

Easter Sunday 2023

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. (Luke 24:5-6a ESV)

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead (Luke 24:45-46 ESV)

Then He Opened Their Minds

April 9th, 2023

Luke 24:1-53

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Introduction:

Good morning! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

I am so thankful that you could be with us this Easter Sunday! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 24.

Resurrection Sunday is a day of celebration, but before we turn to the notes of triumph, I want to remind you of where we are in this story that we have been following over the last two months. The disciples have been exposed as weak and unreliable. Jesus has been betrayed by Judas and has been put on trial by corrupt and wicked men. He has been flogged, humiliated, and crucified between two thieves. His lifeless body has just been laid to rest in Joseph's tomb.

That's where our story picks up today. This story begins in a state of absolute hopelessness.

I want you to see that before we go any further, because I imagine that there are some people in this room who are beginning in that same place. Perhaps you're disillusioned with the world. It isn't what you thought it would be. Perhaps you're disillusioned with yourself. You're struggling to recognize that person staring back at you in the mirror. Perhaps you're disillusioned with God. Sometimes it feels like He's given up on you altogether. And here you are, listening to all these happy people celebrating and singing, but you feel out of place.

I led a funeral yesterday for a young man in my extended family who died of an overdose. I am not naïve to the darkness that exists in this world. Neither were these disciples. They saw the darkness too. And they fled! And they hid! And they denied Jesus! That’s where we left off.

But then, they saw something that changed EVERYTHING! I have seen something that changes everything! The men who are going to be baptized this morning have seen something that changes everything! And my prayer for each of you today is that you would see it too.

To that end, we’re going to read a LOT of Bible today because we have a LOT to see. As we work through this final chapter in Luke’s Gospel, we will break the text up into five “episodes¹.” Look with me now to Luke 24:1-12 where we find episode 1:

The Tomb Is Opened

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵ And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” ⁸ And they remembered his words, ⁹ and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹ but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹² But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened. (Luke 24:1-12 ESV)

In this opening episode, a group of the women who had followed Jesus make their way to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. In modern day terms, you could imagine them making their way to the cemetery with flowers to decorate his tombstone. It was an expression of love and loss, and they made their way to the tomb with the clear expectation that Jesus would *still be in it*.

But what they find instead are two angels in dazzling apparel who ask:

¹ I am drawing heavily here from an outline of this text presented by Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 351.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? (Luke 24:5b ESV)

The angels proceed to remind these women that Jesus had told them all that would take place! He said that he would suffer. He said that he would die. And he said that he would rise from the grave three days later. So, the angels ask, “Why are you seeking the living among the dead?!”

The women are shocked and delighted and they rush back to the place where the disciples are gathered and they share this amazing news, but we read:

these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. (Luke 24:11 ESV)

I suspect that there are some people in this room who feel the same way that these disciples felt. “This is a fairytale! This is a fabrication of someone’s imagination to help emotionally weak people cope with the harsh reality of a broken world! It would be great if Jesus rose again – it would be great if there was hope in the face of death – it would be great if your fairytale were true. But it isn’t. So, leave us alone.”

The disciples were utterly skeptical, and the testimony of these women left them almost entirely unmoved. I say “almost” because we read in verse 12:

But Peter rose and ran to the tomb (Luke 24:12a ESV)

The last time we saw Peter, he had denied Jesus three times. The last time we saw Peter, he was a failure. The last time we saw Peter, he had just made eye contact with Jesus, and he was running away from the courthouse weeping bitterly.

That was early Friday morning.

And for three days, I suspect that Peter has been reliving that scene by the fire. I suspect that every time he tried to rest, he saw the look that was in Jesus’ eyes. *If only* he could go back in time. *If only* he could undo what he had done. But his opportunity was gone. It was over. Jesus was dead. Peter’s story was written.

But then Peter saw these women with fire in their eyes and he thought maybe, just maybe, there’s something here! And so he rose! He ran! He looked! He marvelled! The tomb was open, and Jesus

was gone! There was still more that Peter needed to see, but in that moment, he saw enough to rekindle the fire that had almost been snuffed out in him.

I don't know who needs to hear this today, but RISE! RUN! LOOK! MARVEL! The story is not over! God's not done with you yet! In fact – do you want to hear some amazing news? – the story has only begun. Those dark chapters don't define you, and they don't need to have the final word.

