

From Hopeless to Joyful: *the Ignition Switch of Heart Change*
 Luke 24:13-32

Introduction: If I asked you to remember a time when you were let down, or when someone hurt you, or when you thought God would act a certain way or give you a certain thing but in the end He did not deliver, could you name that time? Was there a time when you felt dry, distant, and separate from God, left unmotivated and simply going through the motions? This morning I want you to capture that picture in your mind of how you felt, what brought you there, and how you tried to deal with it. Maybe that was a long time ago or perhaps you are in the midst of it right now. We are going to look at two people who found themselves in the middle of this kind of spot, a time of disillusionment and hopelessness, head down, tired, and not sure what to do place. What we will see is how God graciously walks us out of that place, and how He extend that to us today.

We get to see what happened when all the dust settled. We are going ahead in the story of Jesus *after* the resurrection, as those who had pinned their hopes on a messiah were dashed, realizing that Jesus was far different than they hoped. What happened to followers left in Jerusalem? What did they do? Where did they go? That is exactly where the text picks up after the empty tomb and before the ascension.

The Conditions & Consequence of Hopelessness

Luke 24:13-24 That **very day** two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,¹⁴ and they **were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.**¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, **looking sad.**¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "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."**

When Expectations are Unmet

The scene sets up as a pitiful one. Two people, one identified as Cleopas and the other unnamed, are walking late in the afternoon on Sunday, literally a few hours after the tomb that Jesus was laid in was found empty. They began the week with the highest of hopes and expectations, believing to be on the right side of the One who would deliver and redeem Israel. Now they started the 7 mile journey home, a trip that would have felt longer going home than coming in (like the ride *home* from Disneyland – at midnight – in traffic). You could imagine their conversation with each other as they tried to piece together what had just happened. How did it all unravel so quickly? How did they move from celebration of the people and mastery of the religious leaders to arrest, trial, and death like a common criminal in a matter of hours/days? You'll notice in the text that there are clues as to how these two were feeling and processing. When the veiled Jesus asked them what they were talking about, they stood still looking sad, or literally **gloomy in countenance.**

When they explained back what happened three days before, you could almost hear the **hopelessness in their voices.** "We had hoped that this One was the One who would finally REDEEM Israel. All the

markers were there. He was a prophet who was validated not only in the way He taught but by the mighty deeds He did. He was clearly the guy, and would have been the guy but the religious leaders (notice they did not call out the Romans – they were simply the instruments to carry out the deed) had their way and arrested, condemned, and crucified Him. Obviously He could NOT be the guy if all of this happened”

They had heard the stories of the women at the empty tomb, but this did not persuade. Even though there was testimony of angels, the validation of the women, and an empty tomb, these two travelers still were not connecting that this WAS THE THIRD DAY, the tomb WAS empty, and JESUS WAS alive.

What do you think the reaction of these two was? What is your reaction when you had expectations of a spouse, friend, or even God Himself, and they did not deliver? Life turned out differently, or marriage turned out to be harder, or having kids didn't bring ultimate satisfaction. I believe these two were dealing with a mixture of **confusion, anger, frustration, bitterness, depression, disillusionment**, and their greatest plight, **unbelief**. This meant their hearts were **cold**, their passion **low**, and their hopes **dashed**. They were returned home changed, but instead of vibrancy they were moping, turning their gaze inward, and focusing on what they lost, rather than what they gained.

When we Seek after the Wrong Cure

Have you ever been there in some measure? Perhaps you are in that spot now. When trying to describe how we feel in regards to our relationship with the Lord, we call it a “desert” or “dry” time, where God feels distant, our joy is gone, and even worship simply seems like we are going through the motions. When we identify this in the wrong way, we seek wrong solutions:

- We tend to **isolate** from others – These two were leaving the rest of the disciples, with only each other to debrief with, and would potentially be cut off from the rest. When our hopelessness leads us **away** from gracious means, we are left with the echo chamber of our own mind and we begin to listen to ourselves and are slaves of our own emotional responses. When we are dealing with confusion and anger we need to **run toward** the family of God, run toward those things that will help us think rightly, and run toward the God we feel so distant from.
- We tend to **numb** ourselves with activity – This is the way too many of us deal with this distance from God or disappointment in life: **we just don't**. We simply ignore, move forward, and try to forget what happened to us, or what happened in us. Numbing ourselves never solves, it simply allows us to move forward in joyless, lifeless, zombie like activity, living out a shell of an existence without the prospect of true happiness, fulfillment, or satisfaction.
- We tend to **replace** Godly discipline and pursuit with anything else – This is where we turn to things that will give us temporal relief, temporary happiness at the cost of long term misery. We turn to things we think we can control (pornography), or things that will help us cope (alcohol), or things that will make us **feel** successful (work, promotion, gaining more money). Of course, these are either overtly sinful or passively idolatrous, in which case are not only destructive but also addictive. When we begin to engage these things over time they begin to control us, binding us into a downward spiral away from the real and complete solution.

