

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

LUKE 24: 13-32

APRIL 8, 2007 – SUNDAY 11:00 AM – DR. JACK GRAHAM

...is the everlasting song of eternity, taken right from the final chapters of the Bible, the book of Revelation; that under Him be praise, honor, glory and dominion.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to the Gospel of Luke chapter 24... Luke 24, and I want to speak to you today on the subject "The Journey of Life."

Life is a journey. It has a beginning, and end, and all the steps in-between. From the first cry to the final breath it is a journey of life that we all must experience. Where... whether you know where you are in the journey, or where you've been, or where you're going, it is important that you understand that the journey is God's plan and God's purpose for your life. You can't change the past... what has happened over your shoulder, but by God's grace and by the power of His resurrection, you can change the present and your future with Him.

Easter means that Christ is alive! And if you will embrace Him, experience Him personally in your life, that He will join you in the journey, guiding you, walking with you step by step, filling you and thrilling you with joy and faith and hope. I know this: Life with the risen Lord is the most incredible journey of all! It is a journey of hope. It is a journey which at the end of the day means that we will be in His presence forever and ever.

Now the journey of life can be full of passion and full of promise for each one of us. But unfortunately many on the journey of life never experience that joy and that hope. Or perhaps you've lost your way. Maybe you see life as just a series of incidents and accidents. Or maybe you're marking time... just getting through, getting by. Maybe you realize that life is a whole lot harder that you had anticipated; that some of the difficulties and the demanding turns and twists of life have caused you to lose hope and even to despair.

I know many people today who are just existing rather than really living! And that's no way to live! Just existing! God has something so much better, so much greater than you can imagine. When even the ordinary, common experiences of life can be momentous and meaningful, and even miraculous. Most of all, Jesus wants to j... join you on this journey of life.

We meet in Luke's gospel... chapter 24... two men who had lost hope. Two discouraged, despondent, disillusioned disciples... followers of Christ who were disappointed... disappointed in God, disappointed in Jesus.

On the first day of the week, 3 days after Jesus was crucified, some women had gone to the tomb where Jesus was buried, and later reported that He was risen; that He was alive. Some considered their reports suspect, but others followed them to the tomb; disciples who went there as well, and they discovered that the tomb was empty. And even an angel who said [Luke 24:6] "*He is not here; He is risen!*" But Jesus was nowhere to be found! So all of the disciples at this point are confused. "What's happened? Where have they p... put our Lord? Where has He gone?"

And so these two men that we meet in Luke 24 sat out on a journey from Jerusalem to a little village... a little place called Emmaus, 7 miles outside of Jerusalem. And on this walk... no doubt, trying to get away from the occurrences... the events of the past 3 days, the terrible cross and crucifixion of Christ. Maybe they're just

getting out of town to clear their heads. We don't know. Maybe they're willing to chunk it all [temporary frog suddenly in Pastor's voice] They thought that He was [frog gone] the Messiah but now everything is laying in the dust. Their hopes are gone, their dreams are dashed. That's where we pick up the reading in verse 13 of 24:

13) *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're holding with each other as you walk?" 18) And they stood still, looking sad.*

Now just push the pause button right there; keep your Bibles open, but look right up here. Let me tell you what has happened. As these men are walking, Jesus joins them. Now they didn't realize that this was Christ. Their... their faith was undeveloped; they were living in a mental... mental fog, and... and... and they didn't understand who they were talking to. We don't know how that was true, but they obviously didn't recognize Him.

And so when this divine stranger walks up to them and says, “What are you boys talking about?”, one of them says:

18) *You must be the only one in all of Jerusalem that doesn't know what's happening here.*

Now Jesus knew everything that had happened, but they say:

18) *Look, everyone knows what has happened here.*

All of these events, both the cross and the resurrection were fully public in those days. Jesus did not die secretly or privately: He died publicly, demonstrating the love of God. Jesus was buried and His tomb is not lost! Rather, He came out of the grave and everyone in Jerusalem knew of all the events about Jesus and... So rather than suggesting that somehow He was put away privately in a family burial p... plot, as the media exploded with the news several... ah... months ago (a false report, all hype, no... no substance.) Just remember, that all it would have taken to expose any kinds of myth regarding the resurrection, was to simply produce the body of Jesus. Everyone in Jerusalem knew of the public events and experiences of Jesus Christ and those who follow Him. But be that as it may, these fellows said:

