

BUT WE WERE HOPING
Luke 24:13-35

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“But we were hoping” (Luke 24:21).

Odd words that leapt from the text when I read the Gospel of Luke. The words were on the lips of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. “But we were hoping....”

We utter those words, too, when the outcome is not what we sought, when we are left bewildered and beaten down. When the medical tests come back positive, with bad news. “But we were hoping the original diagnosis was wrong.”

When our son or our daughter is placed in harm’s way in the military. “But we were hoping he would be assigned stateside.”

When someone in our life walks out, unwilling to reconcile, unwilling to forgive. “But I was hoping that it could be alright.”

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were hoping that day, too.

Look at verse 13.

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

About a two-hour walk, we would say. And notice the specific time – on “that very day.”

Turn back to Luke 24:1.

But on the first day of the week....

It’s the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It all happens, the whole of Luke 24, on the day of the resurrection.

On this day, all sorts of strange things have happened in the morning. The disciples are still clueless as to what has actually taken place. The tomb has been reported empty, but those are taken as old wives’ tales. In the midst of all the confusion of the crucifixion, burial, and disturbed tomb, two of the disciples set off toward home, toward Emmaus.

Their departure from the city at the first opportunity – when the Sabbath is over – hints that the community of disciples is in danger of collapsing because of bitter disappointment, grief, and confusion. (David Garland, *Luke*, p. 950)

Look at verse 14

And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place.

What happened after 9/11? Our worlds were shocked. Rattled. Changed. You didn't have a single conversation with someone on 9/11 that wasn't about the attack. The images were seared in our minds. The fire. The smoke. The catastrophe. The uncertainty. The emptiness. The confusion. Our world was no longer safe. Everything had changed, and nobody seemed to be in control. Churches gathered and prayed and comforted and discussed. Our very bedrock had been broken.

So it was for these disciples on resurrection Sunday. They had been following Jesus. They committed themselves to this Messiah. They had seen His wondrous miracles. And then that horrid image of Him crucified. The confusion of the missing body.

How could you not know? How could you not talk about it if your Master was crucified? Even His body, it seemed, had been disrespected.

Verse 15-17.

And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad.

"Their eyes were seized" (v. 16). The passive voice of the verb suggests that the blindness is divinely imposed.

These disciples, who had seen the crucifixion of their hope, were on the road to Emmaus – going back home disappointed, defeated, discouraged, depressed because of the death of their Messiah.

A stranger approaches. "What world does he live in? How could he possibly not know? Everybody knows what's been happening in Jerusalem."

"What are you talking about?" Jesus asked, innocently enough – as if He didn't already know.

They stopped in their tracks (verse 17). Sadness overcame them again at the question.

Verse 18

And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?"

What world are you living in? Do you have no idea what is taking place?

Could you have been in New York City on 9/11 and not have known what had happened? That would be the equivalent. The unruly crowds had gathered. They had shouted, "Crucify. Crucify."

Pilate had been involved. The Roman army had been involved. There had been a parade through the streets. The sky had turned dark; the cosmos quaked.

Could you really have been in New York City on 9/11 and depart the city asking, “What is going on here? What are you talking about? I am unaware of the attacks.”

Cleopas seemed to say, “If you don’t know what is going on, then you must be the only guy in Jerusalem who has no idea what has been taking place. Are you kidding me?”

“No, what’s going on?” Jesus asks in verse 19.

Verses 20-21

You are not aware of the things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him?

Have you ever reflected on the oddity of this passage? Cleopas unwittingly tells the story of Jesus to Jesus Himself.

They are so disappointed because Jesus has become nothing but another rejected prophet. How many times had Israel rejected, mistreated, and murdered the prophets? Even if Jesus could work the great works of Elijah, even if His deeds were like the deeds of Moses, He has been rejected.

He’s rejected. They’re devastated.

Verse 21

But we were hoping.... We were hoping He was going to be the one to redeem Israel.

Behind this image is another one with which we are familiar. The image of exodus. The image of Passover.

These two disciples were headed back to their home in Emmaus. Cleopas – and maybe his wife Mary. Maybe she was the other disciple. They had been living out the story of the exodus. God had been present with Jesus in His miracles. God had been present with Him in His words. Look at verse 19. He was mighty in deed and word. He didn’t just talk powerfully; He acted powerfully.

And just as Israel had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt in the first exodus, they were hoping that – through Jesus – God would purchase their freedom again.

Israel free. Liberated from pagan domination. Free from Rome. Free to serve God in peace and holiness.

That’s why the crucifixion didn’t make any sense. It wasn’t only that their leader was dead and gone. That was bad enough, but it was more than this. Jesus had been the one to redeem Israel. His crucifixion was the complete and final devastation of their hopes.

The cross is where people end up when they think they are going to liberate Israel and find out too late they don't have the power to get it done.

They knew what His crucifixion meant – or, at least, they thought they did. Now, it seemed, God had not forgiven Israel's sins, and the pagans were still in power. As N. T. Wright said, they were traveling up the road they thought was leading to freedom, and it turned out to be a cul-de-sac.

How could they have been so wrong about Jesus? They had heard about the miracles. They had seen a few themselves. His words were so powerful – He spoke as if He were speaking for God; He spoke as if He was God. If you couldn't trust Him to set you free, then there was nobody else to whom they could turn.

Now all this commotion about angels and empty tombs. It was just the confusing icing on the upside down cake of crucifixion.

