

**“Hearts on Fire”**  
**Luke 24:13-35**  
**March 31, 2024**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Of all the resurrection appearances of Jesus that we encounter in the New Testament, this is by far the longest. It happens on Easter Sunday, Day 1 of the fifty days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to heaven. Two of Jesus’ followers are on a journey from Jerusalem to a village about seven miles west of Jerusalem. These two are not among the twelve apostles. The name of one of them is provided, Cleopas, and the second is possibly his wife. It is likely that they are returning home after being in Jerusalem for Passover. The text tells us that they are sad as they journey homeward, but before the story ends, their hearts are set on fire. It is this movement from sadness to energetic joy that summarizes the impact of Jesus’ resurrection.

**I. Sad Hearts – v. 13-24**

It would be hard to overstate the disappointment felt by these two disciples. They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah who would redeem Israel and deliver them from all their enemies, the latest of which were the Romans. They had held on to this hope to the bitter end, thinking that the power they had seen when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead would be unveiled again in their deliverance from the Romans. But it never happened. Jesus had truly died on that cross, a shameful and agonizing death. Now it was time to accept reality and move on, as hard as it was to do so. So these two were taking steps back into a life after Jesus.

As they were on their way to Emmaus, a fellow traveler began to walk with them. He noticed that they were doing more than just walking, being engaged in what was apparently a deep conversation. So he asked them about it. **“What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?”** The reader is told that this fellow traveler is none other than the risen Jesus, but the other two were kept from recognizing him. They think he is nothing more than another man walking the same road. This tells us something about the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body, and the nature of our future resurrected bodies as well. It was entirely normal in appearance. He didn’t have a heavenly glow about him, but was a material being who was indistinguishable from any other human being. As we learn elsewhere in the Bible, his resurrected body also had some significant differences from his pre-resurrection body, but appearance was not one of them. N.T. Wright coins the word “transphysicality” to describe the properties of Jesus’ resurrected body, which he understands to mean that it is “still robustly physical but also significantly different from the

present one.” The significance of this is that our new bodies after they are raised are patterned after Jesus’ body. Ours too will be “robustly physical” but also very different, and one of those differences will be immortality.

As Cleopas and his companion prepared to answer Jesus’ question about the content of their conversation, Luke tells us that the two were so sad that it was evident in their appearance. It is possible to be sad and to hide it from others, but there is a sadness that can’t be hidden. Such was the case with these two. They are walking back after a major disappointment. After the loss of the Auburn basketball team in the first round of the NCAA playoffs, I heard that the father of Auburn player Chad Baker-Majara had flown to Spokane, Washington from his home in the Dominican Republic to watch his son play. As you may know, his son was ejected only four minutes into the game, with his loss being the likely cause of Auburn’s loss. I can imagine it was a long and sad trip back home for this father. Something like that is happening here.

Though there was sadness for these two travelers, I imagine Luke writing these words with a smile on his face because he knows some things that Cleopas and his companion don’t yet know but soon will. So there are multiplied ironies here. One of the ironies is that at the very time of their great sadness, they were in the presence of the one who can and would soon make all things new for them.

A second irony can be seen in the question they ask Jesus in response to Jesus’ inquiry of them. Jesus had asked them, **“What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk”** (v. 17)? They are so dumbstruck by Jesus’ question that Luke records them as standing still. I imagine them stopping and looking at Jesus as if he might be kidding. What else would anyone be talking about after the events of the past days in Jerusalem? The irony can be seen in the question they in turn ask Jesus. **“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days”** (v. 18)? The irony is that Jesus is the only one fully knowledgeable. They are still trying to work out the meaning of these things and events while talking to the one who was the author and main character of them all. Instead of being the only one ignorant, he was the only one fully knowledgeable.

The final irony lies at the end of their response to Jesus’ question. They rehearse the whole account of the women going to the tomb on the third day and finding it empty. The women reported seeing a vision of angels reporting that Jesus was alive. Cleopas then adds these ironic words, though he is unaware of the irony. **“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”** (v. 24). In other words, they were saying that this whole story about the empty tomb had one shortcoming and that was that there had been no sighting of Jesus. If

the report of the angels was true, where was Jesus? And, of course, they are saying this as they are at that very moment walking with and seeing Jesus.

There is a literary term known as the “omniscient narrator,” a term describing an author writing in the third person with a knowledge of the entire situation. Luke is an omniscient narrator here, and we as readers get to share in the privilege of knowing what our two travelers don’t yet know. There is something enjoyable about knowing what the travelers are still to discover. Though we can understand their sadness, we know something that will very soon wash it away like a heavy spring rain washing off the pollen from every surface in Alabama.

Last Christmas, we joined together with one of our daughters and her husband to buy our seven-year-old grandson a new bike. A few months before Christmas, I was riding with him and he was suffering some from having a single-speed bicycle that was really too small for him. But I knew something he didn’t know, and that was that he was about to get a new and bigger ten-speed bicycle that would allow him to ride faster and longer. I wanted to tell him about his coming present, but of course I didn’t. That is the exact situation we as readers experience with this text. They are suffering from a limited perspective that still has Jesus in the grave, and we know that this is all about to change as Jesus is revealed to them.

