

The Emmaus Road Reversal * Luke 24

April 8, 2018 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

October 29, 1929 started out like any other day, but by the time the sun set that night, everything had changed. Years of speculative trading on the stock market had led to concerns that the market might collapse and investors began selling off stocks. A panic set in and the bottom finally fell out on October 29. Some \$14 billion were lost. Black Tuesday.

People's life savings were gone. Lives were ruined. Hopelessness set in and before long, the Great Depression was in full swing.

Good Friday was the disciples' Black Tuesday.

They had JUST come from enjoying the Passover meal with Jesus – the Passover is really a celebration meal! - think Christmas dinner meets Canada Day bbq –and then Judas shows up and Jesus is taken into custody, put on trial, murdered on the cross and laid out in a tomb.

Their lives were ruined. They had just given three years of their lives, following Jesus around the Judean countryside, watching Him do miracles and teach and announce the kingdom of God and boy were they ready to reap the rewards! They had given up homes and property and family and careers to follow after this Teacher and now He was dead. The Saturday between Good Friday and Jesus' resurrection must have been the most utterly heartbreaking day. They had lost everything. What do we do now? Where do we go from here?

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus answered those questions, albeit in a very different way than they had expected.

They asked – 'what do we do now? Where do we go from here?' assuming that Jesus was dead and gone. But the answers to those questions become very different when they realize that Jesus is alive and right there with them.

All the same, Jesus' death must have been a jarring experience for the disciples, and I'm sure He knew that. And I realized this week that He is beginning now the process of rebuilding His disciples' faith. The Emmaus Road, what we'll talk about today, is Jesus rebuilding His disciples' faith.

And it tells us a lot about what to do when our faith is faltering.

So join me in chapter 24, Luke 24, and I'll actually pick up the end of chapter 23, because all of this happens right on the heels of Easter.

So imagine it's Good Friday and the disciples have just watched the rulers and authorities snuff out the light of the world. They've murdered the man that the disciples have built their hopes on and now... it's all over. What to do but pick up the pieces?

Most of the twelve were AWOL at this point, but there was a man named Joseph of Arimathea on the scene and wanting to honour Jesus. So he risked his position and prestige on the Jewish council by going to ask Pilate for Jesus' body and he laid him in a brand new tomb. Women who had been following Jesus watched as Joseph and Nicodemus and a handful of other men rolled the stone across the grave.

And they went home. To mourn. To figure out what to do next.

Well, the women knew what to do next – they wanted to give Jesus a proper burial, so they prepared the appropriate spices and then put them aside in order to rest on the Sabbath.

But the moment the Sabbath was over, they went back to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.

But when they got there, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty and two men in brilliant clothes stood beside them. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" they said. "He is not here. He is risen, just as He said."

And with that, these women ran back to the other disciples in Jerusalem to share what they had just seen. But when they did, no one believed them. The words just seemed like nonsense – too good to be true.

So two of them decided that they'd had enough. They were going home. So they hit the road. To Emmaus.

Now I don't know about you, but whenever I leave a funeral, I just feel kind of dull inside. My body hurts from grieving and it just feels like the colour in the world has been dialed back a few notches. I'm emotionally exhausted. And I'm sure that's the way these two travellers felt on the way to Emmaus.

As they walked, they talked with each about everything that had just happened.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them, but they were kept from recognizing Him.

He asked them: "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stopped dead in their tracks as a fresh wave of grief washed over them.

One of them – Cleopas – asked with disbelief – "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

And Jesus asked them: "What things?" What a question. If anyone in Jerusalem knows about the things that have happened in Jerusalem – it's HIM. These things happened TO HIM and yet He asks them to tell Him more.

They continue to tell Him "About Jesus of Nazareth," ... "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

You can feel the loss in their voice, can't you? They saw great potential in Jesus; they started to believe that He really WAS the Messiah – the chosen one – the one that God had anointed to make all things right. Everything was pointing in that direction! And then the rulers killed Him. They nailed Him to a tree and killed Him and He didn't even put up a fight. Just like that, their hopes were dashed. Who was going to redeem them now?

