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# The King is Risen!

A sermon on Luke 23:50-24:44 by Coty Pinckney, Desiring God Community Church, Charlotte, NC, 2/11/2007

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Think back on the hardest day of your life. A day when your hopes were dashed. A day when your future looked bleak indeed. Perhaps this was the day of the death of a loved one, or a serious illness for a family member. Or perhaps this was a day of a great failure – yours, or another's that hurt you.

Remember the suffering. Think back on the despair.

That's where we left the disciples two weeks ago when we looked at the crucifixion. As Peter said to Jesus, "We have left everything and followed you" (Mark 10:28). And indeed they had. They left their homes, their fathers, their mothers, their brothers, their employment. They left everything. Furthermore, we know that Jesus' family thought Him to be out of His mind (Mark 3:21). What do you think the families of the disciples thought about their decision to leave all to follow this rabbi from Nazareth?

But they endured all that, believing that Jesus embodied the hope of the nation, believing that God had promised just such a Christ, just such a Messiah long ago. They believed that at long last He had sent this Messiah to His people. So Peter had declared to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus had proclaimed His future reign, with power and glory, and they believed that too. Here, they thought, is the promised King. He will reign forever.

Furthermore, Jesus had promised that they would reign also:

**I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke 22:29-30**

That was their hope.

But now they have seen this almighty King stripped, scourged, and scorned. They have heard the mockery; they have witnessed the humiliation. They saw Him hanging on the cross. They saw him die. They saw His corpse.

Think again on your own hardest day. Do you sense what these disciples felt? Have you felt that loss, that despair, that complete absence of hope?

The burial underlines the seeming finality of death. Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council that had condemned Jesus, asks Pilate for Jesus' body. Evidently Joseph was absent when Jesus was condemned. Perhaps he had walked out of what was an illegal meeting. In any event, by showing publicly that he disagrees with the Council's decision, Joseph takes a clear risk in ministering to the body of the crucified prophet.

Joseph's actions provide a slight comfort, no doubt, to the disciples. But they don't provide hope. There is no hope.

Or so it appears.

From before the beginning of time, God had a plan.

- Just as when Joseph was in an Egyptian prison,
- Just as when the Israelites were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea,
- Just as when the Babylonians devastated Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple,
- Just as when Daniel was left to the mercy of hungry lions

God had a plan. God was bringing about good – the greatest imaginable good – out of despair. There *was* hope – and they should have seen the hope – but they kept their eyes closed.

The women have seen where Joseph laid Jesus' body. They plan to pay their respects to their beloved master by anoint the body after the Sabbath.

So early in the morning on the first day of the week, they arrive. To their shock, they see that the stone is removed! They look in – there is no body! No Jesus!

"What's happened?" they ask. "Where is he? Has someone stolen His body? Why would they do that?"

Suddenly two dazzlingly bright men appear – they are angels, we are told in verse 23. Now the women are completely overcome. They fall on the ground before these majestic creatures. The angels say:

**"Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." Luke 24:5-7**

The angels say, "Jesus is alive! Why should He hang around a tomb? Don't you remember? He told you Himself that he would be betrayed, be killed – and would rise. It has all happened just as He said!"

The women do remember what Jesus had said. Luke records such sayings in 9:22, 44, and 18:31-34. Indeed, Luke commented in 18:34 that the disciples

**"understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."**

They couldn't imagine their king dying. And so they couldn't hear the promise of the resurrection.

The women go back to the disciples, and tell them the news - but the disciples don't believe them. They are in despair. They have been hurt – and they won't listen to possible good news for fear of being let down again.

Have you been in such situations yourself? When you won't even listen to news that could bring you out of despair?

Peter, however, must check out the report for himself. Verse 12 reports that he runs to the tomb. He doesn't see the angels, but he notices something the women didn't talk about: The grave clothes! Joseph had wrapped the naked body of Jesus in linen cloths. If someone had stolen the body, they surely would have carried Him away still in those cloths. But Peter sees the cloths lying there. There is no body. But the wrappings are present. What kind of thief would unwrap the body before stealing it?

Peter leaves the tomb confused, marveling at what has happened, and wondering: What does it all mean?

In verse 13, Luke shifts the scene to two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They too have seen Jesus die; they too have heard the report from the women concerning the empty tomb. They discuss all this on the two-to-three hour walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus approaches them, hears their conversation, and asks them about it.

