

A Living Hope for a Hopeless World
Luke 24:13-35

A preacher told of going through his father's effects after his dad died, and among the things he found was father's 7th grade report card. Back in the Fall of 1941 this 7th grade report card showed the grading scale on the back of it. There was A, B, C, D, F, and something he'd never seen before: the letter G! Who would have thought there was a grade you could get that was below F. But back then there was. "F" of course meant FAILURE. But apparently there was something worse than an F ... a G! On the back of the report card, beside the letter G was this one-word explanation: HOPELESS!"

In our text today, we find two men walking along the road, and their lives have become rated "G." They have become hopeless. Their lives have fallen apart.

They say to the stranger they meet: *"Have you not heard about Jesus of Nazareth? He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had **hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."* (19-21)

They had HOPED Jesus would be the answer to their prayers. They had HOPED He would change their lives. They had HOPED He would make a difference in their world... but He was dead now. There was no longer any hope. They were filled with despair, defeat and discouragement.

Now, they HAD heard stories that Jesus WASN'T dead. *"Some of the women of our company amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but they didn't find his body. They came back and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said Jesus was alive"* (22-23).

But you can tell, by their conversation, these guys don't believe it. Dead people tended to stay dead. For them, the stories of Jesus rising from the dead were just wishful thinking. They refused to believe in a "false hope."

There was a recent movie where one of the despairing heroes says, "Don't give me false hope. And one of the other characters replies: "It's not false hope if it's possible."

Hope in God is what makes us who we are. Hope in God is the essence of our being. David wrote: *“The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those who HOPE in his steadfast love”* (Ps. 33:18). And again: *“You, O Lord, are my HOPE...”* (Ps. 71:5).

As children of a living God, we need hope in our lives. In fact, we can't SURVIVE without hope. [Pause] An Air Force Instructor once wrote something called the Rule Of Threes: “You can survive 3 weeks without food; 3 days without water; 3 minutes without air, but not three seconds without hope.” [Pause]

Now, what I find so interesting about this story in Luke 24, is that these men walking to Emmaus didn't realize who they were talking to. They didn't realize it was Jesus. Why didn't Jesus just say: “Hey guys, it's me! I'm alive! It's not a hoax! Here, place your fingers where the nails were.”

Wait a minute. Didn't Jesus say those exact words to someone else? Who did he say that too? That's right – Thomas. So... Thomas gets a 2-minute “show and tell” and these guys on the Emmaus road get a 2-hour dissertation. What's going on here?

I believe Jesus took the time to deal with THEIR hopelessness so that we'd know how to deal with OURS. All of us have faced times when we've become discouraged, even desperate. Maybe it was losing our job, or our marriage falling apart, or our health deteriorating, or a global pandemic and all the ways it is affecting so many people. It seems safe to say that we all have faced times when we felt boxed in and trapped. And let us not forget the gospel event that follows this one ... where the disciples are in the upper room behind closed doors because of their fear...until a certain Someone shows up.

But let's linger on the Emmaus road for now. I believe what Jesus did for these 2 men was recorded for our encouragement and our hope. I believe the things Jesus did for these travelers were tools God gives to US for times when we get discouraged.

Notice the first thing Jesus does: *“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”* (25-27)

What does He do here? He opens the Scriptures for them. Too often, Christians forget that the Bible is God's very Word, filled with His eternal promises. Romans 15:4 tells us "*Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have HOPE.*"

The scriptures were written so that we might have what? HOPE! The Bible is God's tool to change our lives and give us hope. And it is a powerful tool. Heb. 4:12 tells us, "*The word of God is living and active ... It penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit.*"

There is power in the pages of your Bible. If you're not reading it, you're robbing yourself of the potential God wants to give you. It is in this book that we find the strength and peace to become overcomers in a *difficult, desperate, fear-stricken, hope-starved world.*

ILLUS: Back in 1942, a B17 crashed into the Pacific Ocean. Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, and 6 other men were adrift in 3 small rafts with no water and only four oranges. They tied their boats together, and drifted day after day. Tortured by the relentless sun by day and chilling cold by night, it seemed impossible they could survive.

One of the men, Private Johnny Bartek, always carried a little New Testament with him. And there, in the middle of the Pacific, Bartek had his daily devotions. Eventually, the other men wanted to know what he was doing. When he explained, they asked if they could be included. And so they started in the Gospel of Matthew.

When they got to Matthew 6, life changed for them. They read these words: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things." And so, that's what they began to pray for.

Just when they were near starvation, a bird landed on Rickenbacker's head. They grabbed it, used it for food, and used the rest for fishing bait. Just when they were near death by thirst, a cloud would drift over and fill their raft with water. Sometimes, a fish would even jump into their raft. That went on for 21 days as they drifted in the middle of Pacific.