18) *Look, haven't you heard about Jesus of Nazareth?*

Down in verse 19 He says:

19) *“What things are you talking about?” 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 (and watch this in verse 21) 21) “But we had hoped... we had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all of this, it's now the third day since these things have happened.”*

They're stunned, saddened. “We had hoped... we thought He was the Promised One, the Messiah! We believed Him. We followed Him. We gave up our lives to follow Him. We... we saw Him perform miracles... amazing miracles! We listened to His words and never heard anything like this. And His words transformed our hearts. But now ... now He's dead. Now He's gone and with it our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations.” You see they're confused, they're afraid. Life hasn't turned out the way they expected it.

And many of you would have to say today, “You know my life hasn’t turned out the way I expected it.” Maybe you had hopes even in God and God has somehow in some way in your mind disappointed you. Because God did not come through in the way you expected Him to come through in the time you expected Him to do it. You look at your life and maybe you’re dealing with a physical illness or... ah... the crash of a career or financial reverses or the breaking of a relationship. And all of your dreams and all of your hopes seem to be gone! And here on this journey of life it’s so difficult now and... and so hard to continue to follow. Maybe like these men, you just feel so burned out.

You know burn-out takes place... it’s a classic symptom of the stress-filled lives we live in our generation, but burn-out when the experiences of life do not meet our expectations in life. What had happened to these men has happened to so many people today. Their experience did not match their expectation. They expected more from Jesus! They expected something else from God.

Maybe you’ve decided to give up and just chunk it all to live in pleasure for yourself, to do whatever because you’re so disappointed in life. What we need today is to experience what these men experienced when Christ began to walk with them and became a new beginning, and He turned these disappointed, empty, doubting disciples into burning hearts for Him. How does that happen? How is our faith restored? How are our hopes reborn?

Well Jesus began to converse with them. In verse 25 He said to them:

25) ... *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26) “Was it not necessary that 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.*

Now... now join us in the journey right here, and hear what is happening! These... these men were so upset that Jesus did not deliver the nation of Israel and... and did not sit upon the throne of Israel. They’re so disappointed but Jesus takes them back and He begins to walk them through the Scripture. They take a walk in the Word. Step by step Jesus begins to remind them and refocus them upon the fact that before glory comes suffering.

And so He takes them all the way back to Genesis. No doubt He pointed out in Genesis 13... or chapter 3, verse 15 when man had sinned and broken God’s commandments, He promised a Deliverer, the One who would come and crush Satan’s head and restore them. No doubt on this little walk to Emmaus, Jesus took them to Genesis 22 when Abraham was commanded by God to take his son, his only son Isaac and to lay him on an altar to sacrifice him there. God stayed his hand and provided a substitute, a ram caught in the thicket. It is a reminder... it is really a rehearsal, a preview of the cross and of Calvary. Jesus spoke to them of His sacrifice.

No doubt Jesus would have taken them to the book Exodus... back to Egypt and reminded these men of the day when the death angel passed over and the Israelites were told to take a lamb and... and to slay the lamb and to put the lamb’s blood upon the doorpost of their house. And when God’s judgment came across Egypt, and He saw the blood, He passed over.

No doubt He spoke to them of the sacrificial systems and all of the blood that was poured out in these sacrifices, and why? To condition the world that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin! Perhaps Jesus took these men to Psalm 22 and verse 1, previewing the cross! When Jesus cried out, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*

Without question in my mind He must have taken them to Isaiah 53 and... and shared of the prince of prophet who said of Christ [Isaiah 53:5-6], *“He is wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace has been laid upon Him. The Lord has laid upon Him all our iniquities.”*

You see He walks them right down Route 66. All of the Word of God. By now these men realize something magnificent is happening. Their hearts are beginning to pound! The passion is being restored as they're beginning to understand why Christ came and who Christ is. They begin to realize once again that God had a purpose even in the cross of the Lord; that suffering comes before glory.