One of the two, Cleopas, is amazed that this stranger doesn't know about the talk of the town:

**Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Luke 24:18**

Jesus simply says, "What things?"

Cleopas answers with words that are quite revealing. As I read these, ask yourself: What is the state of mind of Cleopas and all the disciples?

**"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." Luke 24:19-24

Do you hear the lost hope, the despair? "Jesus was a great man – *the* great man, so we thought - the one we have all been waiting for, the one who would redeem the nation! Yet our very leaders rejected Him, and handed him over to be killed. There's this report that He is alive. And the tomb is indeed empty. But if He is alive – surely He would show Himself to His disciples! None of the disciples has seen Him. How can He be alive?"

What does Jesus say?

**"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. Luke 24:25-27**

Let me pause here for a while in the telling of the story. Up to this point in Luke's account, there has been no report of anyone seeing the risen Jesus. (Cleopas and his friend have seen Him, but they don't know it.) They do not believe that Jesus is alive. They act just like us in our hard times: wallowing in despair, not believing.

Ask yourself: Why *should* the disciples believe that Jesus has risen?

Luke has given three pieces of evidence so far. We have this evidence too. So let us learn from their disbelief, so that we might believe in our hard times.

## The Scriptures

The first type of evidence is the Scriptures. As we noted, Jesus said in verse 25 that they were, "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." Then from Moses – that is, the first five books of the Old Testament – and from the prophets, He helped them understand "in **all** the Scriptures the things concerning himself." He specifically said in verse 26 that the Scriptures show that the Christ must suffer and enter into glory.

Which Scriptures is He talking about?

We can point to specific texts that promise the coming King, and can point to others that tell us of the suffering and death of God's righteous servant. For example:

- Psalm 2:7-8 The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.
- Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

But Jesus is saying much more than "there are a few texts that refer specifically to me." He is saying **all** the Scriptures point to Him. The entire storyline of the Bible, God's plan of redemption, points to Him. From God's statement to the serpent in the garden that a descendant of Eve would crush Satan's head, to God rescuing Noah and his family from destruction through the ark, to God's promise to Abraham that all the families of the nations would be blessed through his descendant, to the picture on Mount Moriah of Abraham about to sacrifice his one and only son, to God's bringing His people out of Egypt, to the sacrificial system, to the cleanliness code, to the annual cycle of feasts and festivals - the Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles – *the entire* history of redemption, the entire historic

picture of God calling His rebellious people, the Israelites, disciplining them, keeping a faithful remnant – all of this story points to Jesus.

The entire Old Testament is the story of God's plan to magnify His glory through His plan of redemption. And the death and resurrection of Jesus is the very heart of that story.

So certainly we can point to key Scriptures that contain specific prophecies about Messiah coming, suffering, and reigning. Such Scriptures speak directly of Jesus. But much more importantly, the entire storyline of the Old Testament points to Jesus, His death and resurrection. *All* the Scriptures point to Jesus.

So Cleopas and the other disciple were foolish not to believe that the Messiah must suffer, die, and be resurrected. For they had the Scriptures. They should have known.

What about us? We are foolish not to believe in our day of despair.

- Not to believe that we have a role in fulfilling that very storyline
- Not to believe that God will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In what sense are we foolish? Because God is intent on filling the earth with the knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea.

He is working out His good purposes, always. And He tells us throughout His Word that He uses His people to accomplish His plan.

So this is the first type of evidence for the resurrection: The Scriptures – specifically, understanding the story line of the Bible. Such evidence was important for the disciples in their difficult days, and is similarly important for us.

In addition to the Scriptures, why should the disciples have believed that Jesus would rise?

## Jesus' Very Words

Jesus told them Himself! His very words spoke to this particular situation. Look again at verses 6 and 7:

**The angels say: "Remember how He told you . . . that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."**

We already looked at Luke's record of those earlier prophecies of Jesus, and Luke's explanation that the disciples understood none of it at the time.

Clearly, the disciples should have believed; they should have held on in hope to what Jesus had to say, even though they were confused and disturbed by witnessing the fulfillment of His words.

What is the equivalent for us today of this evidence?

Consider: Jesus had spoken specifically to this point. He told them explicitly that He was going to be betrayed, condemned, and killed – and that He would rise three days later. No guesswork was involved. Their task was only to believe.

Just so for us. In addition to the broad storyline of Scriptures that we know God is working out, God in His Word tells us specific truths that apply to our situations. Such as:

- John 16:33 In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
- 2 Timothy 3:12: All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
- Matthew 5:11-12 11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
- 1 Peter 5:8-10 Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of

suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

- Philippians 4:19 My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Through Jesus' words, God spoke directly to the crisis of despair the disciples faced.

