

Title: The True Tale of Two Men
Date: March 31, 2024
Subject: Easter
Scripture: Luke 24:13 - 35

A kindergarten teacher at a Christian School talked with her new students to see how much they knew about the Bible. One little boy had never heard the story of Jesus. When she told him about Jesus' death on the cross, he asked, "What's a cross?" The teacher grabbed some sticks and put them together in the shape of a cross. The teacher explained that Jesus was nailed to a cross where he died. The boy was saddened and quietly said, "Oh. That's too bad." The teacher quickly went on to tell that Jesus rose again and came back to life. The boy's eyes got as big as saucers. "Totally awesome" (adapted from Chuck Swindoll, *Growing Deep*, p. 149).

The boy isn't the only one to go through a quick change of understanding and emotions. One of the first times was on the evening of Christ's resurrection to two men who were walking from Jerusalem to a nearby village. We find their story in Luke 24. If you use a blue Bible in the chairs, it's page _____

READ Luke 24:13-24.

I find it fascinating that these two men who'd followed Jesus "were kept from recognizing him." Why? Did God prevent it from happening? Was it their lack of belief?

It's important to note that the two on the road weren't the only ones who didn't recognize Jesus. Mary mistook him for the gardener. A few days later, after the disciples had seen Jesus and spent time with him, they didn't recognize him because they were preoccupied with trying to catch fish.

Jesus' appearance had changed. He had a new glorified human body. He hadn't assumed some non-humanoid form. His presence was unexpected as his disciples, including the eleven closest to him, on that Sunday, all thought he was dead and didn't know he had risen from the grave.

Jesus revealed himself to people as he chose, when they were ready.

Cleopas and the other man were dejected because of the recent events and were flabbergasted that Jesus wasn't aware of them. They had a lot on their minds. It came spilling out as they recounted what had taken place the past few days. Jesus of Nazareth, their friend, their teacher, the one they had grown extremely close to, the one they thought was the Savior...had been betrayed, gone through the mockery of trials, was handed over to the Roman government to be crucified, hung on a cross for six hours until he died... and then was buried in a cold, barren tomb. Case closed. Or so they thought.

The duo told the unknown stranger that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. They didn't know where it was, what had become of it. They were in shock and a state of confusion.

READ Luke 24:26, 27.

The two disciples had tried to teach Jesus, but it was obvious they were the ones who needed to be taught. Jesus anchored his return to life in Scripture. He used the Old Testament to show them what it said

about what needed to happen to him. He likely used familiar passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 as well as ones they may not have connected with the Christ who was promised.

The three were approaching the village where the disciples were going to spend the night. They asked Jesus to stay with them and have something to eat. Jesus acted like he was going to go farther but then agreed. At the meal, he assumed the role of host. When he gave thanks for the food, the disciples' eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then Jesus disappeared.

Some commentators feel that Jesus didn't vanish suddenly. They think the disappearance could be explained by his new resurrected body having greater agility so that he speedily, swiftly and suddenly withdrew so that before they knew it, he was gone (Gill, Barnes).

I don't think it was a matter of greater stealthiness. Jesus vanished. He was gone in an instant. He was there and then he wasn't.

The disciples instantly understood that they had been talking with Jesus for hours. They asked each other, "Weren't our hearts burning within us?" Something had been brewing, building up to the moment of joy. They hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others that they had seen Jesus meaning He was obviously alive meaning he obviously was who he said he was and could do what he said he could do. They were told that Jesus had appeared to others as well.

A follower of Islam who became a Christian was asked by his friends, "Why have you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions. You didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one dead and one alive - which one would you ask which way to go?" (*HIS*, April 1980, P. 13).

Back to the story of Jesus. Here's what happened. It seemed like death had triumphed. Jesus' body had been swallowed by earth's dark and silent tomb. The devil thought: "I've got you now. You can't escape my clutches." For three long days humanity seemed to hold its collective breath as the giver of life lay on the cold stone. Though the sun rose in the east, there was a shroud of darkness over people's souls as the light of the world was hidden. The one who said he was the gate was sealed in by one made of stone. The one who said he was the truth seemed to be nothing but a lie. The one who said, "Before Abraham I AM" seemed to be saying "I am not."

