



In our scripture today we're going to read about the spiritual journey of two men who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Before I read of their encounter from Luke 24, let me set this up:

- » two men talk to Jesus
- » they walk seven miles with Jesus
- » they broke bread with Jesus

All of this happens after Jesus had been crucified on the cross in AD 30. His death, by the way, is a historically agreed upon event. The questions for us to consider today are: Did Jesus rise from the dead as described in these verses, and What does their experience have to do with us?

Most people who live on the peninsula would say that Jesus lived and died for love. In this way he's both respected and admired. When people ask me what I do for a living and I tell them that I'm a pastor. I'm usually treated kindly. Jesus was a pretty good guy; he loved his friends; he even died for his friends.

Most people today would acknowledge love as a worthy cause to die for. If you love somebody enough, the greatest expression of that love is to give him or her your everything. That's love.

But what if Jesus was more? What if he was way more than a pretty good guy? What if he actually rose from the dead and then never died? If this is true, the implications change everything.

The resurrection of Jesus is such a core component to the Christian faith that the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, *"If there is no resurrection from the dead, our preaching is useless, your faith is useless, your whole life is a testimony to a lie and everyone will die in their sins. We are to be pitied more than anyone."*

According to the Bible, the position that Jesus was a pretty good guy who taught some pretty good morality is illogical. The Bible places the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as the lynch pin to the Christian faith. If you remove it, the teachings of the Bible are lies. However, if Jesus did rise from the dead, then he must be the Savior of the world.

In today's sermon I want to present you with two components that ought to be part of everyone's spiritual journey—evidence and a personal encounter with Jesus.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they

talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "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. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

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.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and

how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread (Luke 24:13–25).

We just read through Luke 24 that describes Jesus walking and talking with two of his followers. Was this a made-up story or did it really happen? I think it really happened and I'd like to show you two pieces of evidence for your consideration.

Evidence

Jesus appeared to unlikely people: the women

Verse 22 tells us that a group of women were the first to learn of the resurrection of Jesus. Women at that time had low status. Their testimony was not allowed in neither Roman nor Jewish courts. And therefore, if you were making up a story you would **never** put women in there as the first witnesses. It would have only undermined the story. Nobody would have believed it or respected it.

What does it mean then? It means that Luke wrote it this way because it really happened. They were the first eyewitnesses.

The two on the road

Similarly unlikely people are these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We're told one of them is Cleopas, a person we know nothing about. The second person is unnamed.

If you were making up these stories, why appear to these nobodies? That doesn't bring credibility to your story. Instead, a story searching for credibility would include Jesus marching into the temple and showing himself to the very men who delivered him to the Romans for crucifixion.

What does it mean then that Jesus appeared to these two unknown men on the road to Emmaus? It means that Luke wrote it this way because it really happened. Nothing else makes any sense. Jesus Christ died and really rose from the dead. These unlikely witnesses are the first piece of evidence for you to consider.

The second piece of evidence in these verses that Jesus really did rise from the dead is the empty tomb.

The empty tomb

Verses 23 and 24 report that the women found an empty tomb and then some of the 11 disciples ran there and found the same thing. How could this have happened? Where did Jesus' body go?

A person can claim anything they want. In 2011 Harold Camping predicted the end of the world was coming on May 21. You might remember seeing the billboards. When the date passed, he postponed the date to October 21. When that date passed, he quieted down. Despite claiming the end of the world, the evidence just wasn't there.

What about the evidence for the empty tomb of Jesus? It is historically proven that Jesus was a real man and he really died on a cross. Is there such proof of an empty tomb? The Jewish leaders,

who had everything to lose, acknowledged the tomb was empty and spread the story that the guards had fallen asleep. Thousands in Jerusalem saw Jesus being crucified on Friday. Thousands were placing their full belief and faith in the risen Jesus a month later when Peter explained the death and resurrection to them. For a Jew to acknowledge that a man they knew and saw die on a cross was God was unthinkable. They can't even say the name God because it's so holy to them. Historians, atheists and Christians conclude that the tomb was empty. The Bible, being the most reliable ancient text, says that Jesus rose from the dead.

These are two pieces of evidence that the resurrection of Jesus really occurred as described in the Bible. Let me give you some alternate theories about the resurrection.

