

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message Mankind's Blindness; God's Light

Scripture Luke 24:13-48

Our focus today is on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

I think you will agree that the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are among the most dramatic episodes in the Bible. We can picture in our minds the abuse to which Jesus was subjected at the hands of religious and political leaders; His sufferings before and after being nailed to the cross by the Roman soldiers; the shock and disbelief of Jesus' followers at His death. How quickly the excitement and elation of the triumphal entry turned into dismay and dashed hopes.

We can also picture the perplexity of the women who arrived at the tomb early in the morning to discover that the body of Jesus was missing. We can imagine the fright of these women when they were suddenly confronted by angels. The angels reminded them what Jesus had said concerning His death and that He would be raised again. However, when they reported this to the apostles and others, no one believed them. Luke states that their words seemed like nonsense. No one considered the possibility of resurrection. Luke reported that Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself. He discovered that it was indeed empty, but he went away wondering to himself what had happened.

That's all the information that Luke gives us concerning the first hours after Jesus' resurrection. No one among His followers was ready to accept the fact that Jesus' predictions about Himself were to be taken literally. For the followers of Jesus, the day of the resurrection was filled with bewilderment and confusion.

The next episode in Luke's Gospel account took place in the late afternoon. By this time numerous reports, and probably a lot of rumors, had spread among the followers of Jesus. The general mood among them was despondency, to which was added a considerable degree of emotional turmoil. The concept of resurrection was something they could not yet wrap their minds around.

The first set of verses we are going to read help us to understand what was going on in the hearts of Jesus' disciples on that day, and describes how Jesus took away all the pangs of despair.

Read Luke 24: 13-32

From these verses we get a glimpse into the mental and emotional confusion of the disciples. Jesus had tried to prepare His followers for the experiences He would undergo. He had told them on several occasions that He would be handed over to evil men, and that He would be put to death. Whenever He said these things, He usually concluded with the words, "but on the third day He would be raised to life." (*See Luke 9:22, 18:31-33*) His followers had heard these words, but they had not understood. Even after the women had given their report about the empty tomb and the message of the angels, they still had not fit all the pieces together.

And so it was, late on Sunday afternoon, as two disciples made their way toward their destination, they were "talking with each other about everything that had happened." The words used here in the Greek language suggest that they were engaged in earnest, animated discussion. Their demeanor was described as "downcast." When we connect "earnest discussion" with "downcast" demeanor, we get the picture in our minds of two very sad, perplexed individuals who were trying to make sense of recent events.

The dreams and expectations of these disciples had been shattered. They had been following the man who gave every indication that He was the promised Messiah. His miracles had validated His authority over nature, disease, demons, death, and sin. The disciples had expected Him to assert His power during the week of Passover. But then all the terrible events in connection with His arrest and crucifixion had occurred, and, in their despondency, they were talking through all this information.

When I counseled people who were in a depressed state of mind, the question that kept coming up is "Why?" "Why did something happen?" "Why did it turn out the way it did?" and "Why did it happen to me?" These disciples were undoubtedly asking each other these kinds of questions. "Why did He have to die?" "Why did the body disappear?" "Why?" "Why?"

The next question after the “why?” question is always “What am I going to do now?” These are questions that traumatized people usually ask, people who are “blind-sided” by unanticipated circumstances, people like these disciples.

When Jesus came up to them and asked what they were discussing, the disciples were quite surprised that He did not already know what had been happening. “Are you only a visitor and do not know the things that have happened?” It is at this point that Jesus used a very effective method of getting them to unburden themselves of their concerns. He answered their question with a question. “What things?” He asked. “What are you referring to?”

In their response the disciples mentioned a number of facts which, while true, were nonetheless puzzling and incongruous in their minds. They described a man, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they considered to be an exceptional godly person — a man “powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.” It had been their fervent hope that Jesus was the one to deliver the people of Israel from all earthly and spiritual enemies, but alas, He had been crucified by the leaders of the people. Furthermore, three days had gone by since this happened, so there apparently was no longer any hope. This last statement may have been a reference to a commonly held Jewish belief: that the soul of a dead person left the body after the third day.

Such was the gloomy and dejected way these two disciples poured out their disappointment and sadness to Jesus. Then they continued on to describe their confusion about the latest reports. Some of the women had amazed them with the news that the grave had been unsealed and the body was missing and that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive. They didn’t know what to think about all of that because, as far as they knew, no one had actually seen Jesus. The implication was that the sight of Jesus would somehow take away their skepticism and confusion. How ironic that they were face to face talking to Jesus, and they didn’t even know it!