Then...the earth shook. Jesus leapt not only from the grave clothes he'd been wrapped in, but also from the devil's clutches. He ripped through the gates of hell, tore off the chains that bound people's souls. Life conquered death. Holiness defeated sin. Jesus crushed the devil.

Jack declared himself an atheist at age 15. In adulthood he adamantly defended his "atheistic faith" from Christian friends who tried to persuade him otherwise. His brilliant mind led him to a career as a professor of philosophy and literature. A sticking point for Jack was the Bible which he admitted was different from other literature and myths. He was drawn to the account of God calling Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt

(Exodus 3). Moses made lots of excuses including he didn't know whom he should say sent him. God responded, "I AM WHO I AM." The name indicates God's eternal presence.

This thought deeply affected Jack, better known as C. S. Lewis. He believed "I AM" would be the only thing that the one true God would need to say. It changed his life as he "admitted God was God" and moved closer to placing his trust in Jesus.

Jesus offers us God's grace, mercy, love, kindness, forgiveness, eternal life - nothing we deserved... but everything we needed. Because Christ is alive, we are alive, free, liberated. Sins - forgiven. Guilt - gone. Shattered creatures - whole beings. Acceptance - child of God. Destiny - heaven.

When D. L. Moody held a series of meetings at Cambridge University. The cultured and refined students were outraged and disgusted that a coarse, crude, vulgar backwoods American should speak to them. They charged that Moody couldn't properly speak the Queen's English properly. They were correct about that. A group wanted to break up the meeting by shouting, whistling, and mocking Moody till he had no choice but to quit.

The meeting began with a song by Moody's associate. It struck a chord with the students. Immediately after the song ended, Moody strode to the platform's front and spoke bluntly: "Young gentlemen, don't ever let anybody tell you that God don't love you, for he do." They were caught off guard, drawn in and gave no thought to interrupting the preacher. Moody came back to his theme: "Don't ever let anybody tell you that God don't love you, for he do." After the meeting, the phrase continued to run through one student's mind. He thought, "Why do I fight a God who loves me? Why should I be in rebellion to such a God?" That same day he sought out Moody who led him to Christ. It was first time he realized God love him (adapted from raystedman.org/new-testament/1-john/the-path-of-love).

Some of you may be like that man. This may be the first time you understand that God loves you. He loves you so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead 2000 years ago is available to change lives right now, to transform a person from being an enemy of God to a child of God.

Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, served as a volunteer doctor during The Boer War between British and Dutch settlers in South Africa. In his book about the war (The Great Boer War), he wrote about a small detachment of British troops who were forced to retreat by an overwhelming enemy. They left behind their wounded who faced certain death. These soldiers realized the only way to survive was to come immediately under the protection of a Red Cross flag. They had a piece of white cloth, but no red paint, so they used the blood from their wounds to make the cross. Their attackers respected the grim flag and the British wounded were brought to safety.

Christ shed his blood to provide a Red Cross for us. It offers protection and safety to all who come under its banner. We can be at peace with God and reconciled to him. Our enemy, the devil has to honor it.

Chad came home from school and announced to his mom, "I'm going to make a Valentine for everybody in my class." His mom's instant reaction, "I wish he wouldn't do that." Her son was sensitive and shy and she'd seen how he wasn't included by the other kids when they walked home from school. They laughed and talked with Chad just kind of following behind. She thought he'd be disappointed because he wouldn't receive many, if any, cards.

Chad was insistent on making Valentines. He worked on them for three weeks. On Valentine's Day, he scooped up his cards and bolted out the door. His mom decided to make chocolate chip cookies for when he came home. Maybe the cookies would soften the hurt she expected he'd have.

She watched out the window as kids came home from school. The same group was talking and laughing with Chad following behind, but walking faster than normally. His arms were empty and she thought he'd burst into tears as soon as he got in the door. She had a hard time not crying. "I have some fresh chocolate chip cookies and milk for you."

Chad didn't seem to hear. He marched right past. All he said was, "Not a one... Not a one." His mom's heart was in her throat. Then Chad added, "I didn't forget a one, not a single one!" (adapted from Dale Galloway, *Dream a New Dream*).

