

Easter message

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THE CROSS AND THE CROWN

LUKE 24:13-35

I.

We appreciate all of your prayers and cards and expressions of concern in the past couple of weeks. As most of you know, my mother passed away about eleven days ago at age 92. She had been living independently in her own house in fairly good health and driving around town until recently. For about a month she had been complaining about stomach problems. Doctors were uncertain initially about the problem.

They ordered a scan of her stomach area. It looked like a cyst and a tear in her intestines were the main problems. So they scheduled surgery. It appeared that her condition was very treatable. But when they opened her up, they discovered cancer throughout her abdominal region. The surgeon sewed her back up. It did not look good. The doctor thought that her condition was terminal. We did not know what deadline that meant. So we scheduled flights for the following week.

A couple of days later an oncologist examined her and recommended treatment that could extend her life by a couple of years. The situation became a little more complicated and confusing. The surgeon urged against doing that. My brothers were not wanting to rule out further treatment, but my mother was adamant about not wanting to have to deal with tubes down her throat and chemotherapy. It was unclear how long she had to live.

The situation facing the disciples of Jesus 2000 years ago also involved a terminal case of a loved one. It was considerably more confusing and stressful than the circumstances that we faced. Jesus was a young man, and His followers did not anticipate that He was going to be killed. They had hopes that Jesus was going to usher in the Messianic kingdom. They had given up a significant part of their lives to follow Him. But on the day of the Passover, He was crucified. What happened?

Suddenly the past, the present and the future all became cloudy. The apostles were bewildered. They were confused. They were in despair. They needed someone to explain to them what had happened and what it meant.

It is for this reason that the incident recorded in Luke's gospel, in which the Lord Himself provided the interpretation for the recent events, had such significance to the disciples. Our understanding of that incident also holds the promise of giving insight into the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection for us.

II.

In vv. 13-24 of Luke #24, which is found on pp. 884 & 885 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we learn of THE CONFUSION ABOUT JESUS AND THE CROSS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE CONFUSION ABOUT JESUS...) We are told that two followers of Jesus were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was a few miles west of Jerusalem, on that first Easter Sunday.

The fact that there were two disciples present for this incident may have significance, in that the Old Testament law required the testimony of at least two witnesses for something to be established as factual. These men were evidently returning to their home after fulfilling their Biblical responsibility to be present at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. They had awareness of the crucifixion of Jesus and of the reports about an empty tomb. They were talking about these events as they walked, no doubt trying to figure out what it all meant.

According to vv. 15 & 16, **"While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him."** The implication is that God intervened to keep these men from recognizing Jesus. The reason for this intervention seems to be related to the instruction that He was about to give them.

First, Jesus asks about what they are discussing. One of the two is named Cleopas. A second century tradition claims that he was the brother of Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. Perhaps that is why his name is mentioned. It is not essential to the story. His name may have been known to the early Christian community.

Cleopas responds to the question from Jesus and describes the crucifixion and the report of the empty tomb. In v. 21 he identifies the real source of their confusion. He says, **"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."**

The irony is that this is just what Jesus had done. By His death He had provided redemption for Israel. He had provided a redemption from the penalty of sin. They had been hoping for a redemption from Roman rule.

The word "redeem" means **"to deliver upon payment of a price."** When it was used of God in the Old Testament, it had a slightly different meaning. It was not expected that the sovereign God would have to pay a literal price for anything. Rather it was understood to mean that God, in a figurative sense, would put out extra effort to accomplish something.

For example, in Isaiah in a context that speaks of God delivering His Jewish people from captivity in Babel, He says in #44 v. 22 (ISAIAH 44:22), **"I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you."**

The redemption of Israel and the redemption of all of humanity, however, involved a more literal meaning of the term. For Jesus Christ had just made a tremendous sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind. The Son of God had become a man to die on the cross. The redemption price was His blood. (PROJECTOR OFF)

That was not what the followers of Jesus had expected would happen. Their expectations were totally different. When they began to recognize Jesus as the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, they focused on passages that spoke of Him as a conquering hero. They looked at Scriptures that spoke of the Messiah coming as the Savior who would deliver the nation from all of its enemies and who would defeat the bad guys.

Thus, in the same Book of Isaiah, they focused on verses like #11 v. 4. (PROJECTOR ON--- ISAIAH 11:4) That text reads, **"...but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked."** The Christ followers expected and hoped that Jesus was going to cast off

the yoke of Roman rule. They anticipated the coming of a Jewish kingdom ruled over by the righteous and holy Messiah.

