

Luke 24

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[0 : 00] Christ is risen. He is risen. Any event in history, no matter what event you choose, there's always different perspectives, aren't there?

! Everyone is different. We all see things differently from our own point of view.! So let's take church this morning. As an example, somebody asks you tomorrow, what was church like yesterday? What impression it made on you? And there's no doubt, is it, that your answer would be different from the person sitting next to you, probably. And your answer would certainly be different from mine.

Both your answers would be different. We all have attended the same church. We've attended the same church service. At the same time, in the same place.

And all our answers may well be reliable and true, but they wouldn't be the same. They wouldn't be the same, would they? We all have different perspectives. And that's true with any historical event and any eyewitness testimony.

[1 : 10] And so it's no less true that when we come to the resurrection of Jesus, many people at that time, they were aware that there was something strange that had happened, something surprising.

Some people were beginning to develop really firm convictions about what had happened. Some other people were just confused by it all. But over time, people's understanding grew in clarity. And a consensus emerged about what had happened. And that is when people like Luke began to write it down. But when he did, he still had a lot of choices to make.

Luke would have had to ask himself, how should I tell the story of the resurrection of Jesus? What perspective shall I share? What shall I include?

What shall I leave out? You can't write everything, can you? But guided by the spirit of the risen Jesus, Luke made his decisions and he wrote his great chapter, Luke 24.

[2 : 13] And as we reflect on that, I want us to try and think about the decisions that he made when he wrote this chapter. I want us to think about, for a few moments, how he chose to tell this story.

And the first thing I want you to notice is what he leaves out. It's fascinating, isn't it? We're not actually told how Jesus' resurrection actually happened.

We're not told how the stone was rolled away from the tomb. We're not told what happened to the soldiers who were guarding right in front of the tomb. We're not told what Jesus did or said when his body surged with life again.

We're not told whether he walked out of the tomb or whether he simply disappeared. We're not told any of that. And in one sense, as you think about what is not in the story, it all makes sense.

And it's all easy to understand because nobody saw those things today. This is an eyewitness account. It would have no place in an eyewitness account. So instead, as we read Luke 24, I don't know whether you picked it up, we experience the resurrection through eyewitnesses.

[3 : 28] How the eyewitnesses themselves experienced the resurrection. How they encountered the empty tomb. And the risen Jesus himself. And the effect of that, of course, is to authenticate the resurrection.

And the way we know that the resurrection happened is not by some scientific explanation of a dead body being raised to life. But we look at the testimonies of the people who were there.

Who saw the person who two days earlier had been undeniably dead. And the other effect of reading the story this way is we're given an insight into the impact of the event on people.

You see, as we come on Easter Sunday and celebrate the resurrection, we're not just dealing here with facts. We're dealing with people's reactions and emotions.

We come to face-to-face with the impression that the risen Jesus made on people. And because of that, I think we'll find that Luke's story raises questions about how you should react to it.

[4 : 36] And how I should respond to it. And how you should feel about it. Secondly, I want to point out to you that Luke's chosen method is to tell three separate stories, but all set on one remarkable day.

He doesn't choose to tell us anything about the first Easter Monday. Or the Tuesday.

Or the rest of the week. In fact, apart from a short description of Jesus' later ascension in the final two verses, the whole chapter is devoted to telling us the experiences of people on the very first Easter day.

The Sunday after the Friday Jesus was crucified and killed. So in the first of the three stories, in verses 1 to 12, he tells us about the women who came to the tomb to assist in the embalming process for Jesus' body.

And they find the tomb surprisingly empty and the body is gone and they are deeply confused by all of it. But when the two angels appear to them and tell them that they are looking for the living amongst the dead, then it occurred to them that this was just as Jesus had predicted earlier.

[5 : 55] Like the angel said so. And so the women, they race back to tell the men. And most of the men, when they hear these women speak, they think the women are a few sandwiches short of a picnic.

They can't believe it. But Peter, at least, he hopped for the second of the tomb and he saw what the women had seen. He saw an empty cave with the strips of linen which a few hours earlier had wrapped the body of Jesus.

In the second of Luke's stories, in verses 13 to 25, a couple of Jesus' disciples meet Jesus on the road while they're travelling. I'm going to come back to that in a few moments.

In the third story, in verses 36 to 59, many of Jesus' friends are gathered together when all of a sudden Jesus appears right in the middle of them. And he proves to them that he's not a ghost, that he's a living human being come back to life.

The sort of human being that eats fish and explains things to people. And he explains to them how everything that has taken place is in fulfilment to what the Old Testament foreshadowed, looked forward to.