God didn't forget a single one. He has enough love for everyone. But some people miss out.

McDonald's Quarter Pounder was king of the hill until A&W rolled out their Third Pound Burger (1980s). In addition to being larger and winning numerous blind taste tests, it sold for the same price. Never heard of it? That's because it bombed. A&W dropped it from the menu because people didn't buy it. Research showed that people got the math wrong. Apparently since 3 is less than 4, people concluded 1/3 of a pound was smaller than 1/4 of a pound. People missed the basics.

The same thing can happen when it comes to understanding spiritual matters. People miss the basics about God loving them and making a way for them to be with him forever. They mistakenly think they are doing quite well by themselves and don't think they need God. Others think everyone gets to heaven.

The basics are Jesus came to give his life as the perfect and only payment acceptable to God for the moral crimes people have committed against him. He rose from the dead to prove he had life and could give life to people. People can receive eternal life by placing their trust in Jesus Christ and what he has done.

Jesus saves us by his death and he saves us by his life. A risen Jesus lives inside of us by his Holy Spirit. His divinity inhabits our humanity to enable us to live transformed lives.

Life is full of stress, heartache, disappointments, setbacks, trials, tragedies. Sometimes we think, "I don't have the power to change my attitude or my outlook on life. I don't have the ability to break this addiction. I don't know if I can forgive this person who's hurt me. I don't have the power to love my enemies. I don't have the power to live the life Jesus is calling me to live." People walk through life carrying the burden of past failures and sins. They live in a state of constant regret. They're tortured by painful memories. They can't seem

to let go of their past, and as a result they let their past control their present and dictate their future. They wish they could hit the delete button and start over.

Jesus is the one who hits the delete button and gives the start over. We serve a resurrected Savior who exerted power to conquer death. He still operates in resurrection power and he promises to fill us with that same power. Because he is alive, he gives us the power to change, gives us the power and ability to get started in the relationship with him, and he'll give us the power to keep going, to give us strength to face the challenges of each day as we trust in him and lean into him.

We can't do it alone. We can't do it in our own strength. We don't have the power to do it on our own. We were made to depend upon Jesus who has the power to change our lives as he either changes our situation or works through the situation to do in us what God is attempting to do.

He reminds us that as a child of God, because of the power of his resurrection, we're now identified with Christ as his own child. No one else gets to have a say in the matter. God says who we are. We aren't defined by our feelings or our past or the opinions of others or by our circumstances or by our successes or failures or by the car we drive, the money we make, the house we own. We're defined by God and God alone. The power of the Spirit in our lives sustains us through the unpredictability of life's twists and turns, roadblocks, even those life-altering dead ends. Since the Lord carries us with his grace and power, we can face each day, each challenge in the strength of a risen Savior. Regardless of what happens to us, whatever difficulties we may face, whatever curveball life may throw at us, he empowers us to stand and withstand.

The Bible tells us we're more than conquerors through him who loves us. Nothing, "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation" - not trouble or hardship or danger - can separate us from the love of Jesus! (Romans 8:38-39).

The Lord is like a physician with his prescription pad: "To assure vibrant spiritual health and life and ministry, take a big dose of God's love as soon as you wake up. Swallow completely. Take more mercy repeatedly throughout the day. Take extra doses at those moments when feeling tempted or facing trials. Refills-unlimited. No expiration date. Warning - you can become addicted to grace - but that's not a bad thing."

In the early days of the Soviet Union, communist leader Nikolai Bukharin travel to Kiev to speak at an anti-God rally. He waxed eloquent for an hour as he extolled the virtues of communism, berated religion, especially Christianity. He tore at its foundations and ridiculed it like a man possessed. He was greeted with mild applause. He felt he had done what was necessary to destroy all possible rationales for believing in Christ. He then opened the floor to questions that he was positive he could use to further squelch belief in God.

The first to rise was an Eastern Orthodox priest. He momentarily faced the communist leader before turning to the crowd. He spoke the Easter greeting: "He has risen!" The entire audience jumped to their feet and replied, "He is risen indeed!" Bukharin left like a dog with its tail between its legs.