"And what's more" they continued, "it's the third day since all this took place and some of the women from our group went to the tomb but they couldn't find His body. And then they said there were angels, telling them He was alive. And then some of the men went, and found it was just as the women had said – but still, not body – I mean, can't we just get off this emotional roller coaster? We thought He was the Messiah but then they killed Him. It really is finished. Let's get on with our lives."

With that I'm sure that Jesus did one of these – part face palm, part beard wipe.

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (IE How can you NOT understand!?).

26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

They thought He was the Messiah, but then He got killed, so – well – I guess He can't be the Messiah. But hold on – that's exactly what their Scriptures said would happen and that's exactly what Jesus said would happen. That's exactly what happened – the Messiah died to redeem His people, just as God had said.

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

This is the greatest Bible study of all time. Jesus Himself opened up the Old Testament and walked through it with them to say "All of this points to a suffering Messiah. All of this points to ME." (Of course, they didn't realize it was Him).

I'm sure He took them to the Exodus and the Passover – the Lamb that died so that others could live. ~~Deuteronomy 18 – 15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him."~~

I'm sure He brought up Isaiah 53 - he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (That's a perfect lens through which to understand His death on the Cross).

I'm sure He brought up Psalm 16 – You will not see your holy one see corruption in grave.

Frankly, if you go through and look at all the apostles' speeches in Acts, they're pretty much walking people through the OT, showing how it all pointed to Jesus – where do you suppose they got that from? This – right here. The greatest Bible study in history.

They're sharing what Jesus Himself shared, I'm sure.

And as they listened, Cleopas and his companion just wanted to hear more. It just all made so much sense and later they would look back at this realize – it felt as if their hearts were burning with them the whole time. (It's interesting that when John Wesley came to faith [listening to Martin Luther's teachings on Romans BTW] that he said he felt as if his heart were strangely warmed). Their hearts knew all this to be true, and when they arrived at Emmaus, they still wanted to hear more. So they begged Jesus to stay with them. "It's almost evening – stay a little longer."

So He agreed and they went in and sat at the table together. And Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them – and in a flash-

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Now my immediate instinct is to ask 'why did He disappear?' and the best guess I've seen so far comes from [Darrell Bock](#) – who writes "With the revelation that Jesus lives, his visible presence is no longer necessary" (Bock 1920). I'm still not entirely satisfied with that answer – but look – it doesn't seem to bother Cleopas and his friend. Jesus is alive!! That's all that matters. The fact that He vanishes doesn't even phase them – their mourning has turning into dancing. Their hope has been rekindled. They've seen the resurrected Lord.

In retrospect they realize what an amazing journey they have just been on – not just from Jerusalem to Emmaus, but from despair to joy. Jesus is alive and even His death was a part of God's great plan for salvation.

Now, just TRY and go to bed after something like that – they just get right up and even though they've just got to Emmaus, they turn around and head immediately back for Jerusalem. The return trip must have been a very different journey.

And when they arrived, they found the other disciples were buzzing with excitement too.

The Jerusalem crew said (34) "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Maybe that's why Jesus vanished from Emmaus – He had an appointment with Peter in Jerusalem. In the time it had taken to go from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back, Jesus had appeared to Peter (which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:5 BTW).

And then the two travellers told them all about what had happened to them – how Jesus had taught them along the way and how they recognized Him when He broke the bread.

And suddenly, Jesus was there with them. "Peace be with you" He said.

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?"

39 Look at my hands and my feet. It's me! IT'S ME! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." [And]... he showed them his hands and feet.

41 And while it still seemed too good to be true, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" (He didn't get to eat back in Emmaus).

42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

Just as an aside – Luke has told us some pretty incredible things about the nature of Jesus' resurrected body – on one hand, He can appear and disappear at will and yet on the other, you could touch Him, He had flesh and bone, He can eat things. Given that, I think it's fair to say that our resurrected bodies will be real, tangible bodies – no floating around like ghosts on clouds – but they'll be even more powerful and capable than our earthly bodies could even be .

