

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 25 - EMMAUS

TEXT: LUKE 24:13-25 (ESV)

Doctrine & Story

We're nearing the end of this series. The story of today's text took place on Easter Sunday evening. The Bible predominantly tells a story—**The Story**. It is the story of God's revelation of Himself to His creation and of His plan to redeem and restore His creation to Himself. Yes there are entire books in the New Testament which are mostly in the vein of instruction and teaching, (like Paul's epistles) but never make the mistake of thinking the teaching epistles are where you go for doctrine and the Gospels are where you go for story, as if they're separated like that. They are not.



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Doctrine and story are inseparably linked. If what you profess to believe doesn't work itself out in how you live, do you really believe what you claim to believe? All of us live according to what we truly believe—even if we've never articulated it. Doctrines, simply put, are principles or positions of a system of belief. We all live by systems of belief. We're all doctrinal. Relativists say there is no absolute truth (*except for that claim*) and demand that we treat contradictory and conflicting beliefs as being equally valid. This is a doctrine. It may sound appealing because it liberates us from the responsibility of conviction, but there remains the escapable truth that ideas have consequences. One place where the consequences of ideas is tested the most is in the face of our own mortality. Is there life after death? Will my life be judged? If so, by what rule? And by whom?

Answers to questions like this don't come any other way than through story. That's what this series has been, the story of Christian doctrine. Today's text tells of two people deeply affected by the consequences of the idea that Jesus wasn't Who claimed to be. Their story is saturated in doctrinal implication. Even these two, on that first Easter evening, understand that if Jesus' life was taken from Him and He was not raised, all is lost.

Luke 24:13-35

¹³That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and they were discussing all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He said, "What is this conversation you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, Cleopas, said, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹And he said to them, "What things?" They said, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹But 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.

²²Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³and 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. ²⁴Some 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." ²⁵And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹but they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

³²They 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?" ³³And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

We Hoped He Was the One

The road was seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Two of Jesus' followers, Cleopas and another (maybe his wife), walked along as the sun set, possibly returning home after Passover in the Holy City. Moving at a good clip, it would have been at least a two hour walk. We know that as they walked they discussed the things that had happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, and we know their hearts were heavy with a mixture of sorrow, ^(v. 17) disappointment ^(v. 21) and confusion. ^(vs. 22-24) So they moved at the pace of two sorrowful people talking through their grief.

A stranger on the road caught up to them and asked what they were they talking about? Why were they sad? Had this guy been living in a hole in the ground the past few days? They rehearsed the story of how Jesus had been handed over to die by the religious leaders and how He was crucified. "We really hoped He was the redeemer," they said. ^(21, 22-24) But now, they didn't know what to think. They hoped, but three days had passed. They were using this walk to sort things out as best as they could.

Author Frederick Buechner suggests we can all relate: "Do you understand what I mean when I say that there is not one of us who has not gone to Emmaus with them? Emmaus is whatever we do or wherever we go to make ourselves forget that the world holds nothing sacred: that even the wisest and bravest and loveliest decay and die; that even the noblest ideas that men have had—ideas about love and freedom and justice—have always in time been twisted out of shape by selfish men for selfish ends. Emmaus is where we go, where these two went, to try to forget about Jesus and the great failure of His life." (Frederick Buechner, *The Magnificent Defeat*.)

Is it too harsh to call this a discussion about the great failure of Jesus' life? I don't think so because of how these two saw the relationship between the story and its doctrinal implications. Jesus was dead, and if that was the end of the story, how could Jesus be the one they hoped for. He seemed prophetic, mighty in word and deed. But what help could He give from the grave? Popular teachers come and go, some even as martyrs. But they hoped Jesus would be more than that. They hoped He'd redeem them. Instead, their own religious leaders killed him.

There were some women who claimed they visited Jesus' tomb this very morning and found it empty. They even spoke with an angel who said Jesus was alive. It was an amazing story, they said. But you wonder if they mean amazing in the "fantastic tale" sort of way. The women's story, if it were true, would salvage hope. If the tomb was empty, Jesus conquered the grave. They even heard that some of the disciples checked it out and found things just as the women had said. Oh that it were true!

But alas, everyone knows such things just don't happen. The women told their story, but for these travelers on the Emmaus road, "him they did not see." (vs 24) Lest we brand them as weak in their faith, this isn't a matter of weak faith. It is a matter of confidence in the fact that 100 times out of 100 when a person dies, they don't come back to life. These two were still without evidence. And on top of that, they said, it was hard to reconcile how God's Redeemer would have to suffer so much.

Was Suffering Not Necessary?

