

## **“The Road to Emmaus”**

**Luke 24:13-26**

**CLXXXVI. Expositions of the Gospel According to Luke**

**December 18, 2016**

The section of Luke stretching from verses 13-35 is not found in any other of the gospels. Luke tells the story of two disciples journeying by foot to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Wright regards it as “the finest scene Luke ever sketched.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is filled with drama, despair, irony, suspense, and surprise, as the two men move from spiritual blindness to awakened faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior Messiah. In some ways this journey parallels our own as they transition from hopelessness, to scriptural testimony, to faith in Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

### **Dashed hopes**

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, (Lk 24:13)*

These two disciples are now walking away from Jerusalem and the site of the crucifixion and Jesus’ tomb, to Emmaus. Perhaps they were going home now that Passover was over and events had unfolded so unhappily. The precise location of Emmaus is unknown, though it is thought to be west of Jerusalem. The “of them” refers back to the Eleven and the other disciples (Lk 24:9). “That same day” means the same day as the discovery of the empty tomb, the first day of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, 292.

<sup>2</sup> “This describes the experience of innumerable Christians” (Ibid., 293).

week, Sunday. That they are walking away from Jerusalem and the other disciples indicates that apostolic community has been shattered by Jesus' death. Henry sees them "mediating a retreat" without the consent or knowledge of the others.<sup>3</sup> They have given up. They are defeated. Their leader is dead, the movement has been destroyed, and they are going home.

*and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.*

(Lk 24:14)

This is a familiar scene. Two men are walking along the road talking about current events. It would be like a couple of us discussing a recent election. The two were "talking" and "discussing" (v 15) the events of the cross: "all these things that had happened." They were trying to make sense of it all. They had been so sure. How could they have been so wrong? What had they failed to understand?

*<sup>15</sup> While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. <sup>16</sup> But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (Lk 24:15, 16)*

Luke gives us the identity of the "visitor" (v 18) who "drew near" that the two do not possess. It is Jesus who joins them in their journey. We know, but they don't. The One whose death has thrown them into despair is now with them, alive and well! Yet they "were kept" from recognizing Him. Kept by whom? By God. The verb is another "divine passive." God keeps

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<sup>3</sup> Henry, on Luke 24:13.

them in their condition of spiritual blindness. Why? So that He might have the conversation with them that He is about to have. Why? In order to lead them to faith through the testimony of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The key is in verses 25-27. Jesus will show that receiving His message does not depend on His bodily presence for confirmation or conviction, a vital fact for subsequent generations. One need only read the Bible in order to know that Jesus, the same Jesus who was dead and buried, is the promised Savior.

*And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. (Lk 24:17)*

Jesus asks, "What is this?" or "these things," the stress being on the topic of their conversation. Luke says "they stood still." Apparently they were so shocked by the question that they were stopped in their tracks, "looking sad." Three days after the event they are still emotionally devastated, the sorrow etched upon their countenance.

*Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (Lk 24:18)*

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<sup>4</sup> "Its purpose is to enable the disciples to be prepared for the revelation of the risen *Jesus by a fresh understanding of the prophesies of his resurrection*; it may also be meant to show that one can know the presence of the risen Jesus without being able to see Him, and thus to give help to Christians living in the era after the cessation of the resurrection appearances" (Marshall, 893).

There has been considerable speculation about the identity of Cleopas. He may be the same person named Clopas, husband of Mary, found in John 19:25. Yet who he was remains unclear. Neither do we know anything about the identity of his companion. His question is asked with a note of astonishment, or even insult, mocking their Visitor's ignorance. The events of Calvary were widely known and talked about. No one in Jerusalem could be ignorant of them. It was the "talk of the town." Even visitors knew of them. You must be the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has happened, because everyone else does. As the Apostle Paul would later say to King Festus, "The king knows about these things... for this has *not been done in a corner*" (Acts 26:26).

*And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, (Lk 24:19)*

"What things?" Jesus asks, drawing out from them their understanding, their limited and defective understanding of the events of the cross and the aftermath. "They" both join in answering. Their description of Jesus as "a prophet mighty in deed and word," though impressive, falls short of "Messiah" or "Lord" or "Son of God." Their understanding is inadequate. Yet it does echo scriptural descriptions of Moses (Acts 7:22; Deut 34:10-12). Jesus, they had hoped, was the prophet like Moses who would redeem Israel (Acts 7:22).