So Jesus is there with them, in the flesh, and what does He do? Verse 44:

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (He's ticking off the three major divisions in the OT- the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms - 'the entirety of the OT').

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Greatest Bible study ever part 2. (If anybody asks why bother with the OT – point them here!)

46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

You see what He's saying? My death on the Cross was not a setback to the plan – it WAS the plan. The whole of the OT points to this reality – that God's Messiah will die for His people and be raised to life, so that all the nations can be redeemed by His steadfast love. And notice, He has widened the picture compared to what the disciples were thinking.

Right, back in verse 21, they said 'We hoped that He would save Israel' but now Jesus says – "no no, you're drawing the circle too small – I'm call all the nations to repentance and the forgiveness of sins."

And what's more, He's preparing them to do that work! Look at verse 48 -

48 You are witnesses of these things. (And not witnesses in the sense of 'you've seen this' but witnesses in the sense of 'you've seen this and you will testify to it). And then He promises to send the Holy Spirit on them to empower them for ministry in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth!' (And Luke's next book - the book of Acts records that history).

Do you see what's just happened? Jesus realizes the crushing effect that His death must have had on His disciples and so now He is rebuilding their faith. He is recalibrating their expectations of how God works

in the world and He is correcting deficiencies in their understanding Jesus' mission. They had followed Him for years but now they needed a tune up.

And I think it's significant that Jesus does that by showing them two things: 1. That He is alive. And 2. That God has a plan.

Let's take those one at a time. Jesus rebuilds His disciples' faith by proving to them that He is alive.

They were there when He was arrested, they saw Him stand trial, they watched with horror as they hammered nails through His hands and feet and lifted Him up to die. They saw where they laid Him. And it literally broke their hearts. The foundation that these disciples have built their lives upon has been destroyed – the only way to come back from that is to see that that foundation is not actually gone. Rumours of His resurrection would not be enough – they needed to see Him with their own eyes.

And so Jesus obliged. Little by little, He revealed Himself to them to show that He was indeed alive.

The angels announced His resurrection to the women, then Jesus Himself appeared to Cleopas and his companion, then to Peter, then to the rest of the disciples gathered in Jerusalem; He is giving them conclusive proof that He really is alive.

Darrell Bock writes of the Emmaus road:

Here are two disciples who felt that the cross meant the end of the hope Jesus brought. Only Jesus himself, appearing in his restored existence, can change their minds (Bock, NIVAC, 615). And so that's what He does.

He rebuilds their faith by showing His disciples that He is alive. Their hopes were well placed and they are still well placed because not even death can hold Him down.

But not only that, He rebuilds their faith by showing that His death was not an accident – God had a plan. And it all went according to plan.

I really feel for the disciples – I can't even imagine what they were feeling that day – but it IS true that Jesus had told them that this would happen.

Back in Luke 9 – what did He say? 22 "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." (Luk 9:22 NIV).

"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.

33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." (Luk 18:31-33 ESV).

Did they not hold a glimmer of hope that Jesus really meant it?

And certainly, if they didn't get it on account of HIS words, Jesus seems to think the disciples should have got it on account of THE word – what does He say in verse 25 –

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Their faith has faltered because they think that Jesus has failed – but now He shows them – He hasn't really failed. In fact, He has been exceedingly successful in accomplishing what the Father sent Him to do.

So He begins to rebuild their faith by showing them that the Christ DID have to suffer these things and then enter glory. That things turned out exactly as they were supposed to.

God had a plan that He revealed ahead of time and everything went according to plan.

Darrell Bock writes: "The key point of this passage is that everything from suffering to universal proclamation was predicted in Scripture... These events are no surprise. They are part of God's will. God always intended to offer salvation to all races through Jesus. God always intended that the Christ suffer and be raised. God always intended that the message of salvation in the name of the Christ be a call to repent for the forgiveness of sins. These are fundamental aspects of God's plan (Bock, BECNT, 1941)"

The disciples are wishing for a do-over – but Jesus shows them – This is exactly how it was supposed to happen. And our sins are forgiven because it happened this way.

