

Epic: The Brightest Day – Running into Jesus

In our series entitled “Epic” we have been looking at the big bible stories in the Bible. So far, we’ve looked at the stories of Creation, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Esther, David, Daniel in the Lion’s Den, Jesus’ Birth, Jesus and Peter walking on water, the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the healing of a women who touched Jesus’ garment, the darkest day of crucifixion and today...

The Brightest Day – *Running into Jesus after the Resurrection.*

Luke 24:1-6, *“Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead!”*

The Bible records ten different resurrection appearances of Jesus. Today we look at one of the most captivating, a story only found in the gospel of Luke.

The setting is a 14 mile round trip hike between Jerusalem and Emmaus. A couple of Jewish believers are heading home after the Passover celebration. One is named Cleopas, the other is unnamed. Scholars don’t know exactly where the town of Emmaus would have been, but Luke tells us it’s a seven-mile walk from Jerusalem.

The two travelers were probably surrounded by lots of other people making the same journey back to their homes, so it was no great surprise that a fellow traveler would join them.

Let’s join these travelers on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:13-24 says, *“As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. 16 But God kept them from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?” They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. 18 Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.” 19 “What things?” Jesus asked. “The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,” they said. “He was a prophet who did*

powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. 20 But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. 21 We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. 22 “Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. 23 They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! 24 Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.”

Let's unpack each of the segments of the journey these travelers experienced and see how they relate to us.

Cleopas and his friend had been on an emotional rollercoaster that day, as you can easily understand. I mean, we all go through this same kind of emotional roller coaster at times, don't we?

When we feel like God is really moving and our hopes are on the rise, we start to dream and make plans. So, when those hopes and dreams and plans are unexpectedly dashed, we grow disappointed with God.

That is what the first segment of their journey that I want us to relate with. It's the part of our journey when...

1. We grow disappointed with God.

In today's story, "disappointment" was an understatement for Cleopas and his companion. They had expected that Jesus would be their nation's Savior.

Scripture says that they were "downcast"; that "*sadness was written across their faces*" as they shared, "*We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel.*"

They were tired of living under the tyranny of Rome and desperately wanted God to rescue them. Jesus looked like the answer to their prayers.

But then he was turned over by their own Jewish leaders and executed by the Roman government. **All their hopes died with him on that cross.**

But as they continued to recount the story to Jesus, there was something about the story that didn't make any sense.

The women were talking about angels and an empty grave. His body wasn't where it was supposed to be.

These folks were confused. They were sad, disappointed, perhaps a little hopeful but afraid to be more so; perhaps because they were still disappointed with God for not answering their prayers and having their hopes dashed. But still something was off – Jesus' body was missing! Why? What was God up to now?

If we're honest, we can relate. Sometimes it seems like God isn't responding to our prayers and when we finally think He is but nothing happens, we feel let down. God doesn't come through for us in the way we expected.

We pray for healing and it doesn't happen. We talk to God about a relationship and it gets worse. We pray for peace of mind, and our anxiety grows. We pray for enough money to get through the month, but the cash ends before the bills. In our hearts and minds, **God has let us down.**

When I was in Bible school, I remember a message I heard in chapel entitled, "Death of a vision." In that message, the pastor spoke about the clear visions that God gave to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. How they moved forward in excitement only to misread those visions. At which point they had to abandon their version of God's revealed will and come to embrace God's version.

Joseph, there will come a day when your brothers and mother and father will bow down before you (not in the way that you or they think) but after much suffering.

Abraham, you will become a great nation, but not through Hagar's son but through your own son.

Moses, you will free your people but not by leading a revolt and killing the Egyptians.

Bill Gothard writes of this "death of a vision." He says, "Faced with the death of a vision, a person must hold on to hope, anticipating and expecting God to work out His revealed will in one's life, even when it seems impossible. This 'season' of waiting provides us with the opportunity to develop Christ-like character, to realize our shortcomings and inadequacies, and to trust God to demonstrate His power and bring the vision to fulfillment."

Sometimes it takes us a while to readjust and remember that the Lord is still there and that He will be faithful to His revealed word, that in His goodness and mercy He will work around our anger and disappointment and sadness.

And if we're brave enough, if we're smart enough, we might just run into Jesus on our way. Our path might intersect with his.