*<sup>20</sup> and 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. (Lk 24:20, 21a)*

What they anticipated was one who would be a *political* redeemer, like Moses with the Egyptians, subduing the Romans and establishing His kingdom. But He didn't! When Jesus turned out not to be a deliverer in the image that they had imagined, their hopes were dashed. "He should have been *defeating* the pagans, not dying at their hands," is how Wright characterizes Cleopas' meaning.<sup>5</sup> The irony is that Jesus did redeem Israel through death. What is missing is an understanding that Jesus must fulfill the prophet's destiny of suffering. "See how they made me the ground of their despair that which should have been the ground of their hope," Henry observes.<sup>6</sup>

We can see how profoundly our outlook is shaped by our expectations. When you got married, what were you expecting? Disappointed in your spouse's flaws, habits, quirks? Did you think you were marrying a sinless saint? You are shocked at his/her selfishness? Are you kidding? When you became a Christian, what were you expecting? Were you anticipating being "carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?"<sup>7</sup> Didn't Jesus say, "In the world you will have tribulation" (Jn 16:33)? Didn't the Apostle Paul say, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12)? Expectations shape outlook, determining if events will undo us or be taken in stride. So Jesus will say to them, what Bible are you reading? What Old Testament

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<sup>5</sup> Wright, 294.

<sup>6</sup> Henry, paraphrasing his comments on Luke 24:21.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Watts, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," *Trinity Hymnal*, #573, 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza.

prophet didn't suffer? Doesn't Scripture teach that the Christ would suffer and then be glorified? What were you expecting? Why are you despondent? But wait. It gets worse.

### **Spiritual blindness**

*Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. (Lk 24:21b)*

We have come face to face with the problem of spiritual blindness. Pause to consider the two travelers' circumstances and ponder what must be our spiritual condition. Jesus is in their presence. The one whose death has driven them to despair is standing before them conversing with them. Yet they cannot see it. There He is, but they are blind to His presence. However, there is an even greater blindness. They have the witness of Jesus' own predictions. Their reference to the "third day" should have triggered their memory of Jesus' foretelling of His death and resurrection "on the third day" (Lk 9:22; 18:33). More on this in a moment. They admit of knowing of the women's witness of the empty tomb, of the angelic visitors and their testimony that "he was alive."

*<sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. (Lk 24:22, 23)*

“Our company” indicates that these were known and trusted women whose report could not easily be dismissed. They admit they also had the testimony of Peter (Lk 24:12) and John (Jn 20:4-7) and perhaps others.

*Some 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.” (Lk 24:24)*

“Him they did not see.” For Cleopas and his companion, this is decisive. The evidence of the empty tomb is inconclusive. They will only be able to believe when they actually see the resurrected Jesus. This, however, cannot be the case if the Christian church is to survive. Most Christians have never seen the resurrected Jesus. Only a handful of the early disciples saw Him. The rest of us have believed in Him on the basis of the testimony of Scripture. Apart from the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, they should have believed in both His death and resurrection. They had the interpretive key: Scripture. They should have been able to pull it together by this stage in the unfolding events on the basis of the Bible. This is especially the case since Jesus has prompted them to review all the witnesses to the empty tomb, and His death that preceded it. Should this review not have triggered their memory of Scripture, leading to insight into Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection?

We should also recognize that many are exposed to the basic gospel facts in a manner similar to these disciples on the road to Emmaus. They know of Jesus’ life and ministry, that Jesus was “a prophet mighty in deed and word.” They know of His execution on a cross. They know the

Easter story of the empty tomb. Yet they fail to recognize Jesus' true and full identity. Why? Because of our innate spiritual blindness. Divine intervention is necessary if we are to understand savingly the full scriptural portrait of Jesus, the Lord and Christ. Only when Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" did comprehension come (Lk 24:45).

### **Lesson**

*And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Lk 24:25)*

Jesus teaches the travelers two basic lessons. First, we are foolish if we fail to believe *all that is in the Bible*. "Foolish" means not "moronic," but "obtuse" (*anoētos*) or "dull." "Slow of heart" points to a stubborn predisposition not to believe that only slowly is overcome. Many, many people are unbelievers not because of the evidence, or because of the facts, but because they are "foolish" and "slow of heart." The rich man in hell imagines that there is a more effective way to deliver his family from his fate than that of Moses and the Prophets. Hence, he pleads that Abraham send Lazarus to his father's house and his five brothers, "so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (Lk 16:28). They just need more evidence, he assumes. Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them" (Lk 16:29). The rich man argues, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (Lk 16:30). Abraham responds again, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (Lk 16:31).