The Mindset & Method to the Hopeless

Now notice that it was in this context that Jesus approached these two on their journey. This was the same day He rose. Apparently He had already appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34) between the morning and this walk, and just as He would restore Peter, He sought out these two to move them from their hopelessness to joy. What we want to look at is **how** did Jesus go about this. If Jesus wanted to

reassure His followers, wouldn't He simply show them His scars, have them touch His hair, and explain what really went on between the cross and the empty tomb? Sometimes we think that today. Why doesn't Jesus just do something miraculous, create an HDTV in the sky and communicate on a broad scale with the world? Two reasons: 1) We come to Him by faith, not sight; 2) He left us a model we could actually emulate. What was that model?

Personal Approach

Jesus himself drew near and went with them

As these two were on the road, a stranger (to them) sidled up next to them and began to walk with them, asking questions. Remember, this is the same day that Jesus rose and the time He has left on this earth is limited. He would appear to Peter, the 12, and 500 at one time (1 Cor. 15:5-6). But in that limited window He spent time with two seemingly insignificant followers. Its not clear how long it would take to walk 7 miles, but if they walked a mile in 15 minutes, we are talking a little under 2 hours. He also stayed for a meal with them, which could have taken another couple of hours. In other words, on the day of His resurrection, He spent a good portion of the day with two disheartened, struggling, and hopeless followers to restore them to joy. He did not sent someone else, work through delegates, or pass it off. He spoke with them, spent time listening, and clarified important holes in their thinking.

Ministry, true ministry, is like this. It is personal. It is most effective when it is face to face. For all of our advances in technology, which are helpful and useful in certain areas, they are equally harmful in others. I'm thankful we can FaceTime with people around the world, have meetings with people from multiple locations at once over video, and even offer classes to people in remote parts of the world, nothing replaces personal, face to face communication. Though we are connected on so many inroads of social media (how many ways can we get a hold of each other!), we are also some of the most isolated, lonely, and impersonal people. We text instead of call, call instead of meet, and meet without putting all devices away. Jesus spent concentrated time with these two, and it was time well spent.

Power of the Question

"What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?"

"What things?"

Any good teacher will tell you about the power of the question. Asking good, thought provoking questions allows the listener to think, to process critically, and communicate honestly rather than what was expected. Jesus was the master of this. He knew the answer already, like any good parent who asks these of his kids. But rather than explain or declare, He allowed them to open up, both factually and emotionally. Their response to the first question is comical. "Have you been living in a box?" How do you not know what *just happened?!!* This is how I felt recently when someone told me about *Fidget Spinners* (which I still don't understand) – "Dad, all the kids at school have them!". So Jesus followed up with a second, "What things?" This allowed Cleopas to show his cards, to display his disappointment, and declare what he really needed.

When we spend time and ask good questions, it requires us to love with the sacrifice of our own time, but also means we must learn to be **active listeners**. People long for an opportunity to be heard especially from someone who genuinely listens. This requires us to walk by the Spirit since it is an exercise of **love, patience, and self-control**. When we hear the responses, we know how better to declare the most loving thing at all.

Presentation of the Word

Luke 24:25-27 *And he said to them, "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.***

Telling someone the truth is one of the most loving things we could ever do. Helping someone to understand the truth of Scripture as it relates and displays Jesus Christ is more loving still. The two people walking along the road had a knowledge of Scripture but it was incomplete. They believed the Old Testament was true, but there were far too many holes and gaps in their theology to point them down the correct road. They had a fundamental flaw of missing the suffering part of the Messiah, missed the substitutionary act of a perfect Lamb taking away sin, and they missed the fact that redemption of the land and people could only come after this had taken place. In other words, they had enough information to be dangerous, but not to be joyful. How did Jesus ignite the fire in these hopeless hearts?