He speaks directly to our crises of despair also.

The women at the empty tomb needed the angels to remind them of Jesus' words. How will you remember?

Store them in your heart! Be in the Word daily! Remind each other of Scriptural truth!

The Apostle Peter writes that he wants to stir up his readers by way of reminder (2 Peter 1:13). Are you doing this for others? Are others doing this for you? Brothers and sisters, this is a key reason for the existence of the church. How are we doing?

So: Cleopas and his friend should have known overall story line of Bible, and therefore they should have seen how the storyline applied to their situation: Christ *had* to suffer, to die, and to be raised. We too need to apply the storyline to our situation.

Also, Cleopas and his friend should have remembered the specific promises Jesus made concerning their particular situation. So should we.

There is one more piece of evidence that Cleopas and the others had at this point. What is it?

## The Empty Tomb

The body is not there! The linen cloths *are* there. There is no good explanation for these facts. They know that none of Jesus' disciples took the body. And why would Jesus' enemies take it? And even if they did, why did they unwrap the body?

The empty tomb by itself does not provide conclusive evidence for the resurrection. But it is a pointer – a pointer that should have led these disciples to reflect on the storyline of Scripture, and to remember Jesus' specific words.

What is the equivalent of the empty tomb for us today?

The empty tomb for the disciples was evidence in the present of God working out His storyline. The empty tomb is evidence of God's faithfulness to His specific promises. The empty tomb serves as a reminder, a prod, that should have caused them to remember what they already knew. They should have thought, "Yes, a sacrifice was needed. And Isaiah says God's servant will suffer and die, yet will see His offspring. And Jesus Himself said that He would suffer, die, and rise again! Yes, I see it now! It all makes sense! This had to happen!"

What is the equivalent for us?

God in His mercy sometimes gives us glimpses of the fulfillment of His promises and the advance of His storyline. He sometimes provides us with windows into His sovereign working of all things together for His good and our glory. We never know all that God is doing. But sometimes He gives us encouragement through allowing us to see in part how He is working out His good purposes.

Sometimes He gives us such glimpses through important events in our lives. In my life, one of those important events occurred 25 years ago. I had been successful again and again in so many areas of my life. But I had failed at marriage. Our marriage was falling apart. This was one of the moments of greatest despair in my life. But I can now look back on that moment with profound gratitude that God sovereignly took me through that despair, opened my heart and mind to my need for repentance, and thus used that time clearly for His glory and my good.

That was a huge turning point in my life. But God also uses seemingly unimportant events to display the workings of His grace. About ten years ago I applied for a job in Kenya, and was one of three candidates shortlisted for the position. The employer flew the three finalists to Nairobi for interviews. I enjoyed the interview, but enjoyed even more being able to see our dear friend Mary Kitiku in the week before her wedding. I did not get the job – but it seemed that God arranged for me to have a free trip to Nairobi so that I could encourage Mary in those days before her marriage.

We need to hear these empty tomb stories. We need to hear incidences of God's faithfulness in our lives. We need to hear of the big events, such as our coming to Christ, and the little events, such as how He used something you said offhand to glorify His Name. We need to hear how He takes our sins and uses them for His glory and our good. Are you telling such stories? Are you listening for them? Do you intentionally recall such stories from your own life?

Such stories are the modern equivalent of the empty tomb.

Let us now return to the story of Luke chapter 24. Cleopas had all three of those pieces of evidence, yet he still did not believe. He had heard of the empty tomb – but he wanted to see Jesus Himself.

Now, the desire to see Jesus is good. But failing to believe in Him simply because we don't see Him is wrong. Jesus will say to Thomas:

**"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29**

But Luke now goes to great lengths to assure us that these followers did indeed see the risen, physical, glorified body of Jesus.

Since the hour is late, Cleopas and his companion invite the traveler to stay with them. He agrees. At dinner, when Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and gives it to them, they finally recognize their Lord. Jesus is risen indeed – and He is with them! He is blessing their bread! The Lord is risen!

And then He vanishes.

This news is too good to keep to themselves. So they return to Jerusalem right away. They find the disciples – but before they can even tell their story, the disciples say, "The Lord has risen indeed, and appeared to Simon!" (verse 34).

