



# RESURRECTION: THE CHALLENGE OF BELIEF

LUKE 24

## INTRO

It is Easter Sunday, and this morning we get to hear about the pinnacle of the Good News: the resurrection! We'll do that via a walk-through of Luke 24. We won't look at this whole passage in detail this morning; that would be too much for this short time. But in these 53 verses, there are some powerful pictures of doubt and belief. And this will lead us, I hope, to examine our own patterns and habits of doubt and belief. And I hope that when we leave here today, every one of us would leave as believers of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And understanding that, as we read the Scriptures, they are about Jesus from start to finish.

## Outline of Passage

We have three scenes in this chapter, and in each one, we find people who think they have the whole story, but they only have part of the story.

By "story" I don't mean fables or made-up tales. We believe that what is recorded in Scripture is an accounting of actual events, and the authors of the Gospels are in many ways similar to what we would call today journalists who are reporting news stories.

So there are **three stories** here, and within those three stories, we see **four evidences of doubt**. What is striking about these stories is the

difficulty that Jesus's friends and disciples seem to have with believing what he had told them about his resurrection.

You would think that those who were closest to Jesus, those who spent the most time with him, would not have been surprised by the events of that resurrection day. Just as we saw last week when we looked at the Triumphal Entry, it is quite puzzling, looking at the events of that week and seeing how oblivious these people were to what was actually going on around them. The Prophets of the Old Testament had laid these events out, and then Jesus had quite explicitly explained on numerous occasions the things that were going to happen.

So you would think that they would have been waiting with eager anticipation for him to reappear – JUST LIKE HE SAID HE WOULD – three days after he was put to death. But that's not the way it happens.

Instead, his followers and disciples are full of doubt and unbelief; they are dumbfounded.

### **The Women at the Grave (V 1-12)**

First, we have the story of the women who go to the site of Jesus' grave. And immediately we see...

#### **EVIDENCE OF UNBELIEF #1 They take spices to the grave (1-8)**

The only reason to take spices to the grave was to finalize the process of burial. By taking spices to the grave, they show us that they expected this dead person to do what every other dead person does: TO STAY DEAD, to decompose and to return to dust.

But they get there, and the stone is rolled away, and his body is nowhere to be found. They react with fear at the appearance of the angels, who ask them: *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen. Note these words: **Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, [7] that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.**"*

And it seems that this is a memory trigger for them because they then “remember” the words of Jesus. In other words, they finally understand what he meant. And so they return from the tomb, their burial tasks left unfinished, to tell the eleven disciples and the rest of the followers gathered with them. And as they do that, we see...

## **EVIDENCE OF UNBELIEF #2** **The accusation of storytelling (9-12)**

What do the apostles, these God-fearing disciples of Jesus, do? They mock these women of faith, they ridicule them, and they accuse them of making up stories... “Listen, you can't be making up stories like this! This is nonsense.” It seemed to them like an “idle tale” - a story you make up because you're bored and have nothing else to do.

Now, we know something about the status of women in that culture. They weren't respected very much. They weren't trusted as witnesses. Their testimony wasn't even admissible in court. And yet God arranges for women to be the first witnesses to the resurrection!

And they bring what they've seen to the apostles, men who were obviously stalled in unbelief. They were entirely skeptical – these men, who had been closer to Jesus than anyone, who had seen the things he had done and heard the things he had said.

And yet Peter, obviously not completely disbelieving, runs to the tomb and sees for himself that it's empty. He's stunned, surprised... but, it seems, he still can't quite figure out what happened.

The scene then shifts to the story of...

## **The Road to Emmaus (13-35)**

This incident is actually somewhat humorous at some points. Two followers of Jesus are on the road to Emmaus, about a 7-mile walk (about 11 kms) from Jerusalem. So it's a walk of an hour or two, depending on your pace. As they walk, they're talking about the

events of the last few days when Jesus shows up and ever so slyly joins their conversation. And here we see...

### EVIDENCE OF UNBELIEF #3

#### They fail to recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus (13-35)

There's an important thing to notice in v. 16: ***But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*** This reveals that not only did they not see, but that they weren't able to see. They were blocked or restrained from recognizing him by supernatural power. And you must want to know why that is...

