

The Centrality of the Gospel
 Luke 24:13-35
 Michael Felkins
 Grand Avenue Baptist Church
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Last Sunday we looked at how the atonement of Jesus purchased, what we called, real, biblical hope for sinners. Not a crossing of the fingers kind of hope but a confidence and assurance that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross, took the curse of death to the tomb, and then turned death inside out by His resurrection.

This morning we are going to look at how the death and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the gospel. And yet, although we read it, hear it, and have been told it over and over, we often still miss it, fail to believe it, and so, are not transformed by it.

In this passage, we will see the very disciples who walked with Jesus, miss the hope that was in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. These men walked with Jesus for three years, heard Him with their own ears, had coffee with Him every day, ate meals with Him every day, made pastoral visits with Him, heard Him preach God's word every day, saw Him heal the sick and raise the dead, and yet they still lost hope.

Basically, they failed to believe God's word. They failed to see Jesus in the Old Testament so they did not understand Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as fulfillment of the Old Testament and the ushering in of the New Covenant.

What they failed to understand was that all of the Bible points to Jesus. All roads of Scripture lead to Jesus life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. This means that the Gospel is the central message of the Bible.

I wonder how many of us understand that and live life in light of the heart of Scripture's message? I wonder how many of us lose hope because we do not see the person and work of Jesus as the heart of the Bible? Let's work through the text.

I. Missing the Gospel Leaves us Without Hope (vv. 13-19a)

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 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. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?"

These two disciples, one named Cleopas, were walking on the road to Emmaus and they were discussing all that had happened. They had seen Jesus crucified and buried. Then they had heard that three days later Jesus may have risen from the dead but they were not sure. They thought that perhaps Jesus was still dead and someone stole His body. They were sad and confused.

But, as Jesus often does, He begins to work in our lives and we never recognize Him. Jesus came alongside them. He kept them from recognizing Him. He engaged them in conversation and asked a very natural question for that day when someone began to walk with someone, *“What are you talking about?”*

Jesus knew what they were talking about. When Jesus asked a question, it was not because He did not know the answer. He is like a parent who knows the answer to a child’s question but engages the child on his level in order to draw the child out. That was what Jesus did. He drew His disciples out and let them express their grief and sadness about His death and their confusion over His resurrection. So, when Jesus engaged them they were shocked to know Jesus did not know of the events that had just occurred.

In reality, Jesus was the only One who knew what actually happened. They were the ones who did not know what happened. They missed the gospel. But Jesus drew them out with His question, *“What things?”*

Jesus was having to evangelize His own disciples. He allowed them to express their sadness and misunderstanding of His death so that He could move them toward hope.

Does Jesus ever have to do that with you? Does Jesus ever allow you to express your misunderstanding of Him, His ways, His purposes, His plans, and His gospel in order to lead you back to Him and then lead you back to hope? Does He ever have to allow you to express your sadness? Your anger? Aren’t you glad Jesus is patient with you and meets you where you are and walks with you through all of your confusion?

Brother and sister in Christ, you may be confused about life right now and not understand what Jesus is doing. You may not understand the pain, the sadness, the confusion, but the good news is Jesus does. In reality, He is the only One who understands and the good news is He will walk with you and take you to where you need to go.

We need to do what these disciples did—keep walking with Jesus. Don’t quit walking with Him. The problem is that many of us feel like the disciples and want to give up and give in to hopelessness. We often want to stop walking with Jesus and the church. We tend to withdraw when the darkness of life closes in on us and our sadness and depression overwhelm us. When our hope is gone we are tempted to stop walking with Jesus but we must remember that Jesus is the only One who really knows the situation.

You and I must not stop walking with Jesus when hope seems lost. Jesus will lead us back to Him and back to hope. He will teach us to see things from His perspective. When you can’t see His plan, trust His promises.

Friend perhaps you are here and you have been missing the Gospel your whole life. You have heard it and been to churches but now Jesus has your attention. Perhaps you’re not quite sure what to think but you know you have no hope. Let me encourage you to ask Jesus to open your eyes to His Gospel. Find a member of this church or a Christian friend to study the Scripture with you and ask Jesus to open your eyes.

