

Encounters with Christ

Part 1

Luke 24:13-35

1. Disappointment and despair.

2. Discourse and disclosure.

3. Grace that holds on.

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**Encounters with Christ:
From Fear to Faith to Filling
Part One
(Luke 24:13-35)¹**

You and I are here on the resurrection side of Easter, and sometimes that distorts how we read the events in the Gospel stories, especially when it comes to our ability to understand what was going on for the disciples who were living in the midst of what was taking place. So today we begin a six-part series looking at the encounters that the disciples had with Jesus from after the resurrection to the day of Pentecost, in order to identify with what they were feeling and to recognize that we go through the same things. You'll see that over the course of those 50 days, the disciples' journeys took them from fear, to faith, to filling with the Holy Spirit. It is a journey that we can all relate to, and need to be on, along that continuum from fear to faith to filling.

Today we are going to look at a couple of unknown disciples who left Jerusalem early Easter Sunday morning and had decided to go back to their hometown. It's a compelling and honest story that we can easily plug ourselves into.

In a moment I'm going to ask us to honor God's Word by standing as it is read, but before I do, I'd like to pray for us: *God, open our hearts and minds to be receptive to your very Words to us today. Please make your Word come alive in us as we hear it, that faith may come to us by the Word of God, opening our lives to the filling of your Spirit. In the name of your Son, the Living Word, Jesus Christ, amen.* Please stand with me:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

¹ Outline is from *Emmaus: The Road to Realisation*, Damon S. Adams
Primary resources: **NBBC** John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007).

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:13-35, niv)

This, my friends, is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God! You can be seated. Luke is the author of this Gospel, as well as the author of the book of Acts; the two books are part one and part two of the story of Jesus and the young church. This story comes near the end of Luke’s Gospel. I think you’ll see that what we just read applies to us because we too live this side of the resurrection, and we don’t always fully understand what that means. It also shows how we will grow in our faith, and how we will grow through and past our fears into being filled with the Holy Spirit and greater and greater Christlikeness.

So let’s look deeper into this story and as we do, I encourage you to watch for where you fit into it.

Remember that this story takes place on Easter Sunday. These two disciples of Jesus – one of the many followers of Jesus outside of the Twelve – are already heading home. They are dealing with...

1. ***Disappointment*** and ***Despair***.

On the day of the resurrection of Jesus, we see two of his disciples, one was named Cleopas while the other remains unnamed in the story. They are walking *away* from Jerusalem. On Friday they had watched Jesus be crucified, die, and then be buried. The day after that was Saturday, their Sabbath day. All day on their Sabbath they were despondent. They stayed in Jerusalem for that day because by Jewish law, they were not allowed to walk very far on the Sabbath. But as far as they knew, everything was over; Jesus was dead. So the first chance they got on Sunday, the next day, which was the first day of the week for the Jews, they headed out of Jerusalem on the long walk back to their homes, by way of the Emmaus Road. We don't know for sure where the town of Emmaus was, but it was a small village that was about a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem. These two, along with many other disciples, were filled with fear and grief and confusion (Luke 23:48; 24:4, 5, 11). As they walk along, despondent, they are talking together trying to make sense of what has happened. They are genuinely seeking for the truth, reminding each other of the things Jesus had taught them as they followed him for those three years, and then replaying together the tragic events of the last few days.

As readers of this story, we can identify with them. Imagine if you were reading this for the first time without knowing for sure that Jesus had risen. You would not know what was going to happen in the future, but you would know what had happened in the past, just like them. Of course today you know from the accounts that Jesus did actually rise from the dead, but hopefully you can empathize with these two. And that's intentional; Luke intends for us to place *ourselves* in the story. In fact, it's interesting that one of the disciples is given a name, but not the other. We don't know who the other one is. It could be a man or a woman. Could be the man's wife, but we're not told. That's a pretty glaring omission; think about it – Luke was a physician; he had an eye for detail. All throughout his writing, he makes it a point to get the details straight. So why here does he name one person and not the other? I think the other person is unnamed so that we can place *ourselves* in the story. As we read, *we* can easily be the one walking along that hot, dusty road, talking back and forth with Cleopas. This is important, because like them, we need to always try to understand and make sense of the events of the Scriptures. And like these two, Jesus will come alongside *us*, helping us to sort through our questions and directing our desire to understand.

Here we have two disciples – they are not apostles and yet this most unlikely pair experience one of the greatest journeys ever. But this pair was down in the mouth as they were travelling back home. Emmaus was their home town, and where they were going wasn't great people, and a grand place – we're on a dusty back road to a small unknown village with two obscure people. And yet the resurrected Savior takes the time to walk and talk with them. *What we think is insignificant is significant to God.* You might think Yakima is insignificant, or that our church is insignificant, or that your life is insignificant. But to God, we are significant and so are you.