But we need to press on now to the second episode. In verses 13-27:

The Scriptures Are Opened

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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?” ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But 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 happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:13-27 ESV)

In this episode, Jesus finds two of his followers – Cleopas and an unnamed disciple – walking on the road to Emmaus. We find in each of the gospels that, somehow, Jesus had the ability in his resurrection body to prevent his disciples from recognizing him. How did that work? I have no idea. But we see it again here. Jesus – an apparent stranger – pulls up next to these men and joins them on their journey.

He casually asks them what they are talking about. They reply:

“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (Luke 24:18b ESV)

I am certain that Luke means for us to recognize the irony in this. They look Jesus in the eye and ask, “Have you been living under a ROCK for the last three days? Do you not know what has happened?” But of course, THEY were the ones who did not understand the things that had happened. And Jesus – as he often does – patiently walked with them and listened to their questions and their doubts. They went on to explain to Jesus all that had happened on Good Friday, and they concluded:

But **we had hoped** that he was the one to redeem Israel. (Luke 24:21a ESV)

G. Campbell Morgan notes here:

Thus we see their attitude, and in it a wonderful revelation of what the Cross had done for the disciples of Jesus. It had not destroyed their love for Him, nor their belief in Him, and his intention, but it had slain their hope. In the Cross they saw failure. “We hoped,” past tense!²

It is an awful, frightening thing when hope becomes past tense. And yet, it happens all the time. Every person in this room can point to a painful list of past tense hopes.

I hoped that our marriage would recover. I hoped that this job would make me happy. I hoped that my kids wouldn’t make the same mistakes I did. I hoped that we would have had more time together. I hoped. Past tense.

And here, these disciples have added Jesus to their list of disappointments. “We had hoped that he was the one.”

Jesus’ response to them is sharper than we might expect. Sometimes we need a hug, but other times we need a splash of cold water in the face, and these men needed the latter. Jesus says:

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (Luke 24:25 ESV)

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 278.

He looked at these men and he said, “You know the answer to this hopeless question that sits in front of you! You know that the cross was not the end but the *beginning*! You know this!”

Sometimes God calls us to be this voice in the lives of our brothers and sisters. There is a time for listening quietly – but eventually we need to point broken people to the Answer. That’s what Jesus does here. For the rest of this walk, the world’s greatest Bible study was presented to these two men, and I suspect that their jaws dragged behind them as they were blasted with a fire hydrant of truth. Jesus asked:

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:26-27 ESV)

How does Jesus minister to broken, hopeless people? He opens the Scriptures. But, as we will see in this next episode, we need more than that. An open Bible is where we begin, but an open Bible is not enough. We need open eyes! To that end, look with me at verses 28-32.

Eyes Are Opened

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ **And their eyes were opened**, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:28-32 ESV)

The Bible study was amazing, but if these men had not invited Jesus inside, they would have left this encounter with precise theology but nothing more. There are far too many people sitting in pews across the world today who are content to walk away from Jesus with nothing more than precise theology.

But these men were not content to let Jesus pass them by. They invited him to stay, but he acted as if he were going further. Can I ask you something? Where was he going? Think about it. He was on the road to Emmaus for one reason, and one reason only – to encounter these men. He wasn’t going anywhere! And yet, he waited for them to ask. As one old preacher puts it:

There is a tender and beautiful playfulness in the way He dealt with these men.³

So, they insisted. Strongly. “Stay with us. Please!”

And he did. And as they sat down to share their meal, Jesus picked up the bread and – after he had blessed it – he broke it and served it to them.

And in that moment, their eyes were opened! In that moment, all the Bible studies and all the sermons BURST TO LIFE in their hearts and minds! What did they see?

They saw that they were sinners who needed a Savior!

They saw that God so loved the world that He sent his Son!

They saw that Jesus had paid for the sin of his people on his cross!

They saw that this plan had been foretold in ages past and that God is a Promise Keeper!

They saw that Jesus had conquered death!

They saw that everyone who repents and believes in Jesus will live and not die!

They saw the risen King Jesus and EVERYTHING CHANGED!

They said to each other:

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32 ESV)

Perhaps there are some people here today who can relate. You’re not sure about all of this. It doesn’t line up with the narrative you’ve grown up hearing. In fact, if this IS all true, it would

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According To Luke* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981), 277.

absolutely flip your life upside down in a terrifying and costly way. And yet – your heart BURNS within you as the Word of God is preached! It rings true to you. It speaks to something inside of you that you didn't know was there. Is that you?

Then follow the example of these men. Don't let Jesus pass you by. Don't leave the Bible study and jump back into the world. Lay hold of him in faith! Insist upon him to stay! Lean in and ask him to open up your eyes!