Sometimes, when we are in the middle of our pity party, what we really need is a good swift kick in the rear end. We need Jesus to say to us, as he did to these two in **verse 25**, *"You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures."*

And thus, we begin the second phase of our journey on the Emmaus Road, where we see that,

2. Jesus clarifies God's will through scripture.

Luke 24:25-31, *"Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. 26 Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" 27 Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. 28 By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, 29 but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. 30 As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. 31 Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!"*

So, Jesus clarifies God's will through scripture; He began to unpack the Bible the Old Testament scriptures and shows them how the prophets predicted the Messiah would come and suffer and die and rise again.

We don't know which verses he used. Maybe he began with Genesis 3, where in the first story God promised a descendent of Adam and Eve who would come and stomp the head of the serpent for good.

Maybe he quoted from Isaiah 53 or Zechariah 12:10, the one pierced for our transgressions, or Malachi 3:1, the messenger of the covenant.

Jesus' has a Bible study with these two followers, systematically showing them how He was prophesied on every page.

You see, the first Christian believers needed a larger picture of their Messiah than what they had come to believe. They needed to understand that victory often happens after great suffering. And just as the Messiah had to suffer before becoming victorious, so do we at times too.

We trust in God's will and in God's ultimate redemption, regardless of how painful the process.

The early church needed to understand that God's kingdom comes, not by conquering earthly governments, but by conquering one human heart at a time.

As people acknowledge their brokenness and sin and surrender themselves to a merciful and loving God, hearts are restored and given new life.

These two followers needed to trust that God was still at work, even if he was answering their prayers in a **radically different way than they hoped**.

When we finally allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through scripture, God brings the adjustments we need.

We don't ask God to come around to our understanding, because God is God and we are not. God brings us to his plan. God broadens our perspective; he helps us to see the bigger picture.

And then we move to the third stage of our journey:

3. We grow joyful as we align ourselves with God's will.

Luke 24:32-33a, *"They said to each other, 'Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?'" 33 And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem.*

Look at these two disciples. They had just walked seven long, sad miles home. Then Jesus unexpectedly took on the role as host and broke the bread and offered prayer for the meal. Suddenly, God opened their eyes and they finally recognized him and their hearts turned to joy.

We're not sure why everything clicked at that moment. Perhaps his sequence of "*bles*s, *break*, and *pass*" reminded them of stories of the last supper with his disciples, or his blessing and breaking the bread when feeding the 5,000.

We don't know why at this moment their eyes were opened, but they were. And as soon as they realized who he was, he was gone. Perhaps they didn't need to see him anymore to understand the big picture.

Because now, they were no longer downhearted. The sadness was gone.

They recalled, "*Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?*"

In fact, they were so excited, they made the seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem, no doubt at a faster pace this time. Christ had risen! Their faith was still very much alive. They found Jesus on their journey.

And when they arrived back at Jerusalem, they discovered that Peter had seen him as well.

Luke 24:33b-41a, *There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, 34 who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter. 35 Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. 36 And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. 37 But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! 38 "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? 39 Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." 40 As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder."*

All doubts were cast aside. Jesus is alive! And because of that, everything was different! As **Revelation 21:5** says, Jesus "*makes all things new!*"

Do you think we can learn a lesson from these two on the road to Emmaus?

When the coronavirus hits a loved one, or the money runs out, or the prognosis hits hard, or the arthritis flares up, or a person rubs us wrong, maybe we could pause before we react.

Maybe we could **search for Jesus on the journey**. When we catch ourselves **growing discouraged or afraid**, maybe we could purposefully set ourselves on a collision course with the Lord allowing **the Holy Spirit to speak to us**

through the scriptures. It is then that everything changes! Our perspective is the first things God usually works on, as we submit to His will instead of ours.

Very much like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane we surrender our wills and say to the Lord, “**Your will be done.**” That is when He reveals Himself to us and we discover a new sense of joy and purpose in our lives.

Let us pray...

Lord, thank you for these two folks and their Emmaus road encounter with Jesus. Thank you for caring enough to seek them out, to address their doubts, and to reveal your holy will to them, changing their lives forever.

It helps us know that you will seek us out too on our journeys of anxiety, despair, and hopelessness.

Help us understand your will through the power of your Holy Spirit as we open up the scriptures and draw closer to you.

Renew our hope and joy. In you name Jesus our Savior, we pray, amen.