So here are these two people who were talking about all the events and trying to come to terms with it all.

Little do these disciples realize they are about to have the greatest company – the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Yet they are unaware of who he is. The passage says that God blinded their eyes, but that’s kind of a harsh translation; the original language is passive; it’s more that Jesus didn’t reveal himself to them – not yet, anyway. But since they are struggling, Jesus takes the initiative and joins them. He promptly asks them what they are talking about.

We’re told that their faces were downcast. The two were both disappointed and despairing – they had invested time, energy, and a huge part of their lives to following Jesus. What we are talking about here is:

fear.

In between disappointment and despair is fear. Fear drives our disappointments into despair and lack of hope. We see that these two are afraid; afraid of what will happen to them, since they were known associates of Jesus – a man who was given the death penalty for treason. They are afraid to think about how they are going to put their lives back together now that he’s gone. Plus there are already rumors that his body is missing.

Let me just pause right there: what fears do you have right now? What things keep you up at night? What do you worry about? You know that worry is simply meditating on your fears, right?

I think you are beginning to relate to these two.

So they commence to tell the whole story to this person who joined them. They actually call Jesus a “stranger.” They don’t even recognize him.

So I recently read a story about Elvis Presley – you guys all know who Elvis Presley is, right? The article said that Elvis would often go to Lil Thompson’s Steakhouse in Tennessee. He was good friends with the owner who used to give him free food, long before he was famous. One night when he was at the height of his fame, the Steakhouse held the ultimate Elvis Presley impersonator contest. A large crowd showed up, including Elvis Presley himself. Elvis decided to take part and sat quietly at the back.

Elvis said confidently, “I’m going to mash this.” Thompson was worried the place would go crazy when everyone realized it was Elvis. But it turned out he didn’t need to worry. Elvis got up and sang “Love Me Tender,” and the audience...politely applauded. They didn’t recognize him. In fact, Elvis ended up getting third place in the contest!²

So these disciples are walking and talking with Jesus, and they don’t even recognize him, and here’s the irony: they tell Jesus – all about *Himself*. By doing that, they are showing that their high hopes have been dashed. Without hope, they are afraid.

Here is a lesson for each of us – these two disciples had created their *own* hope – hope that wasn’t founded on Jesus’ teaching. The rumor of His disappearing body

² Source: Blog, “The True Complete Story of Mark Hanks,” 706UnionAvenue.com (Accessed 1/28/21)

only added to their fear and despair and disappointment. I think sometimes we too create expectations that don't come to realization; we have a tendency to place our hope in anything else and everything else except where it should really be placed. Often we create false expectations that are based on our own way of thinking, and we even convince ourselves that these hopes are from God. We need to be careful of constructing our own hope built on foundations of our making. That kind of hope will always disappoint and leave us fearful. But hope in Christ will *never* disappoint us. We need a hope that is certain and sure, don't we? We can't undervalue or underestimate 'hope' – it is one of the three greatest things along with Faith and Love (1 Corinthians 13). Hope is bookended by faith and love. Hope without faith is empty; hope without love is harsh. Hope in Christ is the life blood of the believer and is the antidote to fear, despair, discouragement, and despondency. And yet Jesus is so gracious that he comes to them on their road of fear and despondency and turns it into a journey of...

2. ***Discourse*** and ***Disclosure***.

Jesus takes the opportunity to set the two disciples straight. He gives them a Bible study like no other – wouldn't you have loved to have been there! These two needed to realize what the Bible *really* taught about Jesus. And so, Jesus opened up all of the Bible to them. He showed how the Messiah was to suffer and then enter into His glory. It was a disclosure of both the person and work of Jesus.

The Bible ultimately is all about Jesus. The Old Testament contains not only the prophecies relating to Him, but He holds everything together. The Temple, the Law, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the Covenant, the deliverance from Egypt, the Promised Land, the Captivity – it all has to do with Jesus. So in that passage when it uses the expression, 'Moses and the Prophets,' it is a way of saying – 'all' of what the Jews called the "Tanakh." "Tanakh" was an acronym that stood for the "Torah," (the first five books of the Old Testament), the "Nevi'im" (the prophets) and the Ketuvim (the writings). TNK - Tanakh. But to make sure there is no confusion, in verse 44 it says 'the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms' (meaning 'the writings [which included the Psalms and the poetic and wisdom literature and the histories – in that order]). This is the most formal and technical way of declaring all the scriptures.

By doing all of this, Jesus was helping them to become:

familiar

...with the Word of God. If nothing else, this shows us how reading the Bible is essential for our spiritual well-being. In a recent survey done in the US, reading the Bible at least 4 times a week has been shown to be the number ONE basis for promoting spiritual growth.