He rewarded the insistence of these men. And then, through them, he extended his grace to the rest of the disciples. That brings us to the fourth episode. Look with me at verses 33-49:

Minds Are Opened

³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ **Then he opened their minds** to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:33-49 ESV)

I want you to notice an important detail with me. Look back at verse 31:

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24:31a ESV)

And now, look at verse 45:

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45 ESV)

Both of these verbs are *passive verbs*. Meaning what? Meaning – we can't simply open our own eyes or our own minds. We don't *do* the opening; we *receive* the opening. And that is why even within this room, all of us are opening the Scriptures but not all of us are seeing the text with open eyes and open minds. That step can only be performed by God.

He opens and He shuts. He softens and He hardens. And that is why, if you truly want to see Jesus for all of who He is, you need to *ask him for help*. No one can study their way into heaven. And no one can study their way into having a transformed heart. Study is good. Study is necessary! But simply opening the Scriptures is not enough! What we need are open eyes and open minds! And, for that to happen, God must do it!

And what we see in this episode is that God DELIGHTS to do it! And He does it for weak, unworthy people!

We started our time this morning with the reminder of how terribly the disciples had failed. Jesus called upon them to pray and they slept. He called upon them to stay and they fled. He called upon them to take up their crosses and follow him but as soon as they saw his cross, they went into hiding!

And now, Jesus enters the room where these men are hiding, and he has an opportunity to tell them everything that they deserve to hear. If some of us could edit the Bible, I suspect that Jesus would have entered the room and said something like:

“You cowards! Where were you when I needed you? You pretended to be so brave when the sun was shining, but you were exposed at the first sign of trouble. You losers. You failures. Find another Messiah to follow. I see who you are, and I'm done with you.”

But that's not what he said, is it? What did he say to these broken men who had failed him so miserably? He said:

“Peace to you!” (Luke 24:36b ESV)

Now, this was the customary greeting at that time, but Jesus infused this greeting with healing power when he spoke it. Perhaps some of you are seeing Jesus for the first time this morning, and

you feel yourself overwhelmed with guilt and shame over the things that you have done. Hear him this morning.

Peace to you.

Peace to your guilt and shame. Peace to your anxieties and fears. Peace to you.

You *have* failed. You *have* sinned. You *have* fallen short. But Jesus did not come to rub your nose in you sin. He came that you might have LIFE!

So, he took your sin in his body, and it was nailed to the cross. If you have repented and believed in Jesus, then your sin died on that tree. Then, three days later, he stepped out of that tomb and declared that death no longer has a hold on those who are in Christ Jesus! He came to give you LIFE and to give it you abundantly!

And so, he doesn't berate these disciples, even though they know they deserve it. No. He gives them peace, and then he answers their questions, and then he shares a meal with them. Because:

He is far more willing to forgive than men are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon than men are to be pardoned.⁴

Do you believe that? Then stop wallowing. You are forgiven. You are restored. Now, get up.

After setting these disciples back on their feet, he sends them on mission.

You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:48 ESV)

We all are. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are a witness of the most important event in the history of the world! Do you understand that? The tomb is empty! Death has been defeated! There is life beyond the grave! HE is RISEN!

The world is groaning under sin. You have neighbours who can't find a sliver of hope to hold onto. You have friends who are building their lives on sinking sand, and they are one storm away from watching it all come tumbling down. Who will tell them this news?

⁴ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 359.

Friend, it must be you. You are witnesses of these things.

He has given you the good news. He has given you His Spirit. Now, go! Proclaim!

And that brings us to the final episode in this life-transforming chapter. Look with me to verses 50-53 where:

The Heavens Are Opened

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:50-53 ESV)

Time won't allow me to say all that could be said of this final scene, but we discussed it at great length at the beginning of our series in Acts. Suffice it to say this: The King is right now seated on His throne. And he reigns. All authority has been given to him, and he has promised to go before us as we declare his good news to a dying world.

There is, right now, a man in heaven. King Jesus. And he has prepared a place for us.

If we are in Christ, then where he goes, we will follow. His body was laid in the tomb, but it rose in glory, and it ascended to heaven. The same future is in store for us.

In just a moment, we are going to observe the sign of baptism – a sign that declares exactly this.

These brothers died with Christ. These brothers were buried with him. These brothers have risen again to newness of life *now* and they have resurrection hope *for the age to come*. In just a moment, they are going to tell you with their own words about how God brings dead men to life.

THIS is our hope! THIS changes everything! HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!