At this point the stranger speaks up. He wants to know what is so hard to understand about God's chosen One suffering. In fact, He takes it even further, telling them they're being foolish **NOT** to recognize how this fits. Haven't they seen the pattern of God's work in this world? Suffering always precedes glory. Was not Abraham childless, homeless and embroiled in land disputes throughout his sojourn to the Promised Land? Was not Joseph sold into slavery by his own brothers before rising to that position of being able to save his own family from starvation? Was not everything stacked against Moses from the start? Was not David tormented by Saul before rising to power?

Suffering before glory is God's pattern throughout all of scripture. One of the ways you'll know the true Messiah is that He *fits* this pattern, not that He defies it. This stranger, whose identity we know though His companions did not, reveals a profound error many of us hold in our doctrinal understanding of God and how this world works. Many of us operate from the presumption that God's faithfulness is seen in His ability and willingness to shield us from difficulty. But this is a profoundly *unbiblical* understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

Jesus said the Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed. (Mt 16:21) Isaiah prophesied that the Christ would be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquity, and God would lay on Him the punishment that would bring us peace. (Is 53:3-6) The disciples on the road to Emmaus and religious leaders in Jerusalem didn't recognize Jesus as the Christ because they were looking for something other than what the pattern of Scripture laid out for them. Concerning the Savior, they expected One who would rise from a position of power. And though the prophets spoke of the Messiah's certain suffering, Jesus' own peers saw His sufferings as evidence *against* His claim that He was the Christ. And by forsaking the story of God's redeeming work among them up to this point, a story whose pattern is that suffering precedes glory, they embrace a doctrinal view that blinds them from seeing a suffering Savior.

How many of us gauge how close God seems to be according to how little we feel we need Him to sustain us? We presume the faithfulness of God is seen best when God gives us a life free of dependence on Him. When this is our doctrine and hardship comes or when the bottom falls out on our lives, we think the struggle we're in is proof that God has left the room.

That is false doctrine. It defies everything His Word tells us and every pattern Scripture lays out for us. When we embrace a doctrine that says God's job is to grant us lives free from struggle—we're suggesting God is doing His job when He's arranging things so we don't have to turn to Him as often. Not only is this bad doctrine, it is supremely arrogant. It defies everything His word tells us about the Christian life. "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) Jesus tells us, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5) Paul says it is granted to believers, on behalf of Christ, to suffer so that we might live humbly, finding glory in the power of Christ alone. (Phil 1&2)

When our doctrines of God are found more in what we'd like them to be than in how His words instructs us, we are bound to experience a lot of confusion and sorrow when God seems to defy the doctrines we author and then hold dear. Suffering and humility are woven into every chapter of the story of His redeeming grace, because His call on the lives of His people is to *Himself*, and not to a life of untroubled autonomy from Him. Does your doctrine flow from the story you'd like to write or from the one He's been telling since the Fall of man? It matters.

When Jesus went from Moses through the Prophets (Genesis to Malachi) interpreting all the things concerning Him, He gave us a beautiful, concise doctrine of the Old Testament—it is all about Christ. Oh, to have been there as He took them through the history of God's redemption. Oh, that we'd embrace the truth that every part of that Old Testament story is about Him. Oh, that we'd see that His suffering was told from the start.

Did Not Our Hearts Burn?

When they arrived in Emmaus, Jesus acted like He was going on, but they implored Him to stay. He obliged. As they ate, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them—and their eyes were opened and they knew this was Jesus. And just like that, He vanished from their sight. But it was as if all the pieces fell into place and they understood what Christ was telling them. Luke tells us they rose that very hour to return another seven miles back to Jerusalem to tell the eleven. All was not lost! He is risen, and that idea is rich in consequence.

The words of Jesus burned in their hearts. We don't need to rely on eloquence, debate, impassioned pleas or notoriety in order for the word of God to change people. It is powerful on its own. The word brings people from death to life. Sometimes when we're at our lowest and a friend tries to encourage us with Scripture, we might say, "Please don't preach at me. Not now." sometimes even resenting the idea that the recitation of a few verses could reach into our pain and heal what hurts.

Beloved, that is exactly what Scripture can do in your life. His word is living and active. It is an anchor in the cliff face that holds, no matter what. It is true, independent of how you feel—so secure that your sorrow, pessimism, even narcissism can't empty it of its power. It is the story and the doctrines of the truth of God. It is the story that tells us Jesus triumphed over death and satisfied the wrath of God by paying the wage of our sin. May the word of God and the doctrines it holds burn in your heart and compel you to testify that He is risen indeed.