[7 : 05] So there's Luke's three stories. But they are united by one 24-hour period, one day. Verse 13. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

And they were talking to each other about these things that had happened. verse 36. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, Peace be to you.

And then, it's some 24 hours, isn't it? Their heads must have been spinning. But nevertheless, as the chapter goes on, it becomes clearer and clearer as what has happened.

So verse 6. He is not here, but he has risen. Verse 34. The Lord has risen.

Verse 46. Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. And given that at that moment it was the Christ who spoke to them at that moment and it was the third day since he's been killed, I think we'd have to say he's pretty right.

[8 : 28] Now let me give you the major theme of Luke 24. What is the big theme as you read the chapter? That Luke draws our attention to in the way that he tells you as to observe it.

What is it that Luke wants you to know? In each of these three incidents we see the confusion of the disciples but also the clarity of God's word.

That's what ties them together. The confusion of the disciples and the clarity of God's word. So let's go through them. In the first of the three stories, the women are standing at the entrance of the tomb and they're trying to make sense of it.

It's emptiness. They're confused, very confused. But then the angel comes and the angel brings a very clear word from God. There is nothing more or less than what Jesus had told them previously. He was no longer dead. He died according to God's purpose but he's been raised again according to God's power. And then they remembered what Jesus said and it all starts to make sense to them.

[9 : 37] The confused disciples but the clear word of God. In the second story we see the same dynamic at work. The two companions they walked down the road they didn't understand what happened to Jesus and why.

They didn't even recognise the person talking to them. But when their eyes were opened the words of Jesus began to make sense to them. Confused disciples God's clear word.

And then in the third story we see the same thing. The gathered disciples. First Jesus is amongst them in that room and they are amazed and they are troubled and they're joyful and they're confused all at the same time.

But as he speaks to them all the bits of the jigsaw puzzle begin to fit into place and they come to understand that not just his resurrection but they come to understand everything that's gone on before.

Confused disciples God's clear word. And Luke's point to you and I this morning couldn't be more plain. In the midst of confusion or doubt or uncertainty it is the word that God sends.

[10:52] The word that Jesus himself speaks that brings clarity that disciples need. and I hope as we go through this middle story that this theme will become clearer to us over the next 10 minutes or so.

And I hope its importance will be very clear. And so what I want to do is I want to focus on this middle story of Jesus walking along the road with two companions. Because I think all the major notes of the chapter are struck in this story and I hope it will strike you like it struck me.

So let me take you through the story. And I've got points like I usually do but what you'll see in Luke 24 is you'll find different parts of the body. And so let's look at the body in Luke 24.

Verse 13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus. About seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. And while they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself to Nia and went with them. Here are two disciples.

[12:06] And they could have been friends. And they could have been husband and wife. We're not sure. And they set out for a seven mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

And as they walked, they talked. As their legs carried them, their mouths churned over the events of the previous days. How Jesus had been arrested and killed.

How the women had come back from the tomb that morning saying it was empty that he wasn't there anymore. And then there's Jesus, isn't there? And walking with his legs and talking with his mouth.

them. But the question that he asks leads them to downcast faces. Can you see that in verse 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. they looked sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in these days?

[13:16] It's almost amusing to Cleopas and his companion that Jesus doesn't know what went down in Jerusalem last week.

Everyone's been talking about it. Everyone knows about it. It would be like somebody coming into the office and hearing people talk about the cheating Australian cricketers and asking, what? What are you talking about? You'd think, couldn't you, they'd been living under a rock or something. Because everybody's heard about it this last week. Jesus continues.

Jesus continues to play along as if he is the ignorant one. And in response, the two downcast travellers, they give an explanation. They give an explanation for the sad faces.

They say, we knew Jesus was a prophet and that he was powerful and we had really high hopes for Jesus and we hoped that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel.

[14:18] They hoped that he would be the Messiah. They hoped that he would be God's promised king. And then all of a sudden, he's gone. He's been arrested and killed. And even his body's vanished now.

It's impossible to miss the irony of Jesus himself hearing this story from his disciples all the while telling it to him as if he's the most ignorant man in the world.

And that is because not only did these people have downcast faces, but they have slow hearts, the next bit of the body. And Jesus tells them that in verse 25. And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, that's the Old Testament, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they've concluded, haven't they, Jesus is the slow one. But Jesus now here turns the tables, and he says, no, you are the slow ones. You should have known what was going to happen.

[15:38] From your reading of the Old Testament, you should have known that the Messiah, when he came, would have to suffer and die before he's glorified. It shouldn't have taken you by surprise, Jesus said.