The women and disciples made the whole thing up

Stated another way, they knew Jesus was dead but they lied about it all. If this was how events played out, this would have been very simple to refute. The religious leaders could have silenced them by simply displaying Jesus' dead body.

Additionally, it is very unlikely that all 11 of these disciples would have endured persecution and tortuous deaths over a giant hoax. Keep in mind that on Friday, when Jesus was crucified, some of these disciples were hiding and all of them were afraid. This theory is so easy to dispute that no credible critic uses it.

The disciples stole the body

This theory involves 11 normal men, sneaking up to the tomb, defeating a group of trained soldiers, and sneaking Jesus' dead body to another spot and burying it, like an *Ocean's Eleven* job. The flaws with this are:

» It would have been highly unlikely for the disciple to overtake the soldiers guarding the tomb.

» The disciples were shaken, scared men. They were defeated.

» Where would they have gotten such resolve to steal the body, hide it, make up the story of his resurrection, then stick to their story for the rest of their lives under torture and ultimate death for their beliefs?

» In fairness, people have made up hoaxes and deceived people through history. But in these cases, there was something to be gained: power and riches being the two most popular.

» The disciples received neither. Instead, they show all of the characteristics of people who believe deeply in something and the willingness to sacrifice everything to see their beliefs known. They are passionate and committed. These are not characteristics of men pulling off a hoax.

This is such an unlikely option that some have said it takes more faith to believe this than to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

The first piece of evidence I showed you were the unlikely people Jesus appeared to. The second piece of evidence I showed you

was the empty tomb. Let's be intellectually honest—belief in something that happened 2000 years ago will always take a step of faith. And a thorough investigation and careful analysis are justified.

That's what Lee Strobel did. He was an atheist and legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune* in the late 80's and early 90's. His wife had recently become a Christian and Strobel didn't like it. He was deeply offended. He thought the idea of God was stupid. So he set out to disprove his wife's new faith. He meticulously read the Bible and considered the claims of Jesus hoping to disprove it. Here is what he writes: "I did that for a year and nine months until November the 8th of 1991, and on that day I realized that, in light of the torrent of evidence flowing in the direction of the truth of Christianity, it would require more faith for me to maintain my atheism than to become a Christian. Because to be an atheist I would have to swim upstream against this torrent of evidence pointing toward the truth of Jesus Christ. And I couldn't do that. I was trained in journalism and law to respond to truth. And so on that day, I received Jesus Christ as my forgiver, and as my leader."

When Lee Strobel encountered the facts, he didn't like it, but he had to admit that they were true and he submitted to Jesus. Sometimes we don't like facts. But they are unchangeable realities. If you are a Michigan State or Kentucky fan, you are offended by the fact that your basketball teams were beaten last night. But your dislike of it doesn't change the fact. We're more into likes and dislikes, like with Facebook.

People apply this approach to the Bible too. I talk with many people who say, "I'm not interested in becoming a follower of Jesus because there are things in the Bible I don't like." I like this part of the Bible but I don't really like this part. Here on the peninsula people don't like what the Bible says about sex. They say, "I could never become a Christian because I'm offended by what it says." Lots of people have been deeply offended by things in the Bible over the centuries. That's not the crucial issue.

The crucial question is this: Does a person's dislike of a certain part of the Bible mean that Jesus Christ couldn't have been raised from the dead? No. For the moment, I advise that you set aside your dislikes of an ethical teaching within the Bible and for now just focus on the resurrection. You can deal with the rest of the Bible during the rest of your life.

I said earlier that a spiritual journey involves two components. The first is evidence which we've been considering. Now I want to show you the second component—a personal encounter with Jesus. Faith in Jesus involves more than just evidence. It involves a personal encounter with Jesus.

A Personal Encounter with Jesus

Jesus meets them in their pain. In verses 14-17 these two men are described as downcast. Downcast = utterly broken. For three

years they'd been on an emotional roller coaster as they followed Jesus. Was it possible that Jesus was the Messiah? It was truly too good to be true. Imagine all of your dreams and desires being right on the edge of becoming a reality. A life of teaching from parents and Rabbis about God's plan for your nation and the coming of this Messiah who would make everything perfect.

