

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

Dr. George O. Wood

We have been going now through the Book of Luke for a number of months. Today we're at the end of the story. But the end of the story is really only the beginning of the story. Today, Luke 24. I want to read the middle of this chapter, beginning with verse 13 and going through verse 35.

“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 only a visitor to Jerusalem and do 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 him they did not see.’ He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted 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 24:13-35, NIV).

This Scripture today speaks of “A Life-Changing Walk.” Think of what Easter is for just a moment. We are here in church today because we believe. Or, if you don’t believe it, you’re tempted to believe it and that’s why you’re here. We believe or we’re tempted to believe that one person in all of human history came back from death. Out of all the billions of people that have lived and are living now, one swam against the stream of humanity and changed human history and rose again from the dead.

We simply don’t gather for anyone else who makes that claim. In fact, when a family member or a friend dies, we have a service and then go out and either bury their body or scatter their ashes. We do not expect to see them again in this life. Many are the times as a pastor that I have had the solemn responsibility to lead that procession.

I’m reminded of what the great twentieth-century Christian theologian Karl Barth said, “One day, a company of men will proceed out to a churchyard and lower a coffin and everyone will go home, but one will not come back and that will be me.” Since I am probably at the cemetery

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

more than anyone here in this room, I have thought of that every time I go. Someday, a company will come and one will not go back and that will be me. Preachers are expected to think morbidly, aren't they?

I like to go into old graveyards and read the messages that are there as epitaphs. I figure that it's quite a feat for a person, in ten words or less, or sometimes more than that, to tell you their philosophy of life. So I want to learn all I can. And over time, I get a chance to be in an old cemetery, and I'll walk around and see what's there. I was, this last summer, in Bladon, England, where Winston Churchill lies buried. It wasn't Winston Churchill's tomb that impressed me as much as an old tomb right at the door of St. Martin's church, in the churchyard of Bladon, England. This is what the epitaph said: "Here lyeth the body of William Hopkins who deceased April 27, A.D. 1682. Reader, upon me cast thine eye. As thou are here now, so was I. But death of me a debt did claim. I paid it; thou must do the same." I went away real encouraged!

Then I was at Stratford-upon-Avon in England where William Shakespeare was born and lived and wrote. I went into the church in Stratford-upon-Avon, Holy Trinity Church, which is right on the Avon river. I went up to the high altar area. Of course, in many of the cathedrals, if not most of them, in Europe, there's a burial place in the cathedral. That's how they do things in Europe. William Shakespeare lies buried at the high altar in the Holy Trinity church on Stratford-upon-Avon. I thought, "I wonder what's on his tomb." After all, the man was a magnificent writer. Surely, there would be some glistening literary gem there. Instead, here is what he wrote and this was his own writing and he ordered that it be on his epitaph "Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear to dig the dust and close it here. Blessed be the man who spares these stones and cursed be he who moves my bones." Tremendous, profundity and depth of insight!

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

I thought Shakespeare handled death the way a lot of people do. We sort of try to pass it off, hoping we can get by it by laughing a little bit at it and poking fun. But it's a real thing.

A Greek philosopher reports in his journal of trying to make a lifeless body stand up on its own. He worked at it all day long and came to the conclusion, at the end of the day, that you could not make a corpse stand up on its own. I could have told him that before he tried! The dead do not come back to life. That's experience. That's what we see.

How distinctive then is the Christian faith. For one from among humanity has come back from the dead and has offered us the chance to share in that same resurrection life, to have that resurrection life live in us so that we might be really alive spiritually now and, in the age to come, we might be raised to life eternal and immortality.

It's a stupendous thing we claim in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has risen!

A French philosopher, Voltaire, who was no lover of Christianity by any stretch of the imagination, paid a grudging compliment to Christianity when he said one time to a group, "Gentlemen, it would be easy to start a new religion to compete with Christianity. All the founder would have to do is die and then be raised from the dead."

Our Scripture, which I have read today, shows us that Jesus is with us on the road of life in a life-changing walk. When we read this Scripture, we must not just read it of the two on the road to Emmaus, but all of us are going down from Jerusalem and we identify with them.

The story which I have read shows us the effects in their life on Easter morning, before they came to a knowledge that He was risen. For one thing, they were in no frame of mind to invent a story. There are many people who falsely assume that what we read in the New Testament was a creative invention of a group of early Christians who somehow came to believe that the crucified

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

carpenter-teacher from Nazareth was the risen Son of God, and it was their faith that created this story rather than a historical reality. So it is said that they made up this story.