But we were hoping....

You've been there before. I've been there before. The psalmist in the Psalter has been there before. Turn to Psalms 42 and 43.

Psalm 42

As the deer pants for the water brooks,

So my soul pants for Thee, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;

My tears have been my food day and night,

While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Look at the end of verse 5

Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him.

The psalmist is feeling like God is so far away. He's far away from the presence of the Almighty. "Where is your God?" (verse 3). "Hope in God, that I can praise Him again."

Look at verse 9

I will say to God my rock, "Why hast Thou forgotten me?"

Verse 10

While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Verse 11

Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him.

It's really one psalm together. Psalm 43 continues. "Why hast Thou rejected me?" he asks in verse 2. He's in despair (verse 5). And in verse 5 he says again, "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance, and my God."

But we were hoping....

They go on in verse 22 to tell Jesus how the women came to the tomb and reported that His body was not there, and about the angels. But the disciples checked it out (verse 24), and they did not see Him.

Have they not realized how foolish they've been (verse 25)? This stranger, now, whom they did not recognize as Jesus, asks "Don't you believe what the prophets have spoken?" (verse 25).

Look at verse 26

Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?

You see, they've been hoping in the wrong direction all along. They were thinking that God would redeem Israel *from* suffering. Instead, He redeemed Israel *through* suffering. Through the suffering of the Messiah, who became Israel's representative.

So Jesus begins to teach them in verse 27

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Don't think for a moment that Jesus used a proof-text here and there. It wasn't like that at all. Rather, He retold the whole story of God's people and showed how, beginning from Genesis all the way to Chronicles (that's the last book in the Hebrew Bible, as the prophets come earlier), that the fulfillment they were looking for could only happen when the Messiah suffered and rose again, beginning God's new creation, beginning God's new people the church. This is what had happened.

He told the story in such a way that they could discover that the execution of this rabbi was not the disproof of His being the Messiah but, rather, the confirmation and the climax of His being Messiah.

Suppose for just a moment that you tell the story in such a way that the cross was not an example of the triumph of paganism over God's people but actually God's means of defeating the Evil One once and for all. Suppose for a moment that the cross was the way that sins were to be forgiven and the kingdom of God was to come in fullness.

As they listened to the story of Jesus as told by this stranger – who was Jesus Himself – their hearts were slowly unfolding. Unfolding a new truth of God. A truth that the cross was God's plan and God's way to save His people. To begin a new creation which included resurrection.

Can you imagine having two hours to walk with Jesus and have Him explain the Old Testament to you in such a way that it points to Him? Oh that we'd all been privy to those words of our Lord.

As they arrived at Emmaus, some two hours later, He acted as though He had further to travel. "It's getting late," they say. "You need to stay with us."

So He sits at the table with them, and odd things happen. He becomes the host.

Look at verse 30

And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them. He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them.

Jesus plays the part of the host. A role reversal. In the Upper Room, Jesus moves from guest to host by taking the bread (22:19). He: (1) took the bread; (2) gave thanks; (3) broke the bread; and (4) gave the bread.

Verse 31

And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

When Jesus breaks the bread, as He had before, their eyes were opened (verse 31).

In the breaking of the bread....

Think way back to the first meal in the Bible. The moment is heavy with significance. A woman takes some fruit. She eats it. She gives it to her husband. He eats it. The eyes of both of them are opened. The Greek text is plenty paralleled in the Septuagint. Look at verse 31: "And their eyes were opened." What happened in Genesis? "Their eyes were opened." And in Genesis, they saw they were naked.

The tale of the first meal was told over and over. Death, itself, was traced to this moment of rebellion. The whole creation now was subject to decay, futility, and sorrow – the first creation.

And now we have another first meal – we have the first meal of the new creation. He takes bread. He blessed it. He broke it. He gave it to them. And their eyes were opened – like the eyes of the first couple in Genesis.

Cleopas and Mary here in this story. Their eyes were opened.

And as their eyes are opened, the long curse is broken for us all – the curse that began with that first meal in Genesis. Death is defeated.

Verse 32

And they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

"We should have known. Didn't you have that feeling when He was talking on the road to Emmaus? Weren't our hearts strangely warmed?" they said.

I hope your heart is strangely warmed today. I hope your heart is strangely warmed by the words of Jesus again. The words of Jesus, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go

to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know where I am going.... I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:1-4, 6).

Those words strangely warm my heart.

Luke 23:34

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing.” Those words strangely warm my heart.

Luke 23:43

“Today you will be with Me in Paradise” to the forgiven sinner. Those words strangely warm my heart.

Luke 24:46-48

And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.”

My heart is strangely warmed with those words. Words of life. Words of comfort. Words that make sense of His suffering and of ours. Words that bring us closer to the Christ. Words that give us hope over the grave. Words that let us know that, indeed, we are not and cannot be disappointed, for He was mighty in word and deed. And in the cross itself we find the climax of the word of God and not the failure of a would-be Christ.

Our hearts are strangely warmed.

That very hour, they make it all the way back – seven more miles back to Jerusalem. They find the eleven gathered together. They don’t get a word out before the disciples say, “Hey, the Lord really is alive. He is alive. He appeared to Simon.” And they begin (verse 35) to relate their experiences on the road and how He had been recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

He is still recognized in the breaking of the bread. His body, broken. His blood, shed. And, again, our hearts are strangely warmed.

Sources:

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