Lieutenant James Whittaker wrote "I don't think there was a one of us who didn't thank God for that little khaki-covered book. It led us to prayer and prayer led us to safety."

They found their hope in the pages of the Bible. *Its words turn our hearts toward God, and when our hearts turn toward God, we learn to trust in Him, and our HOPE is revived.*

Now notice, when Jesus walked with the men to Emmaus, He didn't just do a Bible study with them. Oh no. As He walked with them, He taught them about what the Bible said about Him – all that happened before in *preparation* ... all that He accomplished in *redemption* ... all that is now fulfilled in *resurrection*.

This very targeted study of the Scriptures focused entirely on Jesus and what He had come to do. *Why did it all have to center on Jesus? Why must it still center on Jesus? Because without Jesus, there is no hope.* Without His hope-instilling ministry, atoning death, and victorious resurrection, this life is all you have. This world is all you have.

Peter opens his first letter this way: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!”* (1:3) Phil Wickham wrote a song recently called “Living Hope.” We’ve included it as one of our songs of worship – please take time to listen and sing along. It proclaims precisely what we need to remember and rejoice over! Our hope is in a living Savior – a Savior who has conquered death – and *through Whom we will conquer death!* Jesus is our living HOPE!

This is why Paul says: *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and so is your faith ... If only for this life we have **hope** in Christ, we are, of all people, most to be pitied ... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!”* (1 Cor. 15:13-20)

Everything we are hinges on the hope of Jesus having lived, having died & having risen from the dead! That's why Jesus spent so much time with these two men, focusing on what the Old Testament prophesied about WHO He is and WHAT He came to do.

That's why Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us that *“Jesus shared in our flesh and blood so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death, and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.”* In other words ... *Fear of death made us slaves. Hope in Christ sets us free!* [P]

And our hope in Christ is also why our *Baptism* focuses on the fact that God calls us to die with Christ, be buried with him, and be raised in newness of life with him! In our baptism, we reenact the Living Hope of a Risen Savior!

And, it's why we celebrate *Communion*. The Lord's Table reminds us that Jesus came specifically to die for our sins. And that's what makes the last part of our story in Luke 24 so intriguing.

We are told that "*As they approached the village, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. They urged him strongly, 'Stay with us!' And he does.*

A meal is prepared. The time for Jesus' disclosure has come. How does he do it? "*He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them*" (v. 30). These actions, so familiar ... What was it that Jesus had said in that upper room a few days ago?

Luke 22 – "*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.*" And **he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them**, saying, "*This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.*" After supper, he took the cup, saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*"

Those words! Those nail-pierced hands! In that moment, "*Their eyes were opened and they recognized him.*" All this time they had been with Jesus, looking at Him, but never seeing Him. Now, *as they break bread together*, they see Him for who He is. [P]

But this was more than a mere recognition of His features. They became aware of Jesus in all His magnificence as the Messiah, the Son of God, and their *Risen Lord!* In an instant, they knew Him. [P] And in an instant, He's gone.

Why did Jesus disappear? Couldn't he have stayed longer? He could've, but he didn't because he was preparing his disciples – on how to manage without his bodily presence – just like us today. But He is with us still by His Spirit; He is with us as we worship Him; He is with us as we once again break the bread and share the cup ...

I can imagine Cleopas and his friend standing in amazement, asking each other, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*" (v. 32)

That heart-burning experience is something that we all need. We need it to realize that Jesus *is* the only Savior, alive forevermore! [P]

Where do we find ourselves right now? Have we lost sight of the Resurrected Christ amidst the struggles of this life, the uncertainty of our days, the crises of this world? [P]

These two travelers, no doubt, had walked this way many times before. Yet this day was different – it was time for a life-changing encounter with the Risen Lord. [P]

He draws near to us as well. He lays questions on our hearts. He opens the Word to us through the power of His Spirit. [P] Are we listening to Him as we walk along? [P] Are we inviting Him in so that He can transform our lives for His glory?

Our problem isn't so much that we don't know what we have ... it's that we don't share what we've been given. You have a Living Hope in Jesus. He offers something that many in this world do not have ... yet.

When peoples' lives seem to be falling apart around you, tell them about a Risen Savior who's in the world today. A Savior that loves them so much that He wants to give them *living* hope in a hopeless world.

I don't know about you, but I want a heart that burns with the love of Christ – a love that died for us, a love that rose for us, a love that sends us out to tell the world – "It's true! Christ has risen from the dead! He is alive! He is alive!"

INVITATION: *Lord ... give us eyes that see and hearts that burn. Give us souls that yearn to serve and to tell the world that our Lord is alive! Amen.*