And then, Jesus died.

The rug has been completely pulled out from under them. They are plunged into utter despair! And this wasn't a simple bump in the road or a problem to solve creatively. Jesus died. The ride was over. The dream was dead. These men were downcast.

Consider how Jesus meets them in their pain. He is present, not absent. He comes to them and serves them by letting them unburden their hearts. He is attentive and listens to them. Jesus doesn't rush the news ... Ta-dah! It's me. I rose from the dead! I told you! Instead, in love, he asks them two questions and listens with no indication that he rushes their process.

Jesus always meets us right where we are. Do you have questions? Do you have pain? Do you have doubts? Fears? Insecurities? Anger? Jesus meets us right where we are.

When they are finished explaining everything they know and feel to Jesus, he brings healing and resolution to their brokenness by calling them foolish and slow to believe. Jesus brings healing and resolution by touching their heart.

They asked 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).

In Luke 24:25-27 Jesus explained to them how the Old Testament was pointing toward him. It wasn't an impartial intellectual experience. It wasn't like $2+2=4$. The experience touched their hearts! *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son and name Him Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14). And their hearts burned within them.

"Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem, and they will look at Me whom they pierced. They will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly for Him as one weeps for a first-born" (Zechariah 12:10). And their hearts burned within them.

*"Surely he took up our pain
And bore our suffering,
Yet we considered him punished by God,
Stricken by him, and afflicted.
But 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.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,*

Each of us has turned to our own way;

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4–6). And their hearts burned within them.

The facts weren't just an idea in the mind but they produced belief and passion in their heart. Another way this is described here is seen in verse 31.

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him ... ”

Jesus took break, broke it, said a prayer and it all clicked for these two guys. They knew with certainty that Jesus had risen from the dead and they were changed men. On the road to Emmaus they were downcast. After meeting with Jesus they rush back to Jerusalem with hearts that were burning within them. Have you had this kind of experience?

One summer, as a college student, I attended Glorieta Baptist Encampment in New Mexico for a week of camp with other college students. During this week I wanted to do three things: 1) win the volleyball tournament, 2) meet some cute girls, 3) learn something new about God.

The first night as the speaker ended his sermon he asked a simple question, “If you are willing to do whatever God asks of you this week, please stand.” Although it was tough, I stood. That's the way I've always been. If God spoke to me, I did what he said. It was as simple as that.

The second to last night, God's working in my heart hit a high point and I had a thought I'd never had before in my life. The thought was: “Shawn, I want you to be a pastor.” It was what I'd expect the guys on the road to Emmaus describe as my heart burning. More than a thought; it was a message that wrapped around my mind and my heart and it felt like a surge of energy flowing through me.

My response to this was, “No way! Where did that thought come from?”

“What are you afraid of? Why not?”

“Well, I don't really like my pastors. And pastors are poor!”

“Do you think that I won't take care of you? Plus I don't want you to be a pastor like those guys you don't like. Just be yourself.”

“Well, it would be cool to be used by you to communicate and inspire people like Louie did this week. If you could use me like that, I suppose that'd be cool.

“So, I want you to be a pastor.”

“No way! I've never even thought of this before. Plus pastors are poor!”

“I want you to be a pastor.”

It continued like this all night. I talked with some of my leaders and they said just wait, and if it's genuine, God will keep speaking to you. I couldn't escape. Like a dripping water facet God's message was constant. “Shawn, I want you to be a pastor.”

The next night at the end of a worship service, I couldn't resist any longer. I got up from my seat, walked down to the front, told the guy that God was calling me to be a pastor. That's all I knew. I didn't know if that was senior pastor, youth pastor, music minister, or a missionary. All I knew was that God was calling me. This was one of the most powerful experiences in my spiritual journey.

Over the years I've talked with thousands of people who have considered the evidence, met with Jesus, and then placed their faith in him. How about you? If you would acknowledge this morning that Jesus did rise from the dead, then:

A – admit that you are a sinner in need of salvation. Romans 3:23 says that we have all sinned and fallen short of his glory.

B – believe that Jesus is your only hope of salvation. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

S – surrender your will and your life to Jesus Christ, inviting Jesus to be your Lord.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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