

June 25, 2023

THE SUFFERING SAVIOR AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Luke 24:13-35

*(15 of 16 in a series through Luke 16-24)*

In our minds, we may move from that Easter Sunday morning when the ladies come to the empty tomb to the day of Pentecost where Peter boldly preaches as if everything was immediate. We may picture the empty tomb, a believing people, and an emboldened witness all happening right together, as if there were never any low moments or questions. But that's not the reality. You'll remember from the last time we were in Luke's gospel that though the women had come back to tell the disciples about the empty tomb and the angels' declaration that Christ had risen, they had been met with unbelief, as their hearers heard their words as "an idle tale" (24:11). And when we get to Luke 24:13-35, we find a text that begins with that same unbelief and despair. In fact, it seems that things are moving from bad to worse. It feels like the church is breaking up before it begins.

Luke gives us a scene where two men are on their way to Emmaus. We only know the name of one—perhaps the one who relayed the story directly to Luke—whose name is Cleopas. But perhaps more important than their destination (Emmaus) is where they're leaving. They're departing Jerusalem. We've read ahead, so we know that the redeeming plan of God was for the church to launch out of Jerusalem, testifying of the risen Christ in that city before moving into Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. And yet now these once-professing believers in Jesus as the Christ are leaving the city. They're disillusioned, and it can feel like people gathered at the campaign headquarters, ready for a party, only to find out that they've lost the election. Everyone ends the night, hopeless, disappointed, and walking home with their heads hanging down. That's how we find these two men in Luke 24:13.

And yet, by the time we get to the end of our text, they're back in Jerusalem, full of hope, believing that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, and bearing testimony to others.<sup>1</sup> So what takes place to account for this complete reversal? It's that Jesus intervenes. The risen Christ shows up and turns everything around. Let's look at the details of the story first, and then we'll look at some truths that I want to make sure we see, surprisingly about Scripture itself, which takes center stage in this encounter.

As I've noted, the text begins with two men walking from Emmaus, downcast, because they thought that Jesus was the Messiah, until they'd seen him die. And so as they walk, they're discussing these things. But in the middle of their discussion, a man appears to them, perhaps coming from a side pathway. And this man is none other than the risen Jesus. But Jesus doesn't reveal himself to them. In fact, the text tells us that the Lord kept them from recognizing him as the risen Christ (v. 16).

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<sup>1</sup> David Garland makes this observation. *Luke*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 950.

And apparently Jesus just walks alongside of them, listening to them enough to see what they're talking about, and they're talking about him. But he nonetheless asks them what their conversation is about, as if he's ignorant. And their first response is to be incredulous that this man doesn't know what happened in Jerusalem. They say to him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (v. 18). And after he asks, "What things?" they tell him everything and reveal their unbelieving hearts in the process. Specifically, they say to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 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. 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" (vv. 19-24).

Clearly, they're sorrowful because they don't believe the report of the women, so Jesus' first response is to rebuke them for their unbelief, but then we're told that he began explaining to them how the Scriptures spoke of him and what he would experience, which would have been a fun conversation to hear.

And, finally, they convinced him to eat with them, and during the meal as he took some bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, Luke tells us, "Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight" (v. 31). And so they rush back to Jerusalem and tell the others that the Lord has indeed risen and even appeared to Simon (obviously at some prior point). Jesus had intervened to turn around the hopes of his followers who seemed about to be scattered from Jerusalem.

It's a fascinating story, perhaps one we're all familiar with. And what's also fascinating is what the focus of these verses become when you dive into it. Although this is a resurrection appearance of Jesus to two men, it seems that the important focus of the text is the Scripture. That is, if you try to gather what truths wants us to see from this text, you find yourself gaining more insights about the nature of Scripture as anything else. So, it seems that near the end of his gospel, the Holy Spirit is inspiring Luke to build his hearers understanding of the nature of the Bible itself. And so this morning, I want to highlight what Jesus' conversation with these two men teaches us about the nature of Scripture. And first we see the necessity and sufficiency of God's Word in our lives.

### **The necessity and sufficiency of God's Word in our lives**

What's fascinating about this story is that when Jesus goes to explain to them "that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory," he doesn't provide some new teaching that no one had access to until Jesus rose from the dead. He doesn't say, "I get it that you guys can't make sense of everything that's happened, so I'm going to let you in on some secret information

that's never been revealed." He doesn't do that at all. He simply points them back to what the Old Testament Scriptures said. In other words, they had—in the Old Testament Scriptures—all they needed to understand what had happened with Jesus, all that God had purposed in his redeeming plan.

Had they understood the Scripture, Jesus tells them, they would have known that these things needed to happen. They would have understood the need for Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. In other words, their unbelief is not rooted in the fact that God kept his redeeming plan a secret. He didn't. It's in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures. They simply didn't see and understand it.

