

Didn't He know that people were depending on Him, trusting in Him?

They continue, "Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain 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." Notice their conclusion of futility. It's as if they're saying "We heard the wild reports, but we're skeptical. How can we believe the hallucinations of a bunch of hyper-emotional women."

The flame of faith had been extinguished from the heart of these disciples.

These two men were *intellectually confused...* and *emotionally crushed...* and *spiritually conquered...* They no longer held out hope for a miracle. These two disciples had lost touch with spiritual realities. Life with Jesus made them believe in a higher plane, but how quickly their short flirtation with heaven was shattered by the bitter realities of a harsh, cruel, ugly crucifixion.

Let me suggest the road to Emmaus not only runs seven miles northwest of Jerusalem, but at some point, it cuts through the heart of every person. There are times when you're *confused intellectually* - you don't understand God's purposes... At other times you're *crushed emotionally* - you feel forsaken, like God has let you down... There are even times when you're *conquered spiritually* - hope is gone. You're too tired and weary to believe. You thought God loved you, but now you're not sure.

The road to Emmaus is a lonely stretch of highway. It winds and winds, and seems to head nowhere, but here's an ironic twist – on the road to Emmaus the answer you're looking for is right beside you. Jesus is with us! Jesus is faithful to join us. Our problem is that we're blind to His presence. The explanation for their confusion, the balm for their hurts, the flame to reignite their faith... all they desperately needed was within arm's reach. Jesus was with these two discouraged disciples, but they didn't realize it.

Verse 25, "Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

Jesus reveals why their eyes are closed... *they were slow of heart to believe*. God wants to open our eyes to the risen Christ, but there's one prerequisite – we have to believe! Faith is the key. But there's more... *we're to believe with our hearts*.

Some folks believe intellectually, but never act on their faith. When you believe with your heart - desire, and commitment, and passion kick in. We're suddenly willing to meet the Lord on His terms – not just our own. And that's when God opens our eyes! Suddenly, Christ is revealed to you! You sense His presence. You're never the same.

It's been said, "Man's knowledge must be understood to be loved. But God's knowledge must be loved to be understood." It's when you love Jesus, that He reveals Himself to you.

Verse 27 "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." What a Bible Study!

If only they had recording equipment and we could get the CD! Jesus goes *Through the Bible. They have a TBG!* Jesus starts in Genesis, and teaches these disciples how the OT speaks of Him on every page!

“Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.”

Jesus is a man after my own heart - He never turned down an invitation to dinner. Revelation 3:20 tells us that Jesus wants to eat dinner with each of us. He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Jesus stands at your heart's door tonight, knocking, waiting for you to open.

There use to be a billboard in Louisiana. It as on Interstate 10. You saw it just as you approached the Mississippi River bridge – it was a picture of Jesus, head bowed, hanging on the cross. The caption read, "It's Your Move!" After the cross the ball was in our court. It's up to us to open our heart.

Verse 30, “Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.”

What was it that finally sparked their faith? It was something about the way He handled the bread?

Here's my theory - I believe they saw the scars in His hands. Phillip Yancey writes, "Jesus can always prove His identity - no other living person bears the scars of crucifixion." When they saw His scars it was undeniable. His scars ignited their faith - and in turn, opened their eyes.

But always remember the succession, *the eyes aren't opened until the heart believes*. It never happens in reverse People want God to open their eyes; then they'll believe. But it doesn't work that way. You believe and then God opens your eyes! Jesus was speaking of you and me, when He told Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

“And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”

This was a case of *good heartburn*. Their passion returned. They were stirred, moved, hope was rekindled - their faith was fueled - even before they realized His identity. When did it happen? While Jesus opened the Scriptures.

When a discouraged and defeated John Wesley stumbled into a church on Aldersgate Street in London, he sat and listened to the reading of Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. The message of justification by faith alone, and grace alone, through Christ alone - captured his imagination and stirred his heart. He wrote of his experience, "my heart was *strangely warmed*."

The stirrings of revival are not the result of all night prayer meetings, although prayer plays a part. They're not the result of a unified church, though the church needs to come together. A *burning heart* is not the result of anointed praise and worship, though we certainly need to worship God. A burning heart – a heart on fire for God - a lasting passion for Jesus Christ - occurs when the Scriptures are opened and Jesus is preached!

Revival comes, when like these two disciples, we go back to the drawing board, and re-open the book, and seek Jesus on every page. You'll burn with love for *the living Word*; when you fill your heart with *the written Word*.

“So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem...” Emmaus to Jerusalem is an uphill climb. That these disciples found the energy to return that day is proof of the excitement that filled their hearts.

“And (they) found the eleven and those *who were* with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” And they told about the things *that had happened* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.” Jesus had also appeared to Peter. Imagine, these three friends overjoyed - and swapping stories.

“Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” They don’t even get to finish the stories. Jesus pops in! He just appears. And this was quite a greeting, especially when you consider the last time Jesus saw these guys He was watching their backs as they dodged trees and ran through the Garden of Gethsemane.

Don’t you know, in one sense they were dreading this meeting... They weren’t sure what to expect from Jesus. They probably feared judgment. But instead, Jesus puts them at ease. “Peace to you.” It’s grace. Here’s what you should never forget, **a risen Christ means a second chance!**

Verse 37, “But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.” They thought Jesus was a ghost or phantom – an apparition.

“And He said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.” Again, it’s the scars.

Jesus was no longer flesh and blood - His blood had been spilt for us! But He was still flesh and bone. His body had changed, transformed, but it was the same body. For proof He showed His scars, His undeniable scars!