You shouldn't have been confused or downcast. You should have simply believed God's word through the prophets in the Old Testament. But their hearts were slow. But as Jesus diagnosed the slowness of their hearts, their hearts also began to burn.

Verse 32. After it's dawned on Cleopas, and his companion who they're talking to, we hear them discussing with Jesus the discussion that they've had on the road.

And they're told, that they said to each other, were not our hearts burning within us? when he talked to us on the road and he opened up to us the Bible. They may have been slow up to that point, but as the Christ explained the Christ to them, it was as if somebody lit a match under the kindling of their partial knowledge, and they began to grasp.

They began to understand more fully what the Bible had been saying all along. And they began to understand that what they were hearing was true, and they began to love this truth with a glow.

[16:57] But they still didn't see it all clearly. That comes next. That comes when Jesus moves them from their slow hearts to burning hearts, to people of being open eyes.

That's the next part of the body. To open eyes. Because it was nearly evening. The two travellers, they invite Jesus, would you stay with us in Emmaus for the night.

And as they sat down to eat, Jesus did a most unexpected thing. He plays the host rather than the guest. So he takes the bread.

And he gives thanks to God, and he broke it, and he passed it to his two travelling companions. And it is at that moment, as he does that, the light dispels. And the last trace of darkness of their understanding goes.

Back in verse 16 we're told that they had been kept from recognising Jesus. God had closed their eyes. But now he opens them. And at that very moment, Jesus vanished.

[18:04] But it didn't matter to them that he vanished, because the lights were switched on, and they understood who he was. And now they realise that it is to him that the whole of the Old Testament pointed to.

And now they realise what Jesus himself was bearing witness to. And because they did that, they were instantly transformed into witnesses as well.

They didn't waste another second. They knew that their newfound understanding of who Jesus is needed to be shared, so they couldn't send an email or a text. There was no phone to call, there was no Facebook to broadcast on, there was no Twitter to tweet out.

And so having walked seven miles to get to Jerusalem, they promptly turn around and they walk seven miles back. And they get their legs going again.

And when they arrive, they get their talking mouths going again. And they found their friends, Jesus' disciples, huddled together in some room, perhaps it's the same room where they were on the Thursday night, where they shared the Lord's Supper together.

[19:10] But wherever they were, Cleopas and his companion barge in only to discover that the other disciples of Jesus have come to the same realisation. The lights have been switched on there too.

God had opened their eyes. And so they spent the next little while just swapping their stories. Now it's interesting that Cleopas and his companion are present for all three of these incidents in Luke 24.

They were there when the women turned up talking about the empty tomb in the morning. They were the ones who walked the long journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus and later that night from Jerusalem back to Emmaus.

And they were in the room with all the disciples when Jesus turned up and spoke to them. Cleopas and this companion, they are right in the centre of Luke 24 in this chapter.

And that is because Luke wants you to see and wants me to see that what happened to them is not because they were unique, it's because they are not unique.

[20:22] What happened to them was indicative of what was about to happen to a bunch of people. Like them at the same time. And what happened to at the end of the day is something that

Luke happens, Luke hopes will happen to everyone who reads his gospel.

He hopes it will happen to you this morning. He hopes that you and I as we look at the evidence, as we look at the difference that Jesus makes, that we will be transformed by what we discover.

That we will be amazed to learn that Jesus is the Christ and that he is alive and he hopes that we will get our walking legs and our talking mouths going.

And bear witness to what we have come to see. Certainly the transformation that these two underwent isn't it?

They began the journey to Emmaus simply as sad friends, companions in their sadness, but by the end of the section they are joyful witnesses on the journey. They were downcast, but on the way back they're elated.

[21 : 40] They had news that must be told, they had a song in their hearts, and the difference was simple. They've met the risen Jesus. That's what Luke hopes will happen to you and to me.

That's why this chapter exists in the Bible. It's really important that you grasp that. Why did Luke write his gospel? People treat the gospel of Luke and the other gospels in different ways.

Some people like to see it as a work of fiction. Some people like to see it as a kind of historical artefact. Perhaps some see it as a mystical form of spiritual inspiration.

none of those descriptions hit the mark. Because this book and this chapter was written with a very specific purpose. It was written to transform your life and mine.

It's written to change people like you and people like me. And Luke wrote this because he had come to know that the risen Lord Jesus wants to take your life and move you from being sad and downcast and distracted.

[22 : 59] Perhaps even driven or lonely or successful or content or obsessed or happy or disappointed or whatever you are this morning.

He wants to take your life and move you from where you were to being a joyful witness of the risen Jesus. And down through the last 2,000 years that's exactly what's happened.

to thousands and thousands of people who've engaged with this chapter. And some of those people are in this room right now. And we found that as we began to read the account of Jesus' resurrection and engage with him our hearts have begun to burn and our eyes have come to be opened.