Now, for us, this leads to a reminder about the necessity and sufficiency of God's Word in our lives. We can be so prone to feel our need for the Lord to provide for us something more than we have right now—more insight, wisdom, and understanding. And there's nothing wrong with such longings. The book of James even instructs us to pray and ask the Lord for wisdom, who gives it to us generously and not begrudgingly. But oftentimes our longings for more wisdom, insight, and understandings are accompanied with a neglect of knowing God's Word. And that is nothing less than a tragedy as we're ignoring that which we most desperately need and is sufficient for giving us understanding of God's work in this world. We need the Scripture like we need food.

And since I was out last week leading another service for a dear church across town, I found myself earlier this week reflecting once more on how and why we do things here, and so I want to pull back the curtain on a few things. First, our entire service is to remind us of the necessity and sufficiency of God's Word for us. Everything response we have in our corporate worship is a response to God's Word. That's why we start with God's Word, end with it, and see it all in the middle. It's a weekly reminder of how all of life for the believer is simply a response to what God has revealed in his Word. This is even why we schedule different people to preach periodically. We want to remind ourselves that the church isn't built upon this individual or that who stands up here and preaches but upon the Word of God—regardless who preaches it. We must see the necessity and sufficiency of God's Word in our lives.

So, I want to encourage us to treat God's Word as it is—the very words of our God revealed to us. Read the Scriptures as if someone had recorded the very words that our creator and redeemer wanted to communicate to us, because that's precisely what they are. And don't think that we're reading and hearing the Scriptures merely for the sake of growing in knowledge—though it provides that—but also to bolster our faith and aid us in holy living. I've rarely (if ever) encountered someone filled with doubts about the faith who is regularly exposing themselves to the Word of God, and I've rarely (if ever) encountered someone who delights in God's Word regularly and is filled with rebellion in their hearts against the Lord in other areas of life. We need the Word of God as dearly as we need food and it provides for us all we need for life and godliness. That's one thing Jesus reminds us here as he points these men—not to new insight—but to the Scripture. Then, Jesus reminds them (and us) that the whole of the Bible is about him.

## The centrality of Jesus in the Bible

As Jesus points them to the Scripture to explain the plan of God's redeeming work, Luke tells us, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27). Now, just to be clear, the phrase, "Moses and all the Prophets" is simply a reference for the whole of the Old Testament. In other words, Jesus was able to walk through the Old Testament and show again and again how the whole of the Old Testament was pointing to him and his work.

Now, probably a number of us have said, "Good grief, that would probably be the most exciting conversation to eavesdrop on in human history. I wonder what he said to them?" But my guess is that we know. No doubt when these two men came back to the apostles and shared the details of what had taken place in their encounter with Jesus, they didn't say, "But we'd rather keep secret just what Jesus said about how the Scriptures speak of him." No doubt they spelled out the conversation for the eleven in every detail.

"Well," we might say, "good for *them*, but how do *we* know what Jesus said?" Well, I think we see it when we read the New Testament. That is, when we open the pages of the New Testament and see the New Testament authors showing how Jesus and his work is a fulfillment of text after text from the Old Testament, my guess is that some (much?) of that came from this conversation between Jesus and these two men. When Peter points out on the day of Pentecost that David's declaration in Psalm 16 that the Lord would not let his Holy One see corruption and then notes that this Psalm wasn't about David ultimately but about Jesus not seeing corruption in the tomb but being raised, I think we're getting a taste of it. When Phillip describes how Isaiah 53 is pointing to the justifying work of Christ in his conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch, my guess is that this also was part of it. And we could go on with example after example. But the key is, don't feel like you're somehow worse off than those two men on the road to Emmaus that day because you weren't part of that enlightening conversation. Actually, you're better off, because Jesus promised his apostles that the Spirit would remind them of what he'd said to them and he'd lead them into all truth. And as the Spirit led them into all truth, they wrote down what he showed them as Scripture. So we have even more in our hands than those two men heard that day.

So, let's not wish we were there for that conversation while neglecting our reading, memorizing, and growing in knowledge of the Bible. That would be like claiming you want a bite of food so badly while ignoring an all-you-can-eat buffet in front of you. Dive into the Bible faithfully. Let it instruct you, exhort you, rebuke you, and build you up more than so many other things we're tempted to fill our time with.

Moreover, let's note the glory of Christ in all of the Scripture. I don't want to assume we all know this because it wasn't clear to me until I'd already graduated college. But though the Bible was written by a number of men over hundreds and thousands of years, it all tells one story that revolves around one person—Jesus—and his work to save us. And if you want to see how this

works, start with the New Testament and see all the ways that the authors tell us the Old Testament informs us about who Jesus is and what he did, and then go back to the Old Testament and read it with this revelation given to us in the new, and delight in all that is there. The whole of the Bible is about Jesus. And we need all of it. In fact, we'll never understand fully who Jesus is and what he did without understanding the categories and framework for understanding those glorious realities from the Old Testament. So, again, dive into your Bibles and see the glories it holds up for us. But we also need to recognize another truth Jesus exposes on this note, namely, that our failure to see the truth of Scripture is rooted in our unbelief.

