

Luke 24:13-35

¹³Now, on that same day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about all of these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing this, Jesus himself approached and began to walk along with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He said to them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” Saddened, they stopped.

¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

¹⁹“What things?” he asked them.

They replied, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be condemned to death. And they crucified him. ²¹But we were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel. Not only that, but besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²²Also some women of our group amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning. ²³When they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb. They found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

²⁵He said to them, “How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter his glory?” ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village where they were going, he acted as if he were going to travel farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, since it is almost evening, and the day is almost over.”

So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he reclined at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and began giving it to them. ³¹Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us along the road and while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?” ³³They got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and those who were with them assembled together. ³⁴They were saying, “The Lord really has been raised! He has appeared to Simon.” ³⁵They themselves described what had happened along the road, and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

Undercover Jesus

I.

Have you ever watched Undercover Boss? I’ve only watched a few episodes, but the concept seems to always be the same. A company is having some issues. It may or may not be floundering, but there is definite room for improvement. The boss, or at least someone high up on the corporate food chain, decides it would be valuable to find out from the inside what could be done better, or what’s going wrong.

A team of makeup artists gets to work, altering the boss’s appearance so that he or she won’t be recognized by the regular employees. The film crew is explained away by some explanation of a documentary to learn something entirely different, and off the boss goes to get an inside look at the company.

Jesus didn’t need a whole team of makeup artists to alter his appearance to go undercover with the disciples we have dubbed the Emmaus disciples. Those disciples were just walking on their way back home from Jerusalem when Jesus came along: “But their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16, EHV).

Just like the undercover bosses do, Jesus engaged them in conversation. Unlike the undercover bosses, Jesus knew exactly what the problem was, but he stayed undercover. “He said to them,

‘What are you talking about as you walk along?’ Saddened, they stopped” (Luke 24:17, EHV). The undercover Jesus has already uncovered the first indication of the problem. *Why* were they saddened?

When Jesus asks them to explain the things going on in Jerusalem, the two disciples begin to tell him what was going on through the last week of Jesus’ life. They explain: “But we were hoping that he was going to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21, EHV). Maybe that explains them being saddened when Jesus first started speaking to them. They “were hoping.” Apparently their sad 7-mile-walk back home was a dejected shuffle. Before Good Friday they were hoping; now, all their hopes were dashed. Things hadn’t turned out the way they had hoped.

What did they believe about the concept “redeem Israel”? Did “redeem Israel” mean to them that they had been hoping Jesus would buy back, or rescue, Israel from their sins? Or were they looking for something else that met that idea a completely different way? They didn’t really explain.

“Not only that, but besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²²Also some women of our group amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning. ²³When they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive” (Luke 24:21-23, EHV). The sadness of these two gets even more perplexing. They had heard reports from the women that Jesus was alive. How can you be saddened? How can you think all your hopes about Jesus redeeming Israel are dashed if he’s alive?

II.

“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’” (Luke 24:25, EHV). Undercover Jesus is not very sympathetic or gentle with these two. Foolish. Slow of heart to believe. A lack of understanding about all the prophets had taught in the Old Testament. Not very flattering descriptions of these two disciples.

Let’s set aside the Emmaus disciples for a moment. Does foolish and slow of heart to believe and a lack of understanding define us, just like them?

These two along the road had said they “were hoping” Jesus was going to redeem Israel. So many Christians today are hoping for something from Jesus. Is what they are hoping for in line with what Jesus actually came to do? So many are hoping Jesus will make their lives better. So many are hoping Jesus will take away the problems they face every day. So many are hoping Jesus will change the political climate so Christians can enjoy an easier walk of faith.

The Emmaus disciples weren’t ignorant. They knew Scripture. They were slow to believe because they picked and chose what they wanted Scripture to say. That same attitude can easily define us. We know what the Bible says, but sometimes what we read or hear doesn’t fit very well with our current attitude or the current social climate. Rather than just listening to what the Bible says and taking God’s Word for things, we look around for passages of Scripture we can twist to mean what we want them to mean. It’s easy to open the Bible looking for it to validate your preconceived notions; perhaps if you search hard enough and use enough different translations you can find a passage that seems to imply what you want it to imply.