If you walk out to our atrium, you will see windows there... 66 of them, and in each window a book of the Bible, starting in Genesis, right through Malachi in the Old Testament; Matthew to Revelation... all 66 books. That's our own Route 66 out there. And in every window there is a symbol... a portrait of Christ, because standing in the shadows, standing in symbol or in shadow in all of the Bible is Jesus, because all of the Bible is about Jesus. As Jesus is walking with these men, they must have been thinking, “This fellow really knows a lot about this Bible. He acts like He wrote or something!”

And in every one of those windows there is a portrait of Christ, a symbol of Christ. And weaving it's way through these magnificent portraits there is a scarlet thread... a red ribbon symbolizing and speaking of that scarlet thread of redemption that runs throughout the pages of God's Word from beginning to end... the promise of the Messiah, and who He is and what He would do.

Cut the Bible anywhere and it will bleed, because it is a bloody book. It is a book of redemption and salvation. And if you don't see Jesus in the Bible, you've missed the whole point of God's Word. Because all of this book is about Jesus!

This is why if you are burned out... if your dreams are broken and shattered, I advise you... open up God's Word! Allow the Spirit of the live Christ to speak to you. Paul said [Colossians 3:16], “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*” And as you walk in the Word and the Spirit of God begins to speak, you will feel once again the passion burning and the fire starting in your heart as you now know the power of Christ.

You see what was wrong with these disciples is what's wrong with so many people today: living on the wrong side of the resurrection. They didn't know Christ was alive! They didn't yet believe that He had risen from the dead. But now when Christ walks them through and shows them in all of the Scriptures those things concerning Himself, they realize who He is and why He came, and what He did on the cross, and they begin to believe again! And to burn again.

You know every step away from Jesus is a step in the wrong direction. And these men were walking in the wrong direction until Christ came and joined and enjoined them once again. If you're disappointed in life's journey... if you feel as though God has let you down in some way or this whole Christianity thing has not worked for you, then I invite you today to begin again with Christ in the fullness and the freshness of His living presence because Jesus will draw near to you as well.

In this passage, verse 28, as they drew near this village, He acted... that is, Jesus acted as if He was going farther. Now Jesus is drawing them in and inviting them in, but He's testing them. And He said, “Okay, boys, end of the journey. I'll see you later.” And then the Bible says, verse 29:

29) They urged Him strongly, saying, “Stay with us... stay with us for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So He went in to stay with them.

Did you know that Jesus will only go where He is welcomed and invited? The Bible says [Revelation 3:20]: “**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.**” Jesus will not barge through the door, break it down in order to get into your life. He waits for your welcome. He hesitates. One of the most amazing, incredible choices of life would be to send Jesus on down the road, or to invite Him into your life.

And so these men pled with Him, “Jesus, come and stay with us.” And He did, and because it is supper time... at verse 30 He was at the table with them and He took the bread (Now don’t miss this) He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and He vanished from their sight. Down in verse 35 it says:

35) *They knew Him in the breaking of the bread.*

They realized who they were dealing with here in the breaking of the bread. What’s going on here? How in the breaking of the bread? Was it the way He blessed it? Was there something in His voice? Something in His eyes as He lifted His face to the Father and prayed, and asked God’s blessing and grace upon the meal that they shared, upon their fellowship and friendship? Was it... was it in the way that He bro... He broke the bread that they recognize Him? Did... did Jesus have His own unique way of serving a meal? Or was it that when He broke the bread and gave them this food that they saw the nail prints in His hands? The only man-made thing in the resurrection in eternity will be the prints of the nails in His hands.

Somehow supernaturally at that moment they realize this is Jesus! And at that moment He disappeared; He vanished. Now I know some liberal types say you don’t have to believe all these stories of resurrection appearances and Jesus showing up and then disappearing and vanishing, and so on. That really it’s all about the metaphor. There’s a news article this week, saying, you know, you don’t really have to believe all of this. It’s just the metaphor; it’s just the inspiration; it’s just the illustration.