### **The blinding nature of unbelief**

I don't want to spend a lot of time on this point, but Jesus does state it clearly. Note when Jesus hears the men express their unbelief, Jesus doesn't simply say, "Foolish men, you should've believed the testimony of the women"—though they should have. He says, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (v. 25). That is, their failure to see that Jesus would die and rise from the dead wasn't rooted in a lack of clarity in the Bible but in their refusal to believe what the Scripture says. Their unbelief had blinded them from seeing the truth revealed in Scripture.

This is why Paul can tell us that the law of Moses is read by unbelieving Jews to this day and "a veil lies over their hearts" so that they can't see the truth of it. And then Paul adds, "But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Cor 3:14-16). What he's saying is precisely what Jesus is saying here: unbelief is what keeps us from seeing the truth of the Scripture. And so we pray that the Lord will open eyes and remove the veil with unbelievers through the preaching of the gospel so that they see the truth of Scripture. And we pray our heart isn't hardened by sin and filled with unbelief so that we are blinded to its glory. Finally, we are reminded of one more truth concerning God's Word, namely, that Scripture teaches us that suffering is the pathway to glory.

### **The necessity of suffering in the Scripture**

One key area where these men seemed to struggle was in grasping how the Messiah could be one who suffered and died at the hands of his enemies. Notice how when they're giving Jesus an update on all the events that had transpired (as if he were ignorant of them), they said, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him" (v. 19-20). So, that's the culmination of Jesus' ministry in their minds. He did mighty things, but then he was delivered up and was crucified. And then they add, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21).

Do you see what they're saying? The Old Testament had spoken of the one to come—the seed of Abraham and of David—who would redeem the Lord's people. He would forgive their sins, deliver them from their enemies, and make all things right. These two men are saying that they thought Jesus was this promised Messiah. But now, they obviously no longer thought that. So,

what changed? I mean, Jesus did do miraculous works. He raised people from the dead, made the lame walk, the deaf hear, and cast out demons. He multiplied fish and bread, walked on water, taught with authority, and outsmarted his enemies in every debate. What about that resume suggests that he *isn't* the Messiah? Well, the obvious answer is in their description of Jesus as they said, "But then he was delivered up and crucified." You see, they had no category for the Messiah suffering and dying at the hands of his enemies. No matter how many glorious things he did, they couldn't square him being the glorious Messiah and suffering and dying.

This is why Jesus responds in verse 26, saying, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Jesus tells them that there's an order to suffering and glory. One precedes the other. And that is what led Jesus to launch into explaining how Moses and all the Prophets spoke of him. Therefore, no doubt, among his many OT texts he would have pointed to, would have been texts like Genesis 3:15 where we're told that the heel of the Christ would be bruised, or Psalm 22 where we're told he'd be forsaken, or Isaiah 53 where we're told that it would be the will of the Lord to crush him. These men should have seen all over the place as they heard the Scriptures read that the Messiah would necessarily suffer before entering into his glory. The cross had to come before the crown that we see in his resurrection and ascension.

And we must not forget that the Bible teaches that same order for us. Jesus lays out this same pattern for his followers. This can be missed by many professing believers. The health and wealth group who proclaim that we're children of the king and therefore shouldn't suffer are right that we're united to Jesus Christ who reigns over all things at God's right hand. But they also need to recognize that this same Jesus with whom we're united not only suffered before entering into his glory but calls all of us who follow him to take up our cross as well. That is hardly an invitation to consider a life without suffering. It may well be that the very tendency to think a Messiah who would come and redeem his people shouldn't be delivered up and crucified is present within us as well—only we're applying it to ourselves. We may well think that such suffering shouldn't be part of our lives either. And before we reject that we're prone to thinking this way, we should realize its subtle nature.

I realized in my own life that this presumption was there one day when I was lamenting to the Lord. The details aren't crucial, but the basic template of my prayer was: 1) I did this to obey you, 2) it led to me suffering, and 3) therefore, I don't understand what's going on and why the Lord would allow this. Have you thought that way? Maybe you're thinking that way now. But it's hard to square the notion that if I obey things should come up roses and lilies while we're united with one who obeyed his Father perfectly and yet suffered tremendously before entering glory. Obedience doesn't lead to the absence of suffering. In fact, for us—like Jesus—suffering precedes the resurrection.

And so we obey him, not because we anticipate obedience leading to ease. We obey him because we know that if we lay down our lives in this age we'll take them up again, just as our Lord did after his death. Therefore, let's delight in God's Word, obey it, and state once more our willingness to take up our cross and follow our risen Lord as we come to the table this morning. Amen.