- **Direct Response to Honest Answers** – Honesty is not enough. We live in a time where authenticity is highly valued and honest is of supreme worth. However, we also use *honest* as a smokescreen to avoid change. Honesty is a starting point for change, not the end. These disciples were honest in their sadness, loss of hope, and disappointment, but where that left them was NOT a good place nor one that left them ready to be His witnesses. Notice that Jesus started by asking questions but was willing to make a direct response: **"You are being foolish and your heart is dull in unbelief, and that needs to change."** Someone being honest allows us to enter this type of direct truth into root of the problem and the source where change needs to take place.
- **Reminded of the truth they already knew** – These followers had heard the truth and had seen the power of Jesus, but they quickly forgot what they already knew. Jesus asked them the rhetorical question of "was it not necessary that Christ should suffer and die?!", a message that He had given them before. Often in the midst of struggle and hopelessness we lose sight of dear truths that we know and understand but lose sight of in the midst of pain and emotion. We must be willing to remind people of the truth they ALREADY KNOW in order for them to move forward to where they need to go.
- **Connected the dots of redemptive history** - Notice that Jesus did not simply recount the stories of the OT, He told THE STORY of the OT that kept Him at the center. Often we think about the Bible as a collection of disjointed stories, moral anecdotes that fit well on flannel graphs or teach us about overcoming giants or conquering cities (David and Joshua - respectively). But the whole of the Bible is one story of redemption, arching back to the Garden of Eden when God promised that from the seed of the woman, her offspring would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), the first message of hope for those who experienced death through sin. All of the Covenants, sacrificial system, and promises of the OT found their fulfillment in Jesus, pointing to the cross and redemption that would come when Jesus entered into humanity to offer Himself in the place of mankind.

This is how the Apostles and church declared the gospel in the 1st century. Read Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 as he recounts Israel's history and rejection from Abraham to Joseph to Moses to Joshua. Or remember Philip answering the Ethiopian Eunuch as to the nature of Who he was reading about in Isaiah 53:7,8, and Philip began with that Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. They connected the dots of how the plan unfolded from the beginning of time to the fulfillment on the cross, to the inevitable return of Jesus one day. This informs us of **two essential principles or takeaways:**

1. When we present the gospel to people apart from a context of redemptive history, we easily make it a story about *them*, rather than God! That's not to say we are not important to God or the recipients of His grace or love, but we are a part of a much grander story than our point in time. Scripture is NOT a group of moralizing stories but ONE GRAND METANARRATIVE of God's redeeming love, His willing sacrifice, and the glories of Jesus work on the cross
2. This means we must know that story. We must know it well. We must know it in a way that we are not working off a script but have intimate knowledge with the material. I don't have to have a script to talk about my family, but can tell you about them starting with health, school, age, interaction, or personalities. I believe it's one of the reasons we were not given the **actual teaching** of Jesus on this, so that we did not simply memorize it without thinking through the story. We must study the story of Scripture, from beginning to end, so that we are ready to start anywhere to talk about the Person and work of Jesus.

The Resulting Change from Hopelessness

A Heart Set Ablaze

Luke 24:32 They said to each other, "**Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?**"

What warmed the heart of these two disciples? What ignited them from ice cold distance to passionate closeness? The answer is that their eyes and hearts were opened to the realities of the Scripture, which meant they could comprehend Jesus, truly, for the first time. Just as their eyes were opened to see Jesus sitting in front of them, Scripture was opened to them to defrost their icy, hopeless hearts.

Do we underestimate the power of God's Word? Is it the first place we turn when we feel distance, or the last? You may counter with the plight of reading it with nothing happening to you, and I would counter back with the question whether you read it *prayerfully, relentlessly, with an eye of knowing Jesus or simply doing a task*. The source of our passion, unity, humility, holiness, and effectiveness is that our hearts and minds are opened up **by the Holy Spirit**, who will guide us in the truth, convict us of our sin, and illuminate these realities so that we can see.

A Mind Ready for Action

When our hearts are on fire, it means we are truly ready for action. These two u-turned immediately and went back to Jerusalem to talk to the eleven other disciples. They told them about the resurrected Jesus and recounted what Jesus had taught them. It was here that Jesus met all of them, and left them with a **commission to fulfill**. We will hit on the specifics next week, but here is what we are left with now: in order to be ready for action, in order to have a heart for the lost, a passion for the gospel, and a boldness to proclaim **repentance and forgiveness**, our minds and hearts must be turned from hopeless to joyful, from cold to hot. The only way to do this is to comprehend the plan and purpose of Jesus in the entirety of His Word.

*Are you struggling this morning? Are you feeling distant and hopeless, unmotivated and blah? The answer is right in front of you. It recapturing a right view of Jesus through and in His Word. How is God speaking to us? How is Jesus talking to you? **In His Word! So to His Word we go, expectantly, consistently, and prayerfully.***