It’s always a provocative thought to remember that Jesus still has His scars. When we get to heaven we’ll still see those scars. When we’ve spent the first forever of infinite eternities He’ll still have His scars. It’s been said, **“The only man made thing in heaven will be the scars on our Savior.”** They’ll serve as an eternal reminder of His great love for us.

Jesus could walk through walls. He was no longer limited by time and space. In the words of Paul to the Corinthians, ***His corruptible body put on incorruption. His mortal body put on immortality.*** The body that was resurrected was the body that was crucified. He was still the same Jesus.

Novelist, John Updike, wrote, **“Make no mistake: if (Jesus) rose at all it was as His body; if the cells’ dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fall.”** The resurrection was crucial. Jesus didn’t swap bodies. His one and only body was subjected to death. So when He rose, our archenemy could be totally defeated once for all.

Verse 41, “But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled...”

Apparently, their fear is gone, but they’re still not believing what they’re seeing. They’re all pinching themselves and laughing. They’re glad and giddy!

Jesus is going to offer further proof. “He said to them, “Have you any food here?” I picture Jesus chuckling with them. “So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took *it* and ate in their presence.” Ghosts don’t eat fish and honey. They’re starting to digest the truth!

“Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.”

Verse 44 is an important proof text. It reveals what Jesus considered the inspired canon of Scripture. He lists the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Notice, He doesn't mention the Apocrypha, or other Jewish writings. Jesus limits the OT to the 5 books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms or poetical books – *the same collection accepted by the Jews of His day.*

And from those books “He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Another Bible study to stir up their faith!

“Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.”

I love the Greek word translated “*witnesses*” – it means “*part of the evidence.*” Your life and my life should be “*Exhibit A*” that Jesus is risen! If a lawyer was trying to prove that Jesus is alive could he point to your life as evidence? Are you full of joy! Have changes occurred in you that can only be explained by a living Savior? Are you walking in His resurrection power?

Verse 49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

In Numbers 11 Moses chose 70 men to help him oversee Israel, and settle the people's disputes. Before they began their ministry Moses called these men outside the camp, and God took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and placed it on his 70 sidekicks. When the Spirit came upon these men they spoke in prophecy and ecstatic utterances. It was divine communication.

Two of the men were still in the camp when the Spirit came upon them and they prophesied. This obviously exposed God's power to the rest of the camp. And Joshua was upset. He didn't think it was right. These were holy happenings and should be reserved for only those chosen for the task. He wanted Moses to muzzle the prophets. But Moses had the opposite desire.

In Numbers 11:29 he prayed, “Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit upon them!” Moses longed for the day when all God's people, *not just a select few*, were endued with power from on high. **Moses wish became God's promise!**

This is what Jesus calls “*the promise of the Father.*” It was repeated throughout the OT.

Isaiah 44:3, “I will pour My Spirit on your descendants”

Ezekiel 39:29, “For I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel”

Joel 2:28 which Peter will quote on the Day of Pentecost, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.” This is what Jesus called “*the promise of the Father.*”

It must've been a Calvary Chapel pastor who said, “Promises are like crying babies in the sanctuary, they should be carried out immediately.” But there are some promises that take time to come of age - to mature.

The Father had promised for over a thousand years to bless His people with this power. Now Jesus tells His disciples the fulfillment of this promise is just days away. He wants them to wait in Jerusalem. There He promises that He will “*endue*” them - or literally “*clothe them*” - in supernatural power.

And this dynamic is available to us! This power can break chains of sin, and shoo away fears. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit produces boundless love and boldness. It turns *wimps* into *witnesses* – *legalists* into *lovers*.

RA Torrey was once asked if he had received *the second blessing* – in other words, not just saved, but filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit? Torrey responded, "Yes, and the third blessing, and the fourth, and the fifth, and hundreds beside, and I'm looking for a new blessing today." God wants to clothe you with a power far greater than your own - *a divine dynamo!*

"And (Jesus) led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them." Bethany was east of Jerusalem - on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were all from Bethany.

"Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven."

What a moment! Like the folks at Cape Canaveral watching a NASA lift-off, Jesus starts rising from the ground into the clouds. He's soaring like a runaway balloon filled with helium.

I've often wondered why we don't hear more sermons about the ascension of Jesus. We preach about the crucifixion and resurrection, but rarely the ascension. I love what author Phillip Yancey writes about the ascension...

"When Jesus returned after death to vaporize all doubts among the remnant of believers, He tarried a mere forty days before vanishing for good. The time between Resurrection and Ascension was an interlude, nothing more. If Easter Sunday was the most exciting day of the disciples' lives, for Jesus it was probably the day of Ascension. He the Creator, who had descended so far and given up so much, was now heading home. Like a victorious soldier returning across the ocean from a long and bloody war. Like a successful astronaut shedding his spacesuit to gulp in the familiar atmosphere of earth. Home at last - Jesus was finally going home."

Jesus' ascension was His last lap down the home stretch. The ascension had monumental meaning. It was proof the Father had accepted His sacrifice. He was equipped and qualified to be our High Priest. He's stepping up. He's assuming a new post. And He's still on the job.

And (the disciples who were with Him) worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen."

I love Augustine prayer, *"You ascended before our eyes, and we turned back grieving, only to find you in our hearts."* The disciples knew now that Jesus would always be with them.

Notice, the book of Luke begins and ends in the Temple. It begins with an aged priest receiving *the promise of the Messiah*. It ends with that promise fulfilled, and the world alive again with a fresh start. And God's people are waiting on another promise – *the Promise of the Father*. That becomes the theme of 2 Luke - his sequel – **The Book of Acts**.