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## On the Emmaus Road

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TEXT: Luke 24:13-27 (NASB)

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking 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. 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?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "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 to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also 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 exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

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Dear friends:

Hopes and dreams. We all have them. They motivate us. They give us a direction for our life. What are your hopes and dreams? And from a perspective of faith, in Pentecost's story in Acts chapter two, it says, "The young will see visions and the old will dream dreams." But what happens if the circumstances of life as they unfold crush our dreams? What happens if life is turned upside down, and everything that we hoped for, even from a standpoint of dreaming with God, is stopped?

Two men on the road to Emmaus were disillusioned, dejected, even despairing. The verb tense they use tells the story: "We *had hoped* that Jesus was God's messiah." Have you ever had moments in your life where hope becomes past tense; unfulfilled expectations that are never realized? I remember years ago driving by a lake where I knew that the DNR had recently killed all the fish in the lake because scavenger fish had taken over, and the ecological balance was so poor, they just decided to start over and restock the fish after a period of time. Well, I drove by the lake and I saw two men on the shore fishing. I knew that they were going to be disappointed. It didn't matter what technique they used, what the bait was, where they were, or in what depth of water, or how much they persevered; they were not going to catch fish. Sometimes in life, we're disappointed.

It reminds me of story of the famed Russian author and philosopher Leo Tolstoy. Did you know that when he was nine years old, he was convinced that God would help him to fly? And so at nine years old, he dove headfirst out of a third story window. And as he would say it, "I had my first major crisis of disappointment with God." Fortunately, Tolstoy survived that crash landing and later laughed at his childish test of faith. Do we ever, in faith, fantasize about yoking with God's supernatural powers? Do we ever pray as if God is a genie in the bottle, and that God is obligated somehow to alter reality to suit our preferences? Sometimes I can think like that.

Make no mistake: we do pray in hope. We do hope as we pray for God to release his power to intervene for us. We pray things like, "Lord, my daughter's on drugs," or, "Can you help me find a job?" "Lord, can you heal my body?" "Lord, can you heal the world of the pandemic of the coronavirus?" "Lord, can you heal my broken marriage?" "God, can you bail me out of this jam I'm in?" "Can you help my relationship with my child?" "Can you bring my children back to the faith of their childhood?" It's always

appropriate to pray, to ask God to release his loving spirit into the context of our life circumstances, to stir and to heal and to call. Yet God is not going to force people against their will, and love is always a free choice. Also, in the sovereignty of God at work in our world, they'll always be mysteries we don't understand until later. So we all wrestle in faith with the mystery of unanswered prayer, or at least of a mystery of prayer answered differently than we expect.

There are moments where God seems hidden or indifferent or silent or unfair or powerless; and we resonate with the feelings of the two men on the Emmaus road. "We had hoped, God, that this is how life would be." In those moments where God seems hidden or silent or indifferent or even defeated, the truth is God is accomplishing something far greater according to His plan in life; even in our life. So for those two men along the Emmaus Road, the truth was that though they thought Jesus was dead, having been crucified on a cross, the truth was Jesus was alive, resurrected, and walking at their side. It says, "Jesus approached them and began traveling with them."

So I want you to know the Bible tells us constantly that God always seeks us where we are, as we are. He consistently, constantly pursues us. Think of the story in Genesis 3, where it says, "The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves. And God searched for them and asked, 'Where are you?'" Or we read in Isaiah 65: "The Lord says, 'I revealed myself to those who didn't ask for me. I was found by those who did not seek me, to a nation who did not call my name. And I said, 'Here I am. Here I am.'" Or the story of the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, or the woman who searches for the lost coin? Or in the words of Jesus, "The son of man came to seek and save the lost." We can conclude not only is God not unwilling to receive us, but that God always goes out of His way to seek us; like Jesus, who sort out these two men on the Emmaus Road.

We need the eyes of our faith to be opened, to see the presence of Jesus alive and walking with us. We need the eyes of our faith to be opened, to see God at work all over in the life of our world. It says in the Emmaus story, "Their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus." So I want you, in all the ups and downs of life, to know that you can trust the presence and the promises of Jesus Christ. Remember, he said, "In this world, you'll have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

I want to compare faith in Jesus Christ to a parachute for a minute. We, in faith, could say God is trustworthy as a conceptual idea. We can also think of a parachute and think, well, then be a cool thing to do. Or we could say intellectually, "I believe the design of the parachute is adequate and excellent to see me safely to the Earth if I were to jump out of a plane." But we won't really test the effectiveness of the parachute until we go up into an airplane, leap out of that side door, pull the rip cord and have the shoot open up and prove the dependability of the parachute. We need, in faith, to trust Jesus Christ, even in the moments of life where we don't understand or we're disappointed.