Now, friends, I've never had much faith in creative documents composed by a committee, so I almost can dismiss that at face-value. But the early evidence shows us that two of the inner group on that Easter morning, before they realized that Jesus had risen from the dead, were not in any frame of mind to invent a story about Him being risen. They were scattering, because they were shattered.

They also were not people who were easily duped or gullible. Sometimes we think that anybody who lived that long ago was easily duped or gullible. There were just as many bright and educated people living then as now and just as many gullible people living now as living then.

The fact that these early disciples were not easily duped or gullible is seen in that they refused to believe what women in their own company came back saying. These women had been to the tomb and they knew those women well, and they said, "He is not in the tomb and we have seen angels saying He has risen." Their walking away from Jerusalem is saying, by voting with their feet, "I don't believe that stuff." And even some of the men who had been with the group had gone out to check the tomb and said it was as the women had said, and they do not believe them either. They are not easily duped, nor are they gullible.

In fact, the empty tomb meant nothing at all to them. That's the fact of the matter. The empty tomb means nothing! Except He's not here. But it didn't change their faith. The tomb was empty and they were depressed. Just because the tomb was empty doesn't mean you've found the reason for life.

The first time I was ever in Jerusalem, I went to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and inside this vast dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, right over the main dome, there is a smaller

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

area that is also enclosed, and inside of it is reportedly the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in which Jesus lay. I have stood in a line and got into the area, and a man was standing there in kind of a religious robe, trying to sell me candle. It sort of put me off. Why is it that those of us who are in the ministry are always collecting money? Even in the tomb, there's an example. (There's always needs in the kingdom of God.) I walked in there and I was so depressed. I thought that being in the empty tomb would be a wonderful experience. Instead, I was just really depressed because of the trappings of the place and the overladen icon imagery that was not a part of my worship experience. I went away depressed and muttering to myself "Thank God He's not here."

I went over to the Garden Tomb, which more seems to fit, and even there, that doesn't prove anything. You can live in Jerusalem and go every day of your life to the Garden Tomb, but it isn't going to change you. It's not an empty tomb that changes anyone. These people were not changed by an empty tomb. The thing that changed them was an encounter with the risen Lord. It's the only thing that turns them around. They needed an encounter with Him.

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not real in our own lives, then we're going to have the same things happening to us that happened to these two disciples that day on the road to Emmaus.

I. One thing that happened to them is that they were sad.

If you're not a believer in Christ and you're here today, you might say to me, "Pastor, I'm not sad at all. I'm having the time of my life. Life's never been better. It's on full throttle. My income is good. My health is good and I'm having a blast." That's great. I'm not for anybody being sad in life. But I just know that, ultimately, we're going to hit a place in life where, if we're without Jesus Christ, we're going to be sad. Because there is nothing after our gladness. There is no undergirding, underlying reality if He is not risen.

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

That's what they show. Verse 17 says, "They stood still, their faces downcast." Then in verse 21 they say to the Lord, whom they do not recognize, "We had hoped..." Notice "we had hoped"—past tense. All their hope was gone. It's all over. It's not "We're still hoping," or "We did have hope." Hope is in the past. Because of the death of Christ and the lack of the knowledge of His resurrection, hope was put on hold and it was a matter of yesterday's faith and not today's experience.

In 1759, British general Thomas Wolfe waited to attack the French in the famous battle at Quebec. It was the night of September 12th, the evening before the battle. Wolfe was walking around the encampment, reciting by his tent the then recently-written poem by Thomas Gray, "Eulogy Written in a Country Churchyard," which is one of the more famous poems in the English language. The theme of the poem is the common fate of common people, that individual people live their lives unnoticed and unremembered. The poem concludes with the famous line that is used of those few people who make it to notable ranks, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." And Wolfe is reciting that on the evening of the battle. The next day, he attacks the French. The British are victors, but Wolfe loses his life in the battle and the French defending General also loses his life. It was said of those two generals that "The path of glory led but to the grave."

It is only in the grave of Jesus Christ that we see a different thing. Of all others, it would be said, "The path of glory leads but *to* the grave." But of Jesus Christ, it will be said, "The path of glory leads *from* the grave."