Jesus' rebuilds His disciples' faith by showing them that He is alive and that His death and resurrection were always part of God's good plan.

And frankly I think that that is how Jesus rebuilds OUR faith when OUR faith falters. None of us has experienced something as horrific as seeing the Son of God crucified, but we all run into storms that can mess with our faith. And sometimes we need a tune up. I think this passage gives us two truths, two tools to apply when our faith falters. First – Jesus is alive. And second – God has a plan.

So first - Jesus is alive. I know that seems so simple, so redundant, many of us have heard it so many times that it has lost its edge. But think about it the way the disciples did – their friend was gone, their hopes were dashed; they had touched his cold, lifeless body and closed over the grave. It was over.

And then came the news – Jesus was alive! The dead man was alive! Death had been conquered. This wasn't the end – it was a brand new beginning.

And think about this – our faith is not in a set of lifeless philosophical of ideas – our faith is in a living being – an honest to goodness, living, breathing, active, compassionate person. When Jesus says ‘let not your hearts be troubled’ – He’s not just mumbling platitudes – He is actively giving us peace – a peace that is greater than anything the world has to offer (John 14:27).

And what’s more, since He, who died, is now alive, we too are assured that even if we die, we will live. 1 Thessalonians 5 - And just as Jesus died and rose again, so too shall we who fall asleep rise to live eternally with Him.

So first – Jesus is alive.

Second - God has a plan. Again, I don’t know if I would have done any better than the disciples, but really, they reacted the way they did - packed up, threw in the towel, went home - because they failed to remember that God had a plan. They were sitting around having a little pity party, because Jesus had been put to death on a cross, while if they had exercised a little faith, remembering all that what written, all that Jesus said, they would have realized the ‘the Christ, the Son of God’ HAD TO BE put to death on a cross. Everything went according to plan. And that plan meant their redemption.

And you know, God’s plans often steal victory from the jaws of defeat. Maybe It’s more accurate to say this – What the world sees as defeat, God knows is victory. The Cross – meant to kill – gives life.

Now apply that to your life.

There is nothing that happens to you that God doesn’t know about. And He is working in all of it for good.

Sometimes we let trials distract us from God’s faithfulness to us and we start to think that maybe God’s not so trustworthy – but hold on – what has Jesus already said? In this world you will have troubles – but don’t worry – I have overcome the world.

33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

His plan is not to give us an easy, leisurely life, but to work through us to reach the nations, to invite them into relationship with Him and give to us an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade. That plan will NEVER fail.

As surely as His plan to redeem mankind through Jesus’ death and resurrection succeeded, so too will this plan. He will be with us all through this life and then we will be with Him all through the next.

Jesus is alive and God has a plan.

As you know, we laid my grandpa Lloyd to rest over Easter weekend and as the planning came together, I was invited to read a portion of Scripture for the service. Lloyd had apparently set up this service

twelve years ago, with hymns and readings, he even gave the preacher preaching notes. Whenever I visited he and grandma, I always felt like I learned something, some new insight – and you know what? He did it again. They asked me to read Scripture and guess what passage it was? This one. Luke 24, starting at verse 14.

And here's the note he left for the preacher. Luke tells us that two people were on the road to Emmaus – Cleopas – and an unnamed person. Any one of us could be that person.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're really unsure what to make of Jesus' death. Is He dead? Is He alive? Does it matter? Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his friend to say – Yes, even though I died, I am alive and boy golly does it matter! His death gives us life. If that's you, receive it. Turn to God in faith and let Him warm your heart.

And if you are that unnamed person – in the sense that you've followed Jesus for a while, and yet now some trial has made your faith falter, know this – this is all unfolding according to God's wise plan and His plans are always for Good. Jesus is alive and actively working to minister grace to us in times of need, so let's boldly go to Him, to lean on His strength.

If your faith needs a tune up – remember this – Jesus is alive and God has a plan.

BENEDICTION

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thess 5).