Jesus rebukes the two disciples *not* for disbelieving the empty tomb, the angelic witness, the witness of the women, the witness of the disciples, *but for not believing Moses and the prophets*. If they had believed them, they would have believed the witnesses because they would have *expected* Jesus' suffering and *anticipated* His resurrection. All subsequent unbelief comes down to the failure to believe the Scripture. Is the Bible God's word? Has God spoken through the prophets and apostles, and supremely in His Son (Heb 1:1-3)? "O foolish ones," Jesus says. We are foolish if we dismiss God's self-revelation in His word. Our faith must be anchored in the testimony found in Scripture. We all must decide if the Bible is true or not. If it isn't, then we can all pack up and go home. If it is, then I must fall to my knees and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

*Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26)*

Jesus repeats what He has said about His death all along: it was "necessary" (*dei*), a term indicating divine necessity (as also in Lk 9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31-34). Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and His suffering is the necessary suffering of the Christ, the Messiah, if atonement was to be made (cf Acts 3:18). Redemption required blood sacrifice, that is, death. The suffering "Servant of the Lord" of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 was not identified by first century Jews with the Messiah. This is the key to their failure to believe. As J. R. Edwards points out, the concept of a Messiah who suffers "was foreign to pre-Christian Judaism."<sup>8</sup> The Messiah of Judaism was a

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<sup>8</sup> Edwards, 721.

conqueror who would subdue Israel's enemies and rule the nations. More typically, the righteous sufferer of Isaiah was interpreted as a metaphor of Israel as a people. Jesus is teaching us that He is the true Israelite who suffers vicariously for the whole people of God. Jesus' sufferings not only don't disqualify His Messianic identity, but rather are proof of it. "He could not have been a *Saviour*, if he had not been a *sufferer*," observes Henry.<sup>9</sup> Only then does He "enter into his glory," Jesus explains. "He must go by his cross to his crown," Henry explains.<sup>10</sup>

The failure, then, was to believe "*all* that the prophets have spoken," a mistake made by every generation. They believed the Scripture. They just didn't believe *all*. We all bring our biases to our reading of Scripture. We have presumptions of what the Bible *must* say and what it *cannot* say. These prior commitments color our interpretation. They blind us to what Scripture says that we find inconvenient or troubling or unsettling or politically incorrect. They also encourage us to see what *isn't* in Scripture that we consider must be, if it is God's word. Surely God must consider important what I consider to be important! Surely God must want what I want. Consequently we read into the Bible what the Bible doesn't say. We are *selective* in our interpretations, deleting that with which we differ, adding what we think should be included.

Jesus does not deliver us politically or militarily, they observe. Then He is not the Messiah. Jesus is put to death? Then He is not the Christ. Dead Redeemers can't save. How wrong they were and how wrong we are when we do not believe *all* the Scripture. Believe what it says about the nature of God. Believe what it says about the singularity of truth. Believe what it says about the

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<sup>9</sup> Henry, on Luke 24:26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

way to heaven. Believe what it says about the falsity and futility other religions. Believe what it says about morality. Believe what it says about marriage. The Bible will do us little good if we read it selectively. Don't pick and choose! Don't allow our biases and preconceptions to blind us to God's truth and requirements.

"A Short Life of Cotton Mather," that great early American Puritan, recently has been published. The author describes a critical juncture in Mather's young life in which he realized that if he was to live his life for the Lord, he could only do so if he were to "radically embrace the Bible," as his biographer puts it. So, at the age of 22, on a cold Saturday night in March of 1685, he asked himself, "Why do I believe the Scriptures to be the word of God?" He later recorded in his diary what followed:

I took into my hands the Bible... and presenting myself with it, on my knees before the Lord, I professed unto Him, that I did embrace the precious book, as His Word; resolving ever therefore to credit all the revelations of it: that I would love it, prize it, converse with it, as His: that I would be so awed by the promises, and threatenings and histories of it, as to study a conformity unto the precepts of it, while I have my being. So, I blessed Him, for His vouchsafing of this invaluable Word unto me.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rick Kennedy, *The First American Evangelical, A Short Life of Cotton Mather* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 5.

This is a bridge which we all must cross, where in our hearts we “embrace the precious book *as His Word*... love it, prize it, converse with it, *as His*,” and “be so awed by (it)... as to study a conformity unto the precepts of it.” Do so, endeavoring to remove all our biases and preconceptions, and praying that Jesus by His spirit will open the Scriptures to us, and we will see that Jesus is the Son of God and God the Son. Do so, determining not to pick and choose, depending on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and we will see that Jesus is the Savior of the World.