No resurrection of Christ means sadness, for that means that if He is not raised, that Jesus, at best, is a misguided dreamer and is at worse a diabolical charlatan. It means that if He is not raised, we do not have the foggiest idea of who God is or if He is. We're simply left with other

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

religious men's teaching and their guess about what is happening is as good as anybody else's guess. Because all the best religious teachers can do is help you live better now, they have no metaphysical ability to tell you who God is or what is out there, because they haven't been there. And they're not going there. And if Jesus has not risen, then we're in the world without ultimate hope.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who is not a Christian but has done a great deal of research on the dying, tells in one of her situations of an eight-year-old boy who was dying from an inoperable brain tumor. The child was expressing his feelings in the pictures that he was drawing, as children and even adults do. In one of the pictures he particularly showed his feeling of helplessness. In the background of his picture was a house and sunshine and green grass and trees—a beautiful day. But in the foreground of his picture, large looming and menacing and sinister, was a picture of an army tank, with its barrel ready to fire. In the front of the barrel of that tank was a little tiny figure holding sign that simply said, "Stop!" Kubler Ross interpreted that as the boy's vision of death, that it was on happening a day which was beautiful, in which he wanted to go out and play but instead, right in his front yard, was this menacing thing of Death. What could one do in the face of such power but only hold up a little small sign, a meaningless sign that said, "Stop!" If there is no hope, we well understand the futility.

II. Not only is there sadness if Jesus is not risen but there is a devaluation of faith in Jesus going on in these disciples.

A devaluation of faith. Before the crucifixion, they had been calling Jesus "Messiah," "Christ." Now in verse 19 they refer to Him not as Messiah but as prophet. "He was a prophet." The Messiah would mean that He was God's anointed representative. He was anointed to be the prophet of God, the ideal and representative prophet who would speak God's Word to man. He

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

was anointed to be the ideal representative high priest who would bear man's sins and mediate between man and God. He was anointed to be the ideal and representative king who, on behalf of God, would rule over the human heart. These three offices were co-mingled and merged within Him—the ideal one, Messiah, prophet, priest, and king. God anointed Him. The oil had been poured upon Him, designating Him to hold these roles. That had been their faith, but now their faith is gone and He's back to being simply one among others—a prophet.

I'm sure I speak today to people whose faith in Jesus has been devalued. I'm sure there are people here who had a higher opinion and higher faith and trust and confidence in Jesus than perhaps you do right now.

How do we get that lower opinion of Him? It's when we're not convinced that He has risen. It's when we take our eyes off of Him and begin looking at other people. Certainly, in the news in the last few weeks there has been a lot of focus upon something other than the personality of Jesus.

I received a letter this week from a friend in Yugoslavia. He said, "The news here about the church in America is very bad. The atheists' propaganda is exploiting this situation against the Christians without mercy. We are being made to appear in the press as though Christians were people who lived in luxury off the offerings of the poor and were all immoral and didn't act true to their principles." Then he said, "It has given the church a great deal of difficulty in this land." He said, "I have preached a sermon on this theme 'Charisma Without Character Leads to Catastrophe.'"

I thought, "I don't know anyone who can put it any better than that." Charisma—this splendid ability to have a shining personality and glibness and effectiveness with people, without being backed by character, leads to catastrophe.

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

Jesus has the charisma. He is the anointed one of God. But He has character and He doesn't lead us to catastrophe. It's a time for the church today to refocus on who Jesus is.

Our faith gets devaluated in Jesus when we get away from the Scriptures and this is no longer burning in our hearts. It gets devaluated when we remove ourselves from vital companionship with God and with His people. It's devalued when we become embittered and our focus turns inward rather than outward and upward.

III. They were living with a devalued faith, and as a result, they were returning to the old life.

Heading out of Jerusalem, leaving on the third day, skeptics of the women and so disinterested in the story of the empty tomb that they themselves had not even bothered, first hand, to go check it out, the old life called.

The old life may call us. The old life of drugs or alcohol or immorality or self-centeredness or unforgiveness or hardness of heart. It's a strong pull of exertion on us. But there's something that day that makes their walk a life-changing walk. Instead of maintaining sadness and a devalued opinion of Christ and going back to their old life, something happens to them on the road that can happen to us. That is, first of all, Jesus is with us on the road of life. Jesus becomes present.