The followers of Jesus either overlooked, or did not understand, passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, which spoke of a suffering servant who would bear the iniquities of His people. They ignored Jesus' own statements that He was going to die at the hands of the elders and the chief priests. They did not want to listen to such talk. This crucifixion and missing Messiah did not fit with their expectations, and they were confused and discouraged.

Sometimes the actions of Jesus and the work of God in our lives do not fit with our expectations either. We naturally have a tendency to focus on the positive words of the New Testament. (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPIANS 4:6) **"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (PHILIPPIANS 4:7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

Then there is the famous promise in Romans 8:28 (ROMANS 8:28): **"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."** Those promises in the Bible are good things to think about, and they are truths that we should embrace.

But the New Testament also speaks about trials that will be encountered by the people of God. There are Scriptures like 2 Timothy #3 v. 12 (2 TIMOTHY 3:12), which says, **"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."** We don't tend to make passages like these our "life verses." But we are bound for disappointment and confusion if we overlook them.

When health problems or persecution or death or financial reversals come our way, we can be--- and often are--- shocked and disappointed and confused. (PROJECTOR OFF) Perhaps we have marital problems or problems finding the right one to marry or disappointments in our career or failings at school or problems with our children's behavior. Perhaps our kids have health problems.

Our temptation in these situations is to get angry with God, or disappointed in Him. We are confused and discouraged because the Lord's sovereign ways have not matched up with our expectations. This is the problem that these two followers of Jesus had on the Easter Sunday as they walked on the road to Emmaus. They were confused about Jesus and what had happened to Him.

III.

In vv. 25-29 we encounter THE EXPLANATION OF JESUS ABOUT SUFFERING. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE EXPLANATION OF JESUS...) Jesus provides the necessary interpretation for these two followers to understand what has happened in the previous few days. In v. 25 He begins, "**And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?'**"

The root problem for these disciples was unbelief. They did not believe the Bible, or at least all that the Bible had to say about the Messiah. It is the Word of God, after all, that gave them, and that gives us, the necessary framework by which we can understand and interpret the important events of life.

The disciples believed the stuff in the Bible about the Messiah coming to earth to establish His kingdom. That was something to be believed. But they did not believe in ALL that the prophets had spoken. They did not believe that the Messiah also had to suffer.

We can be like that today in our approach to the Bible. We want to pick out of the Bible only the things that we want to hear. Some people in the world around us look at the Bible and point out those things that describe God as a God of love and forgiveness. They conveniently leave out of the picture those parts that describe God as a holy God and a Judge of unrighteousness. They don't like to think about His statements about the serious consequences of sin.

Even Christians can use the Bible to justify wrong behavior or to support a faulty theology. "The Bible says that what makes a person a Christian is simply faith in Christ. So I don't need to go to church, or it is OK to live with my girlfriend, or I can keep my addiction." Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. It is not on the basis of works or good behavior. But there are consequences to wrongdoing, and we cannot grow to know the God who loves us if we remain rebellious toward Him.

"The Bible says that I am responsible to provide for my family. So it is OK if I am not able to spend much time with my wife and kids. I work to provide them with the better things in life." We do have a responsibility to provide for our families. But that does not mean that we have to provide a TV and a computer for every room in the house. It does not mean that we have to have a new car for every family member and a huge house and a boat, if these luxuries come at the expense of fulfilling our Biblical responsibilities to spend time and be there for our family members.

"God is a God of healing. So if I use the right formula and have enough faith and go to the right Christian leader, God must heal me of my ailment." God does sometimes graciously heal us of our physical problems, but He does not always do that. He allowed His Son to die on the cross. He allowed His apostles to suffer difficult deaths.

In v. 26 in our passage Jesus said, "**Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?**" Exactly what He meant by "His glory" is uncertain. He could have been talking about the coming ascension into heaven, or about His resurrection from the grave and possession of a resurrection body.

Luke goes on to describe what Jesus did next: "**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.**" What a Bible study that must have been--- the Son of God Himself explaining the meaning of the Bible. He apparently brought out key passages to explain the meaning of the events that had recently come to pass. He did it by teaching from the Scriptures that they already had in their possession. I can just picture them saying, "Wow, how come I never saw that before?" Still they did not realize that it was Jesus who was speaking to them.