Is it possible that every sad thing we encounter in life is in the same category as the sadness of Cleopas and his companion? Perhaps you’ve heard of Tolkien’s famous statement in *Lord of the Rings*, the statement about all sad things coming untrue. This passage gives us some insight into what that means. It doesn’t mean that the sad things cease to exist, as if they are erased from history. Reality doesn’t work that way. Nor does it mean that we should somehow force ourselves not to be sad when sad things happen. That is called dishonesty, and it is emotionally unhealthy. What it does mean is that all the sad things are infused with hope as they get reinterpreted by the end of the story. That is why Paul could say in his letter to the Thessalonians that we grieve when a loved one dies, but we grieve with hope.

Are there sad things in your life right now? Sadness is an inevitable part of life in this broken world, but remember that you have an omniscient narrator in the risen Jesus. In fact, he is more than a narrator. He not only knows all things, but controls all things too. And he will redeem even the saddest things for his children. The hymnwriter William Cowper, who knew firsthand about sadness, expressed this well in his great hymn “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” “Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face.”

## II. Hearts Afire – v. 25-35

Verse 25 begins the turning point of the story, when Jesus says 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?”** I’m so glad that Jesus walks with those who are foolish and slow to believe. Notice the diagnosis Jesus makes of their problem. They are foolish and slow to believe the prophets. He doesn’t agree with them that the problem is accurately expressed in their last sentence: **“but him they did not see.”** They made the same mistake many today make, thinking that if we just had more evidence, then we would believe. From our perspective two-thousand years later, we can see that they had abundant evidence. First, they had Jesus’ repeated statements during his ministry that he would die and be raised again on the third day, and this is now the third day. Further, they had the testimony of the women who had already been to the tomb and reported that they found it empty. In addition, the women reported seeing the angels there who said that Jesus had been raised. What did Cleopas think of such a report? We are told back in verse 11: **“but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”** They dismissed it as just the words of hysterical, unreliable women. What’s more, they had Jesus walking right beside them.

One of the skeptical explanations given today for the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus is refuted by this account. That explanation is that ancient, pre-modern and pre-scientific people were more gullible. They wanted to believe in such things as resurrected bodies because it helped them deal with their sadness about the loss of Jesus, as well as the common fear we all have of death. But this account, as well as the rest of the New Testament, shows that they are no different than us in their reluctance to believe that a dead man could be raised up.

They are also just like us in the fact that no amount of evidence is sufficient to prove the fact of the resurrection. Both the Bible and our own experience teach conclusively that the human problem is not lack of evidence but a heart that doesn’t want to surrender to God. It is evident from Cleopas’ words that he was looking for the wrong kind of Messiah. He wasn’t unique in this, because it is evident throughout the gospels and even into the book of Acts that the disciples were at first looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from their Roman occupiers. Like so many today, they misidentified their real problem. Before they could see the resurrected Jesus, and before their hearts could be set afire by the resurrected Jesus, they had to agree with Jesus’ diagnosis of their central problem. It wasn’t their Roman occupiers, but their own sinful

hearts. That's why it was **“necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory.”**

Our need is the same as theirs. We must agree with Jesus that our biggest problem lies within us and not outside of us. It is this problem that Jesus came to address in his sacrificial death for us. I'm so glad that God does what is necessary to restore us and save us, not what we might want him to do. Once we agree with God about this, we are in a position to understand the Scriptures properly.

It is when we read the Scriptures with this central theme in mind that our hearts burn within us. That central theme is the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are the primary two things necessary for the realization of God's plan for restoring wandering sinners. This approach to the Bible, not more evidence, is what Jesus says we need. There is an interesting and parallel verse about this a few chapters earlier. In the parable of “the Rich Man and Lazarus,” the rich man, in torment in hell, asks that Lazarus be sent back from the dead to warn the rich man's brothers so that they might avoid his same fate. The rich man is told that this will not be done because these brothers have enough already to be warned, in that they have Moses and prophets. The rich man says that someone coming back from the dead would be far more convincing. But he is told, **“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead”** (Luke 16:31).

## **CONCLUSION:**

If you are here today thinking that if the resurrected Jesus were to walk up to this platform and preach the sermon, then you would follow him. I want to tell you that Jesus himself tells you that you are mistaken. You are flattering yourself by thinking that you will be open to the evidence. Jesus says that what you need is to see that it was **“necessary that the Christ should suffer.”** Do you agree with Jesus, or do you think that there is something else that is necessary? Do you think the necessity is for you to be more disciplined, more successful, more comfortable? If you can agree with Jesus here, your heart will burn within you as well. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer because it was through his sufferings that our sins are forgiven. It is no longer about achieving, but is now all about receiving. If you find yourself agreeing with Jesus that your sin is the problem, and if you receive the gift of forgiveness made possible by the crucifixion of Jesus, then welcome to the family! Because of the resurrection of Jesus, your future is a bright one, made secure by the death and resurrection of Jesus.