Have you ever noticed how this story fits with how Jesus ministers to us? We, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when He initially begins talking with us, do not recognize Him. He may begin talking to us through the witness of a friend. He may talk to us through kind of goose bumps we feel when we're in a service like this. He may talk to us through just an inner resonance in our heart that warms up when we open ourselves to sing a hymn or a gospel chorus or when we pray and just sense God's presence and we're not sure quite what it is because we've never felt anything quite like that before. But it's Jesus, who's going with us on the road to life

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

and appearing to us in the Scripture, appearing to us in prayer, appearing to us in worship, appearing to us through the witness of a friend. He is with us on the road to life and we need to open our lives and see that it is Him who seeks entrance into our lives.

I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it.” I’m going, “Amen! That’s true. God said it. I believe it. That settles it.” Then I saw somebody else that did every marvelous thing to that bumper sticker. They took a big red “X” and crossed out the middle phrase “I believe it,” so that it would simply read “God said it. That settles it.” I thought, “That’s got it right.” Because if God said it, it doesn’t matter at all whether I believe it, as to its truthfulness. If God said it, that settles it. If I believe it, all the better for me. If I don’t, tough! God still said it.

I can say, “You crazy people, to believe in the law of gravity! You just go ahead and believe it, but I don’t believe that.” My belief is immaterial. All that you’ve got to do to show that you’re right and I’m wrong and that there’s the objective truth of gravity is walk up to the top of one of the tall buildings and step off. Then go all the way down saying, “I don’t believe in gravity!” but that doesn’t settle the splat at the end of the jump!

God said it! Easter faith is Easter fact. It’s objective reality, whether I feel it or not. He’s walking with me on the road of life. He is with me always and He stays at my invitation. Because He has this habit—Jesus does—of showing up at my heart’s door and knocking. He doesn’t indefinitely knock. He’ll go away for a while, then come back and knock again. It’s just like that day with the two disciples. He walks with them for a while and they do not perceive who He is, so He is going to go further. He is going to leave them without revealing who He is. And the key comes when they say, “Abide with us. Stay with us.” It is that spirit, in our own heart, that unlocks the door and makes the full revelation of Jesus Christ available to us when we say, based upon that

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

impression, that the Holy Spirit gives us of Him, “Stay with me, Jesus. Let me open Your Word and let me hear Your Word proclaimed to me. Stay with me.”

Jesus makes a full revelation of Himself to any who will invite Him.

So the day becomes life-changing, because Jesus is with them on the road of life. And also, because Jesus then is with us, our direction in life is changed. The disciples had been on the road away from Jerusalem. Maybe I’m being mystical here. But in leaving Jerusalem, they were going down. It’s the only way you can go from Jerusalem—down. They were going down to Emmaus. That, to me, describes a life without the risen presence of Jesus—going down. When we meet Jesus, we get our direction changed. Instead of going down, we’re going up. Back to Jerusalem. And instead of going inside, with doubt and misgiving and self-centeredness, the Lord gives them the opportunity to go outside and say to them, “You’re going to be witnesses of Mine throughout all the world.” They do that. They change directions because they’ve met with the risen Lord.

The meeting with Jesus does change our destiny in life and in the life to come. When we believe in the risen Lord, we are no longer bystanders. We are committed to His cause. We therefore are Christians, not because it’s culturally convenient or because every once in a while we need to tip our hat in His direction, but if His risen life truly dominates us it’ll affect all three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. It’ll affect our understand and our approach and our use of His Word. It’ll affect our involvement in our service in the church, the body of Christ. It will shape our behavior at work and at school and at leisure. It will govern how we spend time and finances. It will control us. Because the resurrection, if true, demands nothing less than our total commitment.

Jesus has risen.

A LIFE-CHANGING WALK!

Luke 24

Closing Prayer

Our Lord, we have given testimony to that which the Holy Spirit—continually in our hearts—affirms. That the Father raised Jesus from the dead. We, likewise, who have put faith in Him, have been raised to walk in newness of life. There are friends here today who are really in need of a life-changing experience. Maybe they're not cognizant of that need because everything is going real well in life. Yet, Lord, how much greater life is when You're walking along, by our side. How much it shapes us and changes us. It, for one thing, takes us away from being a taker and makes us a giver. It teaches us the joy of service and not just the joy of success. Then, Lord, for those who are going through moments of life where their faith has been devalued or they're sad because of hurtful things that have happened in their experience, what a difference You do make in life. What a difference it is to know that You walk with us and are available to us and that our eyes, spiritually, can see You. We can walk with You. Thank You for that, Lord. Thank You for rising again from the dead. We commit our lives anew to You, that You might be Lord of this day and Lord of every moment. We pray, in Christ's name. Amen.