II. The Gospel According to Cleopas Leaves Us Without Hope (vv. 19b-24)

“And they said to him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,’²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning,²³ and when 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.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

If *missing the Gospel leaves us without hope*, then the *Gospel According to Cleopas* will also leave us without hope. The Gospel according to Cleopas has lots of gospel facts but no gospel hope. Listen to the Gospel of Cleopas and see if you can tell what's missing?

Cleopas started with Jesus' life and earthly ministry. He was right, Jesus was a man from Nazareth. Jesus was a man who was real flesh and blood. Next, he said Jesus was a prophet. In other words, Jesus was like the prophets of the Old Testament. He spoke the words of God as a prophet and did mighty works like Elijah or Ezekiel.

After Cleopas explained Jesus earthly life and ministry he told about Jesus tragic death. Instead of blaming Pilate and the Romans, he rightly said it was the chief priests and rulers who condemned Jesus to death and had Him crucified. It was Jesus' execution that broke their hearts. This was the reason they were so sad.

They were looking for the redeemer. They hoped Jesus was the One to redeem God's people. Yet, it was as if they did not understand their own words for to redeem means to purchase but obviously they never understand that Jesus' redemption was going to be by dying for their sin. They were lamenting because they loved Jesus although they did not completely understand Jesus.

Finally, Cleopas misunderstands Jesus' resurrection. Cleopas exhaled and inhaled and told Jesus that it had been three days and now the most extraordinary thing had happened. The women who were disciples went to the tomb and reported they saw angels and the tomb is empty. They said that Jesus had risen from the dead. Then Peter and John wanted to confirm what the women had said so they ran to the tomb and found it just as the women had told them.

Cleopas was not sure if the empty tomb was good news or bad news. It was simply a mystery. The tomb was empty but where could Jesus be? Perhaps someone stole the body? Perhaps Jesus never really was dead? All they knew was that Jesus was gone and it was all very confusing and disheartening. They were not sure what to believe.

So, you see, the Gospel of Cleopas is really no Gospel at all. The word "*Gospel*" means "*good news*" and there is no good new in Cleopas' Gospel.

The good news of the Gospel is that by faith that we believe Jesus is the Son of God, the God-Man, the Prophet, Priest, and King who came and died as a substitute on the cross for sinners to pay to God their debt of sin. Jesus received the punishment for our sin on the cross, was buried in a tomb, and rose from the grave on the third day defeating death and Hell. You see, without the resurrection, there is no good news.

Friend perhaps you are here this morning and you have had the facts of the Gospel all wrong. Perhaps you did not understand that Jesus came to earth with the expressed purpose to die for sinners and rise from the dead. Jesus blazed a trail to God for His people and that was what He was about to tell them in vv. 25-27. A half-Gospel is not Gospel and certainly leaves you with no hope. You need to believe the Gospel according to Jesus, then you will have hope in life and in death.

III. The Gospel According to Jesus Give Us Hope (vv. 25-35)

"And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

It must have been a long way to Emmaus because vv. 26-27 tells us Jesus went through the whole Old Testament showing how it was about Himself and how the Christ must suffer, die, and rise from the dead.

Jesus began His Bible lesson with a mild rebuke of His disciples, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”* The words *“O foolish ones”* literally means, *“O clueless ones.”*

Just picture the scene, Jesus staring His disciples in the eyes and telling them they were clueless about the word of God. They lacked faith in the word of God and now the very *Word of God Incarnate* was about to explain to them the *written Word of God*. Wouldn't you have loved to hear the sermon Jesus preached to them?

I wonder what Jesus said to them. I would love to have heard that sermon. I wonder if Jesus told them how God was the first One to preach the Gospel in the Old Testament after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden? I wonder if He reminded them that Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head but His heel would be bruised. I wonder if He reminded them that the promise made to Abraham was actually about the Redeemer and was the very essence of the Gospel? I wonder if He walked through Leviticus and the sacrificial system and how all of the sacrifices pointed to the death of the Messiah who was the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world? I wonder if He quoted Isaiah 53 verbatim and told them that this was about the Messiah. I wonder if he reminded them of the prophet Jeremiah's words that said the Messiah would usher in a New Covenant that would remove the heart of stone from sinners and put a new heart into the people of God and all because the Redeemer suffered, died on the cross, and rose from the dead? I wonder if He told them that everything happened just as God had planned it before time began? Jesus' disciples needed room in their theology for a suffering and rising Savior.