So Jesus appears to Cleopas and his companion, to Peter, and then to the entire group of disciples. For while they are still discussing these appearances, Jesus suddenly stands in their presence. They are still frightened, doubting. But Jesus assures them:

**"See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Luke 24:39**

His hands and feet are pierced. He has flesh and bones. He has a real physical body. He then eats fish.

This is no ghost. This is not simply a bodiless spirit. This is the risen body of Jesus Himself. He is changed. But He is physical.

So Cleopas and the disciples get the evidence they want: They see Jesus! He is risen indeed! They believe the resurrection.

They now have four pieces of evidence:

- The storyline of Scripture
- The specific statements of Jesus predicting His death and resurrection
- The empty tomb
- Seeing Jesus Himself

The last is the clincher. In their moment of despair, Jesus appears. He eats with them. They believe.

What about us? We don't see Jesus with our eyes. Our situation is like that of Cleopas before He recognizes Jesus. We have these pieces of evidence:

- The storyline of Scripture
- The specific promises of Scripture that apply to our particular situation
- Evidence in the world around us of God's hand at work

And we wait for Jesus to come again physically, suddenly, and bodily, with power and great glory. That may happen soon. At that moment, we will see the risen Lord with our eyes.

In the meantime, we have one more piece of evidence that Cleopas and other disciples did not have:

## The Evidence of Disciples Themselves

Critics have tried to discount reports of the resurrection, sometimes suggesting that the hopeful disciples had a mass vision of the risen Jesus. But Luke clearly shows that the disciples are *not* hopeful. They did *not* anticipate the resurrection, and are skeptical even when the first pieces of evidence arise: the empty tomb, Jesus' opening up of Scripture on the road to Emmaus.

The women did not expect Jesus to have risen. The disciples did not. Cleopas walked with Jesus and still did not expect it. Certainly there was no mass wishful thinking.

But then these skeptical disciples saw Jesus, and everything changed. They then devoted their lives unto death for the truth that Jesus rose from the grave.

This is a powerful piece of evidence for us today. For imagine: if even *one* disciple had anticipated Jesus resurrection, wouldn't he have made a big deal of it?

Consider: When things come out the way you anticipate, don't you tell people? I've told a few people: "Yes, I thought the Colts would win the Super Bowl. And they did." I like saying that. I like making good predictions. But that statement is only a half truth.

Once they beat the Ravens, I then thought they would win the Super Bowl. But my son Matthew had us record our predictions at the beginning of the playoffs. The evidence there. At that point, I picked Baltimore, not Indianapolis.

The point is this: My memory, and my reports to others, tend to emphasize what I got right, not what I got wrong! But Luke, in making his investigations among the eyewitnesses, in talking with those disciples who were still living, didn't find anyone saying, "Oh, yes, I knew all along Jesus would rise from dead." Not at all. They all said, "I was stunned! I didn't expect it! I couldn't believe it!"

The disciples were not deluded through wishful thinking into seeing a risen Christ. They didn't expect it. Yet they knew beyond all doubt that Jesus was alive. They gave their lives for that truth. This change in the disciple's lives is key evidence that we have – and that Cleopas did not have.

## Conclusion

Next week we will consider the implications of the resurrection for us, particularly from last five verses of the chapter.

But for us today:

Until Jesus comes again or you die, you will not see Him face to face. But God commands all men everywhere to repent, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friends: Jesus is risen from the dead. He is *alive*. He reigns today at the Father's right hand. The evidence is overwhelming:

- The storyline of the Bible
- Jesus' statements while He was on earth
- The empty tomb

- Jesus' appearances
- The reactions of the disciples

He is risen! He is living, active, and interceding for His people.

Do **you** know Him as risen?

Apart from Him: There is no hope. For He is the one who conquered death. Apart from Him, you are enslaved to sin. You are headed to death. By trusting in Him, in Him alone, you can be united with Him in His death *and resurrection*. You can be raised to walk in newness of life, to the joy of knowing that the risen, reigning King loves you beyond imagining.

So believe. Trust Him. And then, at your lowest point, when all seems lost, at your moment of deepest despair:

- Remember the Bible's storyline
- Remember God's promises
- Remember the specific evidence that God has given of His power at work around you
- Remember the evidence of the risen Christ
- Remember the change disciples.

Remembering, then long for His appearing. Amen, come Lord Jesus!

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This sermon was preached on 2/11/2007 at Desiring God Community Church in Charlotte, NC. Darrell Bock's *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Baker, 1994) was helpful.

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