We may not have Jesus physically present to explain the Scriptures to us, but we do have the Holy Spirit. Earlier Jesus had promised that after He left, He would send the Holy Spirit to guide His followers into spiritual truth. Today we have the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. If we are spending time in the Bible, the promise from God is that the Holy Spirit will help us to understand what we are studying.

The three individuals finally arrived at Emmaus, which was the destination of Cleopas and his friend. Jesus acted as if He would go further, but the two disciples asked Him to stay with them. The custom of politeness dictated that Jesus would not invite Himself in with these two men unless they asked Him to join them. The nuance of the Greek verb at the beginning of v. 29 suggests that the two strongly urged Jesus to stay with them. He did stay and join them for a meal.

IV.

In vv. 30-35 in our passage we come to THE REVELATION BY JESUS OF HIMSELF. (IV. THE REVELATION OF JESUS OF HIMSELF) According to v. 30, "**When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.**" Normally it was expected that the master of the house would

serve as the host of the meal--- if indeed this was the home of one of the two men. But Jesus was such a master of the situation that He took on the role of host. It seems as if the two men were so enthralled with Jesus that they did not even think about the possibility that He was displaying any impropriety.

Verse 31: "**And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. and he vanished from their sight.**" Notice the form of the verb that was carefully chosen here. "Their eyes were opened." Not "they opened their eyes." The implication is that either Jesus or God the Father or the Holy Spirit was responsible for the opening of their eyes. Perhaps Jesus did it by revealing His nail-scarred hands as He broke the bread for them. Clearly the revelation of Jesus' identity was not the result of any action of the two men. When they did recognize Jesus, He disappeared. He instantly vanished. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There are people today who have also walked with Jesus and have never realized it. They have been married to Christians, or they have been raised by Christians, or they have produced children who have become Christians, or they have rubbed shoulders with Christians at the office. Perhaps they have gone to church and heard Christ explained to them from the Bible. Yet they have never really recognized Christ. The light has never really gone on in their mind. The reason is that their eyes have been kept shut.

Perhaps there is someone here today whose eyes the Lord is seeking to open. He wants to have a relationship with you, and He is revealing Himself to you right now through this study of the Bible. You sense that what is being explained is true, and you are beginning to understand, and you feel a conviction that you need a relationship with God through Jesus. If that should be the case, your responsibility is simply to believe. You need to place your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, recognizing that He died on the cross in your place to pay the penalty for your sin and that He rose again from the dead. The moment that you truly believe that in your heart of hearts, you will become a true Christian.

When these two guys in our story recognized Jesus and realized that it was He who had explained the Scriptures to them, they could not contain their excitement. Even though evening was approaching, they headed back up to Jerusalem. My guess is that they ran much of the way. They found the other followers of Jesus and described what it was that had happened to them.

V.

Consider finally THE CRUCIAL LESSON. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. THE CRUCIAL LESSON) In my analysis, the key verse in this passage is the statement of Jesus in v. 26: "**Was it not necessary that the Christ should**

suffer these things and enter into his glory?" The two men on the road to Emmaus, and their friends back in Jerusalem, were in a state of sadness and confusion and despair because they did not understand this principle. Jesus had explained it to His followers before the crucifixion on several occasions. It was contained in the Old Testament as well. But they did not get it.

This principle of v. 26 about suffering coming before glory was true of the experience of godly believers in the Old Testament. Abraham was the father of the nation of Israel. He was highly honored and richly rewarded for his faith. But Abraham experienced a good deal of suffering in his life. God had promised him a special son. The Lord had given him a name that means "father of many nations." But he was 100 years old before he got his promised son. Because God called him to go to the land of Canaan, he had to move hundreds of miles away from his homeland and most of his relatives--- too far for even yearly visits to the relatives he was leaving behind. He was faced with great temptations, which he did not always handle well. He twice tried to pass his wife off as being his sister, which got him into trouble. He took his wife's maid in an attempt to bear the child of promise. That also had negative consequences.

Then there was Moses, who led the children of Israel to the Promised Land. He wrote the first five books of the Bible. His name is honored today by Jews and Christians. But Moses also experienced suffering. He had to flee for his life from the royal Egyptian family which raised him. He spent forty years in the wilderness as a result of killing an Egyptian before God called him to lead his people out of Egypt. Then he spent the last forty years of his life leading a grumbling, disobedient, unappreciative people in the wilderness.