Well let me tell you this: if you... It does matter! And if you believe in the resurrection that means [taps several times] you believe in a supernatural Savior! And it means that Jesus, the supernatural, risen Savior can show up anytime and leave anytime He well pleases; that He is Lord and that when He comes or when He goes, that’s His choice and not ours. But greater than this, He is pointing out that it is not His physical presence, but the living presence of His Spirit who lives within every believer now. Because Christ is no longer limited by time or space or place! The Christ who was in that place and that time, because He is alive, now lives in the lives... the hearts of those who believe and trust in Him. And He is with us!

And when you feel alone... So many people feel alone and abandoned in life! Again, on life’s journey you feel like perhaps you’re walking all by yourself. But can I tell you because Jesus Christ lives, you never walk alone! [applause begins] He is by your side. He is in your car, He is at your school, He is at your place of work! He is with us! He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” And, I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to walk a single step in life’s journey without Him!

The greatest promise... the most repeated promise in all of the Bible... You know what it is? You say, “Well, it must be that God will forgive us.” That’s a wonderful promise. His amazing grace is promised, and certainly we’re grateful for that promise, that we can be forgiven by God because of His cross. But that’s not the most repeated promise of the Bible.

You say, “Well, it must be the promise of heaven.” What a wonderful promise, glorious promise it is to think of heaven and to know that He has promised us eternal life and we can know for sure that we’re going to heaven! That’s a great [tap] promise! But that’s not the most oft repeated promise of the Bible.

The most given promise of all are these words: “I am with you... I’m with you.” Over and over and over again God promises us His presence. We have a friend that sticks closer than a brother. And we experience His presence in the most unexpected places, often in the most unusual ways.

These men experienced His living presence in the simple act of the breaking of bread. What could be more common than sharing a meal? And yet, around that table to experience the love of a living Christ. So often He shows up because He is closer than you can possibly imagine. He shows up in the most ordinary ways: in the face of a child, in the beauty of an early morning, or even in the dark midnight of some crisis of our soul. He is present; He is real because He is risen! Therefore, our faith is restored and our heart’s passion is rekindled. Every time we recognize Him... every time we realize Him, our hearts begin to burn again [strike]. The passion is back!

They said, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us?”

They say, “Now we get it... now we know!” that before the resurrection comes death. From death comes resurrection, from suffering comes glory, from the cross, the crown; from the pain, the gain. And in that moment in that miracle they’re given renewed courage and confidence and conviction. And the first thing they do is to go back to Jerusalem. They started again. They went back to Jerusalem! It was a brand new beginning in their lives! And they told all of their friends, “We have seen Him! He is alive!”

And with that same confidence and certainty we can tell our family and friends that we know He is alive! Because right now, right here, right now this is where your journey begins. For some of you for the first time, for others, your journey begins again!

If your heart has grown cold or cool towards the things of God, now is the time for your faith to be restored and the fire of hope to be rekindled! Because this same risen Christ is coming again! He’s returning! And we will know Him! And He is making us like Himself. One day we will share in His resurrection and we’ll be like Jesus. That’s what the Bible says.

Look at your neighbor. One of these days they’re going to look like Jesus. I know that’s quite a stretch [laughter] looking at one another right now, but that’s the promise! That’s the hope! That as we journey with Jesus every step of the way when He comes for us that we will be able to say from life’s first cry to life’s final breath, “Jesus led me all the way.”

In 1932 a California pastor was getting ready for the day of preaching at his church on Easter. And he was shaving in a mirror, and the radio was on and he heard a liberal minister say, “Good morning, it’s Easter.” And then this minister went on to bring a message which suggested as we mentioned earlier that it really didn’t matter if Jesus came out of the grave, that... that it was just the... the thought of Easter. It was just the... the hope and the inspiration of Easter and it... it was just a metaphor of life and death and so on. And when this Bible-believing pastor heard these words it... it so angered him that he shouted! His wife heard him in the next room. He nearly cut himself shaving! He ... He said, “That’s a lie! It’s a lie!”