The second thing about faith I want to share with you today is that Jesus stabilizes our spiritual internal environment. There was a chemist, a famous chemist, named Claude Bernard, who wrote about man's internal environment. He said that human beings' physical bodies are self-contained systems, and that like a refrigerator, our internal temperature is unaffected by external changes. So whether we're in a sauna, a hot room, or outside in the frigid weather of a blizzard, our human body, physically, internally is at 98.6° [F]. So for the Christian believer, when we have invited Jesus, the resurrected Lord, by His spirit to live within our life, He becomes the stabilizing internal environment to my spiritual soul.

Third, I want to say that faith is a journey of perseverance where we will experience difficulty and disappointment. I don't know if any of you are pro football fans. What would you say or who would you say is the greatest running back in NFL history? Maybe you who are a little older like me remember watching Jim Brown run? Maybe you'd say O.J. Simpson or Gale Sayers or Barry Sanders. Or if you're a Minnesota Viking fan like me, maybe you'd say Adrian Peterson. Or you who are younger might be excited about young running backs like Ezekiel Elliott or Saquon Barkley. But do you know the common denominator of all these great running backs is that in the accumulation of yardage that they have in game time competition, they are knocked down 4.5 yards on average, and they get up and they keep running. So somehow greatness is not only in the intrinsic giftedness, but the greatness is affiliated with perseverance. And God promises that by his Holy Spirit, He will pour himself into us to enable us to persevere in the journey of faith.

But in the invitation to trust Jesus Christ, the most important reason we trust Jesus is for the forgiveness of our sins; the reconciliation with God himself and the promise of eternal salvation. There's a true story about a pastor and his wife who were given a trip

to an upscale hotel in a nearby city where they could rest and recover. The gift had come from a member of the church who also had made provision for them to attend a popular show in that city when they were away. The night came for the show, and the pastor and his wife stood in a long line waiting to get in. The pastor had been instructed to just say the name of the individual who had made the arrangements to the host of the auditorium, and the host would have seats for them reserved in the crowded auditorium. But in front of the pastor were 50 to 60 very well-dressed people. And he began to worry, what if he got up there and the guy didn't know their name or the name of the individual who had made the arrangements? And there were so many people in front of the pastor who were having animated conversations with the host and then leaving in a huff. He could hear the host of the auditorium say, "You don't understand, we're sold out. There's no more room." Some of those well-dressed people were waving hundred dollar bills in front of the man, but still left frustrated. The man thought to himself, "Well, I've only got a 20 dollar bill in my wallet. I'm sure not gonna be buying my way in." Closer and closer, more and more people were leaving angrily until the man directly in front of the pastor waved two hundred dollar bills in front of the host. Yet they went away, red-faced in anger as well. Nervously, the pastor comes up and says, "Mr. So-and-so has told me he's made provisions for me and my wife to attend the concert." "Well, what's your name?" the host asked. The pastor told him his name. The host lit up with a smile and said, "Come with me. I have your reservation."

Jesus has given us His name and He's made provision for us to enter into the grace of God. He's made provision for us to enter into the promise of eternal salvation and the hope of Heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." So we trust Jesus with the simple prayer: "Lord Jesus, thank you that you have made provision for my forgiveness, for your grace, and for my salvation." Faith lays claim to the reservations Jesus Christ has made for us and paid for us.

The last thing I want to share with you today is that faith also empowers us to be resilient on our journey. Jesus rebuilds and restores our dreams, and then Jesus encourages us to dream great dreams for God. We should pray that the Holy Spirit would show us or that we would say, "Lord Jesus, what do you wish me to do for you? How do you wish to use me?" When our eyes of faith are open it changes our expectations for the future. I think about the passage Paul writes in Philippians 4 from a

jail cell when he says, "Whatever is good or lovely or excellent or beautiful, think about these things and the God of peace will be with you."

So, dear listener, I pray that you, even when you don't understand, will trust Jesus Christ. In the moments of life where your dreams have been derailed or crushed before you and you are disillusioned, keep trusting Jesus Christ. Believe in His promises for you. Believe that He loves you and will never leave you or forsake you. Believe in Him for the forgiveness of your sins and the hope of eternal life. But ultimately, continue to dream big dreams for God, in the ways that God will shine through you, even in those tough days. Believe in Jesus.

Amen.