III.

“‘Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter his glory?’ ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:26-27, EHV). What a Bible study that must have been!

Sometimes people reach the false conclusion that all the gospel information—all the Good News about God’s plan of salvation—is to be found in the New Testament. That’s not the case.

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. That’s where Jesus started. The first gospel promise can be found right after Adam and Eve fell into sin. God immediately promised a Savior. Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets continually fleshed out God’s promises and God’s plan. Details were revealed. Details that, for those whose eyes were open, made plain all the things Jesus would do, and now had done.

In just a few months I will have been a pastor for 30 years. Every single time I read through the Bible, things jump out at me that I never remember having read before. Every time I prepare a sermon, something from the reading for that Sunday jumps out at me in a way it never did previously, even if I've preached on that reading a dozen times. I've heard pastors say they can never preach on the same text twice. Perhaps they have too good a memory and remember the words they spoke the last time. Fortunately, I forget. That means that each time through I see things with fresh eyes. I hope each time I can find something I missed the last time.

Open your eyes to Scripture. It's essential to keep coming to hear Jesus speak to you week after week, year after year. If you aren't hearing it again and growing in your faith, your faith is dying.

The disciples from Emmaus needed to realize that all of the Old Testament was pointing ahead to Jesus. We need to know the same thing. Jesus is the central focus of the whole Bible.

All those things we misinterpreted and misapplied are among the sins Jesus took to the cross and paid for. Jesus didn't redeem Israel to make our political lives or our earthly lives easier, he came to redeem us from the curse of sin. He came to make us children of God who have the sure hope of heaven.

IV.

"As they approached the village where they were going, he acted as if he were going to travel farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, since it is almost evening, and the day is almost over'" (Luke 24:28-29, EHV). The two Emmaus disciples really enjoyed their Bible class. Perhaps they wanted even more teaching. Maybe they were just being polite and inviting the One who had taught them so well to enjoy a little refreshment and rest before he continued on his way.

You can see the Undercover Jesus episode reaching a climax. Even if the next part weren't there, you know he's about to reveal to them who he really is. "So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he reclined at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and began giving it to them. ³¹Suddenly their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:29-31, EHV). Jesus didn't give them communion, just began the meal as if he were the host, rather than a guest at their house. This is when the big reveal happened, but it seems almost anticlimactic. No sooner do they recognize the undercover Jesus than he disappears.

"They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us along the road and while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32, EHV). Isn't this part fascinating? The two don't go on and on about the celebrity of Jesus, but about what they had just learned. All that he had taught them was so important. They were no longer confused about what Jesus had really come to do. They were no longer looking for a political Jesus. Instead of their preconceived notions, they listened to what God's Word taught about sin and redemption. They knew the truth now.

"They got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and those who were with them assembled together" (Luke 24:33, EHV). It wasn't all that long ago that they had urged Jesus to stay with them, because it was almost evening and the day was almost over. Now, they can't put off this news until morning. They have to make haste to get back to Jerusalem. They didn't have a car. There weren't streetlights to light the road on their way back. They didn't even have a flashlight or a headlamp to light their way. Still, this was important enough to take their chances with the road; they simply had to make the 7 mile journey as quickly as possible. They had to share the news they had learned with the 11.

If the undercover Jesus was making this visit to uncover a problem, the problem was with the misplaced priorities and the understanding of his followers. He didn't need to go in undercover to find out what needed to be corrected, but to adjust their attitudes. They needed to experience the sheer joy of the resurrection and apply it to go and tell.

You have experienced again the joy of the resurrection. You know the message of forgiveness for you. Again and again the message of Jesus makes your heart burn within you. Go and tell. Many need the same eye-opening experience you have enjoyed. Amen.