In all likelihood, similar thoughts must have been in the minds and on the hearts of all of the followers of Jesus. In all likelihood, Luke used this encounter between Jesus and these two disciples as his way of describing the perplexity in every follower. And more importantly, Luke used this episode to indicate how the despondent followers of Jesus came to the realization that all the events of the previous days had followed a predetermined plan. We are now going to learn how Jesus helps people to gain understanding and find the encouragement and confidence they need to get through difficult and confusing times.

The key to understanding the circumstances about Jesus is in the Scriptures. Jesus rather pointedly told the disciples that they were “foolish” for being so confused and depressed, and that their problem was lack of belief in “all that the prophets have spoken!” The point that Jesus was making was that the Scriptures were an adequate source of information for essential questions about Himself, and that if these and other disciples had only read the Scriptures accurately without their personal prejudices and cultural filters, they would have understood the need for the crucifixion and been able to anticipate the resurrection.

If they had read the Scriptures, they would have recognized that the suffering and death of the Messiah was God’s way to gain victory over sin — God’s way to redeem humanity from the grip of death. If they had believed what the Old Testament prophets had written, they would have recognized that Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of prophecies and not just an unfortunate end of an innocent man. If they had understood the reason for the cross, then they could be rejoicing instead of despairing. If they had read and understood the Scriptures, they would have known that Jesus would rise again from the dead.

In order to make all this clear to His listeners, Jesus then explained what was written in all the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Himself. This must have been an incredible revelation to the two disciples. They were later to report, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us.” Everything they needed to know had been written down and was available to them all the time. They had probably read over the crucial passages many times, and completely missed the meaning.

And now we come to the application, the verses which are the most essential for people today. I'm sure you noticed that I skipped over verse 16. This verse explains that the two disciples, when Jesus approached them, "were kept from recognizing Him." This lack of recognition probably strikes us as a bit odd since these disciples had undoubtedly spent a lot of time with Jesus in previous days. Nonetheless, in this episode, they did not recognize Him.

I also skipped over verses 28-30. "As the two disciples approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther." The important thing to note here is that Jesus' willingness to continue to be with the disciples depended on their initiative, their invitation. Jesus did not agree to stay with the disciples until they specifically urged Him to stay with them. These verses might seem inconsequential on a quick reading, but contained in them is the application that I hope you grab hold of and hang on to.

The point is that no one can recognize who Jesus really is until they understand what the Scriptures say about Him. Physical eyesight did not help the disciples to see spiritual realities. Our physical eyes are too often clouded with human prejudices and opinions and assumptions to see obvious spiritual truths. The two disciples were perfect illustrations of this fact. They had seen Jesus do many wonderful deeds and speak many wonderful words. But they had not connected the deeds and the words to the foundational truths of the Scriptures. As a result, they were people who "saw, but didn't see," and "heard, but didn't really hear."

It was only after the truth of Scripture was carefully explained to them that the words of Jesus and the prophecies about Jesus became clear in their understanding. It was only through the revelation of Scripture that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus made sense, and when the disciples heard Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures, it instantly cleared up the confusion. What a difference it made in their attitudes and subsequent behavior.

Actually, there was one more essential step in this process, a second important principle we must latch on to. Jesus would not have remained with these disciples unless He had been specifically invited to do so. Jesus does not force Himself on anyone, even after they have had the truth explained to them. People who have been enlightened with the truth must take the step of welcoming Jesus Christ into their lives or else they will not have opportunity to enjoy His presence. People must act on their knowledge, and invite Jesus to come in and stay with them, or He will just walk away.

If truth is to have an influence in our lives, there must be commitment to it. Truth must be accepted and believed if there is to be a meaningful result. A genuine understanding of the truth of Scripture should lead to a desire to spend time with Jesus. The two disciples in this episode had that desire, and they “urged Him strongly,” and He went in and stayed with them. He fellowshiped with them at their table. It was in the context of that fellowship that “the eyes of the disciples were spiritually opened and they recognized him” for who He really was. It is only in the truth of Scripture and in the intimacy of fellowship that people experience the reality of Jesus.

I think the application of this passage is obvious. We must immerse ourselves in the Scriptures. The Scriptures should not be difficult for us to understand. We now have both an Old Testament and a New Testament. This means that we have access to both the promises and prophecies of God and an account of their fulfillment. We are in a much better situation to learn truth than the disciples 2000 years ago. We have no excuses for not understanding what God wants us to know about Jesus Christ.

However, we must keep in mind that knowledge is not enough by itself to bring us into fellowship with Jesus Christ. We must believe what the Scriptures say about Him, accept that information as God’s truth, and invite Jesus Christ to come into our lives as our Savior and Lord. When we do that, then “our hearts will burn within us,” just like the disciples had burning hearts, and hope and joy and excitement will replace the despondency and despair in our lives just like it did theirs.

Read Luke 24:36-48 before Benediction