

The Bases of Faith, Luke 24:13-35
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Revision and expansion of a message preached Easter Sunday 1987 at WIBC

A. Introduction

"If only I had been there." Have you ever wished that you could have been there at the first Easter, to look in the empty tomb, to hear the angel's announcement, to see the risen Lord? To judge from the reaction of the early disciples, we probably would not have seen things as clearly then as we do now, with scriptural hindsight. The material evidence was incredibly ineffective in persuading the disciples that the Lord was risen. Yet in the end they were persuaded, and in the strength of that persuasion, they changed the world.

If the physical circumstances did not persuade them, what did? And how can our faith in the risen Lord be strengthened, we who have no access to the empty tomb and the angelic message? We can find answers to these questions in the experiences of two early believers who met the Lord on the afternoon of the first Easter.

[Luke 24:13-35]

B. Background Information

1. *Whom do we meet?* Two disciples.

a) At least one of them, Cleopas (24:18), would have a long and intimate understanding of the Lord's teaching and ministry. He is probably:

1) Clopas the husband of "the other Mary" (John 19:25),

2) Alphaeus (another Greecization of the same Aramaic name) father of James the Less (one of the apostles), and

3) according to tradition, brother of Joseph the foster-father of the Lord.

b) The vividness of the narrative has suggested to at least one student (John Wenham, *The Easter Enigma*) that the other is Luke himself, and that the two of them were going to his house.

2. *Where were they going?* Emmaus, 24:13, 60 furlongs = 6.75 miles, 11.2 km, from Dave Nelson's to Westgate Shopping center. About a two hour walk. (20 km was a day's journey for a soldier.) The actual site of the village is not definitely known today. They had been in Jerusalem for the Passover, but now the sabbath was over, and they were returning to tend their affairs. Remember that the first day of the week was not a holiday then (or even

today, in Israel).

3. *What were they doing?* Talking, rather animatedly. v.15 has the flavor of a debate; v.17, "what are these words that you hurl back and forth at one another?" They are confused about what has happened, and sad (v.17). Hardly the image of faith!

Compare v.16 with v.31. At first, their faith is so weak that they do not even recognize the Lord. Finally, they do believe. Of interest to us is the steps they go through. What is it that persuades them? On what does our faith rest?

C. 18-24, External Observations are Not Enough

1. 18, The Challenge: How come you don't know?
"Art thou only a stranger" = "Are you the only person visiting Jerusalem this week who doesn't know the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth?" Almost a rebuke. Aren't you aware of what's going on around you? Don't you understand the real world?
2. 19-20, The Observations (General)
Such as those to which the "stranger" might have had access in the city:
 - a) The discussion concerns Jesus in human terms: a man of Nazareth.
 - b) His spiritual credentials: a prophet, attested by a dual ministry, miraculous "deeds" and authoritative "word" (cf. Mark). Unlike today, these were not in question. Even his adversaries agreed that "this man doeth many miracles," John 11:47, cf. Acts 4:16 ("a notable miracle hath been done ... we cannot deny").
 - c) His opposition by the Jewish rulers.
3. 21, The Discouragement
 - a) Their inclination: they were favorable observers, not antagonistic critics!
 - 1) If we have identified Cleopas correctly, he would know the Lord very well; might have been one of the 70. From the vivid detail of the reporting, some have suggested that the other traveler is Luke.
 - 2) They hoped (*elpizw* not *pisteuw*) that he was indeed the redeemer of Israel, the Messiah, the Christ. If anyone should have understood the events, they should have.
 - b) But (*alla*) it's been three days, the time allotted by Jewish tradition for the soul to leave the body and decay to set in (Morris on John 11:17), and now they are beginning to lose hope. Perhaps that's why they have left Jerusalem and are now on their way back to Emmaus.
4. 22-24, The Observations (Personal)

To these an arbitrary visitor to Jerusalem might not have had access. Note the second *alla*, countering the discouragement to some degree: the empty tomb and the angelic announcement, attested not only by the women but by some of the men as well. "But him they saw not."

5. *Application*: Their words to the "stranger" remind us of the words of the modern world toward us: "Are you the only people who don't know what's going on in the world, the advances of modern science and the evidence that there is no God?" We may envy the access they had to the empty tomb, but it did not persuade them. Physical manifestations and miracles are not the basis of our faith. Cf. John 20:1-15.

D. 25-27, The Scriptures are Not Enough.

The Lord's reply follows the form of theirs.