He was so fired up, he went to his church that morning and he preached the resurrection furiously like he’d never preached it before. He came back that night and once again he preached the resurrection. And that evening... late that evening his wife just seeing his passion for the resurrection, said, “Honey, why don’t you write a song about your faith in Christ and the resurrection so that the world can hear it?” And so that night Alfred Ackley sat down with pen and paper, he composed the tune and wrote the words to this song:

*I serve a risen Savior; He’s in the world today;/ I know that He is living, whatever men may say;/ I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,/ And just the time I need Him He’s always near./ He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! And He walks with me and He talks with me along life’s narrow way./ He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!/
You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within [strike] my [strike] heart [strike].*
[extended applause]

He lives! And your heart can burn again and believe [tap] again [tap] if you will receive the risen Savior. And on this journey of life compel Him [tap] to stay [tap] with [tap] you [tap]. To come [tap] into your [tap] life [tap] and walk with you from here to eternity.

Would you bow your heads with me in prayer? Every head bowed and every eye closed.

You have a decision to make... same decision these men on the road to Emmaus made and that is either to let Jesus walk out of your life, or to welcome Him into your life. You can choose to let Him walk away and live the rest of your life and all eternity without Him. That would be a tragedy of unthinkable proportions. Or you can say, “Lord, stay with me.” You can simply pray a prayer like this:

Lord Jesus, I invite You to come into my life [music begins]. On my journey I realize I’ve made many mistakes and I’ve failed in so many ways and I’ve almost lost hope. I’ve almost given in but thank you for being here today, for speaking to my heart through Your word. So, Jesus, I invite You to come into my life and forgive me of my sin, to change my heart, to reignite my soul, to give me a hope and a reason and a future for living.

And if you will invite Christ to come into your life in those kinds of terms... Just say “Lord Jesus...” The Bible says [Romans 10:9]: *If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus and believe in our hearts God has raised Him from the dead, we will be saved.* [Romans 10:13] *“For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.”*

So call upon His name right now; trust Him and promise to follow Him in the power of His living Spirit until He comes for you. In just a moment we’re going to stand and invite people to come forward to confess faith in Christ. That’s you. If you are receiving Christ today I want you to do what He always called people to do... I want you to do what these 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus did. They went public. They went back and they told their friends. And you can begin today.

This journey of life... this new beginning is just one simple step, and I promise you if you will take that step, He will empower you the rest of the way. That pounding in your heart... that burning in your heart that you feel today; that’s not merely your emotions, that’s the work of the Holy Spirit bringing you to the living Savior now. So come forward and confess your Christ and confess your faith and follow Him openly and publicly. Don’t be ashamed of the One who gave His life for you.

What I’m going to ask you to do is come and simply stand here at the foot of this cross, at the bottom of this pulpit and just face right here. And your standing here will mean that you’re standing in Christ and Christ alone. You’re not coming to me. You’re not coming to the church. You’re coming to Christ.

Now there are others who want to join the church today and we invite you come forward as well... to join this church. This is where you’re blessed, this is where you want to belong. So those of you who need a church home... you’re looking for a spiritual family, then you come today, stand here as well, and join us, this fellowship of the burning heart, as we follow Christ together.

Lord, thank You for Your word. Thank You for the power of the resurrection to change lives even now. We pray that as this invitation is given that many will say, “Lord, stay with me, Lord, stay with me, Lord, stay with me.” In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN

Let’s stand together. In the balcony our ministers are waiting for you upstairs. They’ll meet you and there’s no need for you to come all the way here unless you want to do it. But they’ll meet you there. But on these lower levels what I want you to do is just come and stand and face this direction right at this pulpit. And by the act of coming forward and standing, you’ll be saying, “I’m following Christ.”

Believers who want to come and join with us in the church, you come and lead the way; be an example to others. We need our decision counselors to join us. And I want to invite you to come.

And I please... I plead with you don't be leaving right now unless it's an emergency. This is the most tender and precious moment of the service. Lives are in the balance... lives are in the balance right now. People need Christ. You need Christ! Come to Him right now. God bless you on your way.