We could also look at Job and Jacob and Joseph and others in the Old Testament who experienced much suffering before they entered into any experience of glory. But what Jesus specifically pointed out to the two men on the road to Emmaus was what the Old Testament said about the suffering of the Messiah. Probably He talked about Genesis #3 and Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Yes, it was true that the Messiah would at some point come as a conquering hero and as a reigning king. It was also true that the Messianic kingdom would be established on earth. But before the crown must come the cross. Before the crown must come the cross. Good Friday happens before Easter.

That principle also proved to be true in the experience of the eleven remaining apostles of Jesus. All of them but one died the death of martyrs. The other, the Apostle John, was sent into exile on the barren island of Patmos. The Apostle Paul was executed for his Christian convictions. Before the crown must come the cross. Triumph comes only after tribulation.

When I was in seminary, the president of my school was a man by the name of John Walvoord. In the heady world of academia many students regarded his position as the apex of Christian success. Not all of them knew the story about his family. He had four sons. One of them died as a child. Another was retarded. Another son graduated from medical school. A day or two after that graduation, he was killed in a car accident, leaving a wife and children behind. First there is tribulation. Then there is triumph.

Suffering also may come across our path. The crown does not come without the cross. We follow Someone who achieved His greatest victory by dying on a cross. But He did it for a purpose--- that we might have eternal life.

Fortunately, in the midst of our trials, we are not left alone. The One who suffered the most has promised to be with us. In the New Testament Book of Hebrews (HEBREWS 14:14) we are given this encouragement in #14: **"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (HEBREWS 4:15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (HEBREWS 4:16) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."**

We have also been given a promise that there is a purpose for our sufferings and that the causes of our stress and confusions serve a divine purpose. Sometimes we get a glimpse of that purpose this side of heaven. Sometimes we do not.

When it became clear that my mother's time on earth was very limited, I tried to move up our flights from Wednesday to Monday. There were no more openings on our airline on Monday. So I had to change the reservations for Suzy and Rob and me to Tuesday. We arrived at my mom's home in north central Wisconsin on Tuesday evening. She seemed to recognize us. Suzy sang for her. We prayed. The next morning she passed into eternity in our presence.

Another brother set up an appointment with the funeral director for that afternoon. When all four of us brothers and our wives showed up, the director told us that we had 30 minutes to do up an obituary and get it into the weekly paper for publication the next day. We just made the deadline. It seemed important that people in the community know about the service.

We scheduled it for the afternoon of the following Sunday, which was Palm Sunday. My mother's pastor had a conflict, but she had told him that she wanted me to lead the service. So that was OK. The church building was available. All but two of the grandchildren were able to come. Our Scott was able to get a flight to Minneapolis on Friday. One of his cousins was getting done with college classes in the Twin Cities and could give him a ride from the airport to Wisconsin. It seemed right to have the service on Palm Sunday, which is associated in the Christian calendar with a time of rejoicing.

On Thursday we notified as many relatives as we could about the service. Many were able to come. On Friday I prepared a message based on John 14, which I entitled "Fear Not." I submitted it to the church for the funeral bulletin. On Friday I was going through some of my mom's papers. I discovered a brief autobiography in which she said that her favorite verse was Isaiah #41 v. 10. I looked it up and read these words: **"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God."**

On Sunday morning Suzy and I and another brother went to an early service at a Baptist church in town. The funeral director met us at the door and sat with us in the service. He and his family had not been known as Christians in our school days. It turns out that he had become a believer about ten years earlier.

We had visiting hours in the afternoon in our family's Methodist Church. We encountered many old friends and neighbors and relatives. In the service, all four of us sons spoke. We had an opportunity to share the gospel with many who did not know Jesus in a personal way. Because our return trip was not scheduled until the following Thursday, we had an opportunity to get work done on cleaning out our mom's house and dividing up her belongings. We had no arguments. It all worked together for good.

Tribulation precedes triumph. Before the crown must come the cross. But sometimes this side of the grave we get a glimpse of the reason for suffering. The disciples of Jesus certainly came to a greater understanding of the reason for the suffering that they experienced and that their Savior experienced. They left us with an explanation in the New Testament that Jesus was the Son of God who had to die in our place to pay the penalty for our sin so that we could have the opportunity to have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He rose from the dead on Easter morning to show that He really was God. Our primary responsibility is to put our trust in this Jesus so that we can go to heaven some day.