Notice what happened after Jesus had preached His sermon-- their hope was renewed. Verses 28-35 tell us that they did not want to leave their new friend because His words put hope back in their hearts. He had put the wind of the Spirit back in their sails. Yet, it was not until they were breaking bread with Jesus that Jesus allowed them to understand who He was. Verse 31 says *their eyes were opened*, they recognized Him and then He vanished.

How is hope restored to God's people? Is it by some mystical experience or waiting from some extra-special-revelation from God or by the plain reading, teaching, and preaching of the word of God? Friends, hope is restored is by the plain, reading, teaching, and expository, Christ-centered, gospel-centered, preaching of the word of God.

Verse 32 says, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”* It did not say our hearts burned within us when He *laid hands on us or sprinkled us with water or baptized us or spoke in tongues or ran some special program of evangelism or held a revival*. No, it says, when, *“he opened to us the Scriptures.”*

It is the Spirit of God taking the word of God and driving out doubt and filling our hearts with conviction of who Jesus, assurance of our salvation, faith and trust that we are children of God and that God rules over all things and is working all things for our good and His glory in Christ.

Notice what they did when their hope was restored in vv. 33-35, *“And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”*

They began to tell others that Jesus was alive! Hope does not remain hidden it like a light in a dark cave. It drives out the darkness and the light of Christ moves into dark places to keep driving out the darkness.

In closing let me say there are some prominent preachers and pastors today that want to disconnect the Old Testament from the New Testament. They say that the Old Testament is irrelevant and not applicable. They treat the Old Testament as if it is only background material to the New Testament.

Friends do not believe a word of it. Pastor Eric and I could preach every day for the rest of our lives out of the Old Testament and never exhaust the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is in it. If Jesus clung so fearlessly to the Old Testament as the witness of His life, death, and resurrection, shouldn't we? We need to wear our Gospel Glasses of faith so will see that all roads lead to Jesus and to the cross and to His resurrection.

The church that holds the Old Testament and the New Testament together as the complete witness of the Gospel is a church that has steel in its spine. Its members are transformed by the Gospel. This church and its members become bold witnesses of the Gospel. They know that because their Savior is alive that they truly live. They have great assurance in their Savior and eternal life.

This means you can live life with great assurance because Jesus lives in you. It means that as you draw near to God to see Jesus in it, the fire of the resurrection is rekindled in your heart. You will live as a bold witness for Christ. What we are going to see next Sunday and as we move into Acts in Foundations study is that the church became bold witnesses for Christ.

But not only do we live well because of the resurrection we also die well. In my reading I ran across some accounts of the dying words of saints past. Listen to some of their dying words. D. L. Moody, the evangelist, publisher, and founder of the Moody Bible Institute said, *"Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now."* John Newton, the pastor and author of the hymn Amazing Grace lay dying he said, *"My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior."* As hymn writer Frances Havergal was dying, her sister, Maria, record that *it was as if she looked up into heaven and saw her Lord. We watched her for ten minutes as if she was having an invisible meeting with her King. Then she tried to sing, but after one sweet high note, her voice failed, and she passed away.* As Scottish pastor Donald Cargill was about to be hung in 1685 for his faithfulness to Jesus, he said, *"This is the most joyful day that I ever saw on earth. My joy is now begun which shall never be interrupted. I am no more terrified as death, because of my sin, than if I had never sinned, for all my sins are freely pardoned and washed thoroughly away through the priceless blood of Jesus Christ."*

Friend, I hope you can say these words in life or in death. The Heidelberg Catechism from 1563 helps us summarize solid understanding of the Gospel. Question One asks: What is my only hope in life and in death? *My only hope is that I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully paid for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil. He preserves me in such a way, that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; indeed, He makes all things work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also preserves me and assures me of eternal life. He also makes me whole heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.*