So again, notice this group on the road to Emmaus was a Bible study – here was a small group. Generally, Jesus' ministry was teaching with groups – that is the way of discipleship – community was an integral part of Christ's ministry. The commitment to Church isn't really a choice – relationships are bound up in the essence of faith.

So remember that Jesus comes alongside them and enters their conversation, but the entire time, they don't realize that it is Jesus. Sometimes, by the way, it may *seem* to us that Jesus isn't with us. But it doesn't mean he's not there – *he is* – it's just that we can't always recognize him! When that's the case, it's usually because Jesus is trying to teach us something.

Anyway, we've seen plenty of times how the disciples didn't grasp the whole picture and often seem ignorant, but in this passage we see they are rational, thinking people who are in an honest and intelligent conversation about the meaning of Jesus' life.

These disciples are doing exactly what *we* must do: we must seek to understand the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus more and more. We cannot simply dismiss these things; these are real events in our history as humans that we need to get hold of. The crucifixion and the resurrection are pivotal events in the human story that we must seek to understand. Every one of us, whether we'd say we have been Christians for a long time or not at all, we must spend our lives seeking to understand in deeper ways what the truths of these events mean, and the implications they have on us. Remember that Jesus taught us that if we are going to find truth, we've got to seek it:

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10, niv)

If you do this, I can assure you that Jesus will draw near to you in your seeking. When this passage tells us that Jesus came up and walked along with them, it means more than simple physical proximity. It means he came to them very closely; he came to them as a “revealer,” someone who will enter deeply into their conversations, into their thinking, into their heart-searching. So Jesus asks them questions to help them think it through, and they retell the story of what has happened. And then Jesus becomes what's called an “interlocutor;” it means that he is someone who enters into the dialogue and the conversation to help understand it; he unlocks the context of Scripture with the life of Jesus.

Let me illustrate it this way: I'm going to read you a series of statements, and see if you can understand what it's about:

“A seashore is a better place than the street because you need lots of room. At first it is better to run than to walk. You may have to try several times. It takes some skill, but it is easy to learn. Even young children can enjoy it. Birds seldom get too close. If there are no snags it can be very peaceful. But if it breaks loose, you won't get another chance.”

Without any context to frame the sentences, this paragraph doesn't make any sense. Now let me read it again, but this time let me provide some context—a one-word frame or interpretive key. The one word is *kite*. Now see if it makes sense:

“A seashore is a better place than the street because you need lots of room. At first it is better to run than to walk. You may have to try several times. It takes some skill, but it is easy to learn. Even young children can enjoy it. Birds seldom get too close. If there are no snags it can be very peaceful. But if it breaks loose, you won't get another chance.”³

Jesus is the key word – the Word of God – that makes the context of all of the Old Testament make sense for us! The crucifixion of Jesus didn't negate what the Old Testament said, it *fulfilled* the Old Testament!

So Jesus begins to ask questions in order to direct their thinking toward what the true answers really are. We must *keep* seeking to understand Jesus and never stop. We need instruction. There is always greater growth emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually that we can discover. But here's something else that is important to realize: while we must genuinely seek, our understanding is *not* going to come from ourselves; we must have God's help if any of this is going to make sense. We can't trust our thinking alone. We need to ask and allow Jesus to come alongside us, allowing him to ask probing questions of us and enlighten our thinking, seeking, questioning, doubting, and our understanding. Remember, for all of the disciples' knowledge of the Bible and their first-hand knowledge of Jesus, even they *still* didn't understand it. They had lived with Jesus 24/7 for three years, and they still couldn't connect the dots. They *needed* Jesus to explain it to them. In fact, Jesus, in a very loving but stern, way, challenged them for their lack of understanding; he essentially was telling them that they didn't pay close enough attention. I wonder if Jesus might also sternly rebuke *us*; how often have we read the Bible, or listened to sermons, without attempting to *fully* understand it or believe it? And then we wonder why we struggle in our faith...Amidst all of our seeking, we need to ask Jesus to instruct us and help us understand it. Let me tell you he is more than happy to help us understand it. There is so much of it we simply will not understand if we don't open ourselves up to Jesus and the Spirit to enlighten our limited understanding. Jesus was able to help these two disciples connect the dots from all the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies about Jesus. By the way, this too was important to Luke, the writer of this Gospel. He had already listed thirty *direct* references to the Old Testament throughout his Gospel (1:15; 2:23, 24; 4:4, 8, 10-11, 12, 18-19; 7:22, 27; 8:10; 9:54; 10:27; 13:19, 35; 18:20; 19:38, 46; 20:17, 28, 37, 42-43; 21:26, 27, 37, 69; 23:24, 30, 46). Then, if we include the Old Testament passages that Luke made *indirect* references to, there are 525 references to the Old Testament in the Gospel of Luke! So this story shows us how *all* the Scriptures come to fulfillment in Jesus. When it says that Jesus explained the events of the last week in light of the Old Testament, the word for “explain” that is used to describe what Jesus does for the disciples on the road means literally to “translate.” Jesus “translated” the Old Testament into the language of their lives. We need Jesus to translate for us, too.