1. 25, The Challenge. They said, "How come you don't know?" He replies, "How come you don't believe?" The Lord rebukes them for not believing this evidence. He does not fault them for questioning their experience, but goes beyond the experience to the scriptures. Even before the events of the weekend, they should have known, on the basis of the Word of God. Cf. John 20:9, "knew not," probably in the sense of understanding. Two characteristics of their failing that will be true of those who demand external data over the Word of God:
 - a) "Fools": not *afrwn*, the usual word for both prominent OT words for fool (*wyl*, 19x in Prov, and *ksyl*, 49x in Prov). *afrwn* has the sense of "mad, reckless, irresponsible," i.e., moral culpitude, while *anohtos* is more "ignorant, unlearned." They thought he didn't know; it was rather their intelligence that is called in question. That mind is clearest that can perceive the truths of God in scripture.
 - b) "Slow of heart": Compare our use of "quick" to denote mental acuity. Just as some people are faster than others in the mental realm, so in the spiritual some "get it" faster than others. And as the examples of these disciples suggest, the two capabilities are often inverse to one another. 1 Cor. 1:26-30. It is a major breakthrough for those of us who are wise in the world's eyes to realize that our secular intelligence does not translated directly to spiritual insight, and may often be a hindrance!
 - c) Their question was how he did not "know"; his concern is with how they do not "believe." Different modalities, and completely inverted in today's values.
2. Where they reported their observations, he expounds the scriptures.
 - a) They spoke of "Jesus of Nazareth"; he speaks of the Christ.
 - b) They emphasize what the rulers did; he emphasizes the "ought" of divine sovereignty.

- c) They mourn that their nation Israel has not been redeemed; he speaks of Messiah's own glory; focus on their interests rather than his.
- 3. Corresponding to the discouragement they reported, later (32) they will admit that during the Lord's exposition their "hearts burn[ed] within" them. Yet they still do not recognize him. Faith begins to awaken...but only begins.
- 4. *Application:* Three lessons here.
 - a) The direct confrontation of the two challenges is an important admonition for us. Scripture trumps observation.
 - b) We often say, "How wonderful it would have been to be along on that walk." The PB's named their main Bible school after Emmaus. But the scriptures, even from the lips of the risen Lord, were not enough for them to recognize him. The scriptures, by themselves, are not enough to save! Heb. 4:2, speaking of the Israelites who fell in the desert: "2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard [it]."
 - c) Yet though not sufficient, the Scriptures are necessary. The Savior does not bypass them, and under their influence, hearts begin to burn. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," Rom 10:17. In this way they contrast with direct observation, which the Lord declares not to be essential in John 20:29, "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

E. 30-31, 35, The Lord's personal touch does persuade them.

- 1. v.30, the sequence {take; bless/give thanks; break; give} is common in the Lord's ministry.
 - a) Lord's Supper: Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19
 - b) The 5000: Matt. 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16 (John 6:11 is different).
 - c) The 4000: Matt. 15:36; Mark 8:6
 - d) They had perhaps been present on one or more of these occasions. They recognized him by his familiar action.
- 2. What is unusual here is that he does it in their house, with their food! Did they invite him to give thanks? Or did he just do it? The important point is that he is ministering to them, not the other way around. Even in their house, he is the host.
- 3. Cf. John 20:16. The empty tomb and the gravecloths still leave them doubting, but when the Lord speaks to Mary, she responds.
- 4. *Applicaton:* So in our lives, the Lord touches us personally. Salvation is not just our coming to him--it is his coming to us! He speaks to us in some personal way that we can understand, and

suddenly the pieces fall into place. The scriptures make sense. It is no longer just history, archaeology, and literature--it is the Lord Jesus personally with us.

- a) Correlate this with our great observation from Acts: the two authorities in the believer's life, Scripture and Spirit. Scripture is necessary, but not sufficient without the work of the Spirit to draw and convict.
- b) Recall Eph. 6:17, "sword of the Spirit." Not our sword! That's why the spiritual qualifications of one who opens the Scriptures are far more important than the academic ones. Slothfulness in Bible study is not to be excused, 1 Tim. 4:13 (give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine), but lack of formal training is no hindrance to a genuine work of God, while reliance on such training may very well block real progress.

F. **Summary**

The Lord is Risen! This fact is the cornerstone of our faith. Never missing in gospel presentations in the NT.

- 1. This is a historical fact--the tomb is empty. But the empty tomb is by itself not enough to persuade us, and not even necessary.
- 2. The OT prophets anticipate this resurrection. Unlike personal observation, the Scriptural record is necessary for salvation. Yet by itself it is not enough.
- 3. The reason that these two don't by themselves bring faith is that we are dead in trespasses and sins, and dead men can't believe! So, in our evangelism, we need to be careful not to push. Present the facts and the scripture, but don't be surprised if people don't respond.
- 4. We believe in the resurrection because the Lord touches us personally. He speaks to us in a way that may seem insignificant to others, but that cuts through the haze and touches our hearts directly--as the grace before meal with Cleopas and his companion; as Mary's name in the garden. And with that key in hand, suddenly the prophets make sense, and the empty tomb becomes more than a relic. Our faith does not rest on archaeological findings or exegetical proof, but on the direct intervention of God in our lives. He has saved us, raised us up together with Christ, and thus (and only thus) do we believe in the resurrection.