And as the lights have come on we've begun to realise that we've met Jesus Christ who was dead but is now alive. And since he is alive and since we've actually met him we've come to realise that we actually want nothing more than others to know that as well.

To know what we know. And to see what we've seen. And that is how this story meets your story.

[24 : 25] And intersects with it and transforms it. And my hope is if that hasn't happened to you yet that it will this Easter.

And even if it has happened to you I hope that this transformation that this chapter describes would take place more and more. That's what I hope for myself.

Until I finish I just want to point out to you the two things that I think this passage leave us with. I want to say they are the two ingredients of how your life and how my life gets transformed.

Of course if you're not interested in being transformed you should just tune out right now. But if you want God to change your life and if you want God to enrich your life and empower your life and if you want to know Jesus better and I'm assuming that's why you're here this morning I want to urge you to pay attention to these two things that Luke 24 leaves you with.

And the two things are this what we can do and secondly what only God can do. So what is it that you can do?

[25 : 43] What is it that Luke 24 teaches you that you can do? And what we can do is open the scriptures the Bible open the scriptures because that is the way that we can pay attention to God's word.

What have we seen this morning? We've seen this morning haven't we? That it is the word of God that brings clarity to confusion. And so we ought to expect that even now the word of God will be the best remedy for our confusion.

And when we open the scriptures when we read the Bible we will find what the disciples in Luke 24 found that the whole of the Old Testament the left hand side of your Bible bears witness to Jesus and that Jesus himself shines light onto everything and that the New Testament has come down to us because of the very experiences that this chapter describes.

The New Testament is basically written by people who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. People who were transformed by their encounter with the risen Jesus.

And so if you want to know the risen Jesus read the scriptures. And if you want to be transformed by the risen Jesus read the scriptures.

[27 : 20] And if you want the resurrection power of Jesus at work in your life develop an appetite for the scriptures. Treasure God's word.

Bathe in it. Don't take it for granted. Love it. Learn from it. Live by it. Because if you do that we will be joyful witnesses of Christ for no other reason than that we've come to know him personally. Jesus who died lives. And he speaks to us as he spoke to them. And when we listen attentively we will be transformed.

That's what we can do. Open the scriptures. But the other key ingredient to transformation is something that we can't do.

That only God can do. And that is open our eyes. And that was the experience wasn't it of the two travelers on the road to Emmaus.

[28 : 30] And it's also the experience of verse 45 where it describes all the disciples. Verse 45 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.

Verse 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. At the end of the day you will not believe that Jesus rose from the dead unless God opens your eyes.

And you won't know him unless he opens your mind. And we won't see him for who he is and be transformed by the risen Jesus unless God flicks the light on us.

And what that means of course is that if you don't believe in the risen Jesus yet and if you don't follow him and if you don't live for him and if you don't love him but you want to you can't manufacture this.

Instead right now right now you call out to God in prayer and you ask him to bring light to your eyes and to open your mind.

[30 : 07] And what it also means is that if you long for greater transformation in the Christian life and if you long for a clearer vision of the resurrected Jesus, if you long to be a more joyful witness for him, then the answer to your longings is you need to pray and I need to pray that God would bring lights to my eyes.

And the message of the Bible is that when you pray like that earnestly and humbly, when he answers and it is a prayer that he loves to answer, you will see and you will know and we will live like Jesus who died and really did rise again and really is alive today.

And we really do have a relationship with him. And that of course is an astonishing thing to say, isn't it? A relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's almost too impossible to believe, isn't it? And yet that is what is on offer to you this Easter Sunday morning. And this chapter is written so that you might take up the offer of that relationship. that we might find like those disciples, our confusion evaporating in the light of his clear word. And that we, like those disciples, might find our eyes open to see the risen Jesus and so be irreversibly changed by him.

[31 : 44] And I don't know about you, but as I study this chapter, I find myself freshly stunned that the Jesus who lived and died 2,000 years ago, lives in 2018 and I know him.

Not just as someone who is the central character in an ancient story, but as someone I'm actually in a relationship with. And once again, as we think about this, we pinch ourselves, don't we, as we contemplate it.

it really is an incredible thing, and I can't speak for you, but for myself, I really do want to know him better. And I crave depth in my relationship with him, and I do want to be transformed by him, and changed by him.

And this wonderful chapter in the Bible assures us that that really is possible this morning. And that the risen Lord Jesus is up for it.

And Luke says, then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him. And I'm going to pray the same will be true for us.

[33 : 03] Let's pray.