Even right now, as we discuss this story from God's Word, there may be things we don't understand. So if you haven't already, let's take the time to stop and invite Jesus to speak to us.

³ Adapted from Christopher West, *Fill These Hearts* (Image, 2012), pp. 99-101

Pray

Then we get to the turning point in the story, and here's what is really cool: we see these two disciples move from fear to familiarity with Scripture, so they are now on the road of...

3. *Discovery* and *Determination*.

So the disciples and Jesus have been walking along the road. The disciples are trying to make sense of the events of the last few days, and then Jesus comes along and joins them and begins explaining it all to them. Eventually, they arrive at their destination toward evening, but Jesus indicates that he's going to keep walking.

Even with such a great Bible study the two disciples did not realize they were speaking with Jesus. As paramount as Bible study is – there is more to a living and real relationship with Jesus. The disciples didn't want this stranger to leave – they invite Him to stay with them. They wanted not only his wonderful words – they wanted His presence. Stay Lord!

The disciples invite Jesus to stay with them for dinner. They are being good hosts and showing hospitality. The act of inviting someone for a meal was a desire for real communion. Among the Middle Eastern and Southern Europeans, sharing a meal is a BIG DEAL. Throughout the Bible we see this time and time again. How readily do we really invite Jesus in for deep and honest communion? They (the two disciples) wanted intimacy!

It was in this context where Jesus is engaging in this intimate act that He reveals Himself. Here was a personal encounter with Jesus. An encounter with Jesus is available to us all – it is not exclusively a thing of the past – it is yours here and now.

And Oh! When their eyes were opened – it all falls into place. They discover the true Messiah – not only do they know in their heads, they know in their hearts – they have experienced and have related with the Savior. He has become the Bread of Life in its fullest sense to them. *Jesus, the guest in the story, becomes Jesus the host, and he serves them their food.* At what point is it in the story when the disciples realize that he is Jesus? *When he breaks the bread.* Why is that? What is it about *that* act that clues them in? *It recalled the Last Supper.*

This scene is very, very similar to the Passover meal in Luke 22:14-23. The writer Luke brackets the death and resurrection event with table fellowship. Before and after Jesus' death and resurrection is a meal together – first in the upper room, and now here on the Emmaus Road. Both meals occur as darkness is falling. Both occur at a table hosted by Jesus. The first is the "last supper" with Jesus and his disciples before his death, which inaugurates the sacramental meal. The second supper, here, is the "first supper" after his resurrection which inaugurates and institutes our communion meal in the post resurrection era. The language in both meals is the same: Jesus took break, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. In both passages there is bread, thanksgiving, and breaking of the bread.

Do you see this? They have moved from fear to familiarity and now to:

faith.

But it doesn't stop at the discovery – they are filled with determination – they have hope, they have living and active faith and they are now stirred by love. They talk to each other in a way they have never spoken before – Did not our hearts BURN within us?! They were now activated and compelled by what they describe as a burning of their hearts. Do you have a 'Yearning for the Burning?' Do you yearn for Jesus that your heart burns for him?

See what this does – the day was over; it was now night. Instead of retiring for the night they are now compelled to return to Jerusalem – 'at once!' *They were headed away from the resurrection in their fear; now they are headed toward the resurrection in their faith. (repeat)* Jesus compels – the Gospel compels – you cannot sit still – you cannot keep silent. Immediately – they got up and went off to tell others about Jesus. You can't shut them up. It is this force – infused by the person of the Holy Spirit that thrust the Apostles and disciples to turn the world upside down on the day of Pentecost – Jesus is Alive! Say it with me – Jesus is Alive! – Uncontainable and unstoppable.

Daily we should journey with Jesus – walk with Him, read His Word, listen to Him, talk to Him, dine and commune with Him.

When we seek Jesus and attempt to understand the Scriptures, the living Jesus, through the Presence of the Holy Spirit, will walk beside us, and teach us all about God's plans. Christianity is not some set of objective truths that need to be comprehended; Christianity is a *revealed religion*. God himself reveals himself to us through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. When this happens, you understand completely what Cleopas and the other disciple meant when they said, "Weren't our hearts burning within us?" You will no longer be controlled by fear, and in faith you will go and tell others about Jesus who is alive and revealed himself to you.

Prayer

Pastor Jason:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:17-23, niv)