But keep in mind that they were kept from recognizing him as we step into the story... While the three of them are walking together, Jesus says, "What is this conversation you're having all about?" And they stop, looking at him in disbelief, looking sad and ask him, "Are you the only person around who doesn't know what has happened the last few days?"

[18] Jesus plays along: "Why, what do you mean? What happened? Did something happen? What did I miss?" he asks.

[19-20] "Ok, listen, there was this guy named Jesus – he was a mighty prophet. His teaching was powerful, he performed miracles... The chief priests and the rulers trumped up some charges against him, condemned him and then crucified him.

They go on... [21] "So we were hoping that he was the one that would redeem us, and it's now the third day since he was crucified... He's gone... We haven't seen him."

These men are obviously disappointed. They think that Jesus's death is a tragedy, not a triumph. They think that the crucifixion was the end of the Messiah in whom they'd placed their hope. He's dead, what can he do now?

[22-24] They go on... "AND some of the women we know told us a pretty crazy story this morning. They went to this prophet's tomb early this morning, and he wasn't there. His body was gone. Ok, and

if that wasn't weird enough, they went on to tell us that they had seen angels who said that Jesus was alive! Pretty crazy stuff, eh?"

"So needless to say, it's been a pretty eventful day. How can you not know about this?"

### **The Reveal**

[25-27] This is where it gets really interesting because Jesus addresses them directly. BUT THEY STILL DON'T GET IT! [V25] *"O foolish ones,"* Jesus says, *"and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"* And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

This is amazing! They can't figure out what has happened to Jesus, and here Jesus is teaching them directly – all the way back to Moses and up to the present, he's laying out a systematic theology for them... AND THEY STILL DON'T GET IT. They're still wondering who this guy is. Some ancient history professor or something, they figure... But it all seems to go right over their heads... "Ah, yes, this is all good information, but what does it have to do with what we've been telling you about?"

There is just a complete disconnect... But remember, v. 16 ***But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.***

[28-29] They get close to Emmaus, and an interesting little detail here. It says that Jesus ***"acted as if he were going farther"***. ***It really seems like he's playing a part here.*** They're branching off in one direction, and Jesus makes like he's just going straight, [29] but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, it's getting late, and you really can't do much more with this day anyway." So he went in to stay with them.

[30-31] And then finally, we have the climactic highlight of the story. Jesus sits with them, takes some bread, blesses it and breaks it, and in that moment, it says that ***their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.... And he vanished from their sight.*** What?!

So back in v16 it said that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him," and then finally here, in v31, it says "that their eyes were opened and they recognized him." And then he vanishes. Imagine the look on their faces. "Hey, wait a minute! I know who you are..." WHOOSH. "Where'd he go?!?!" And they continue their discussion...

[32-34] "OK, this makes sense now. I had a funny feeling when he was so thoroughly explaining the Scriptures to us!" And so they go back to Jerusalem, a walk of 2-3 hours or so, now probably in the dark and much more dangerous, but they go to find the disciples, and they now admit: "It's true. Jesus is alive! He appeared to us!"

### **Jesus Appears to His Disciples (v 36-49)**

[36] So these guys have travelled in the dark from Emmaus to tell the disciples about their encounter. It's probably about midnight now, and the disciples are gathered together, and they're discussing everything that's happened... And suddenly **there he is - Jesus reappears!** "*Peace to you!*" he says... And here we see...

#### **EVIDENCE OF UNBELIEF #4**

#### **They even doubt his appearance in their presence**

[37] But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. Despite the women's account of events and despite what they had heard from the guys from Emmaus, they **STILL** react with shock and disbelief when Jesus appears before them.

[38-40] He senses their anxiety, and what a remarkable instance of compassion we see here. Rather than chastise them for their doubt, he prods them for the source of it so that he can address it: "Why are you disturbed? Why do you doubt even now?" He acknowledges their doubts and deals with them openly: "Look at my hands and feet; it's me. Who else could it be? Go ahead; touch my hands and my feet. I'm real, I'm here; I am risen."

[41-43] **AND THEY STILL DIDN'T BELIEVE**, although now it seems to be morphing from a "this-is-nonsense" disbelief to a "this-seems-a-little-too-good-to-be-true" disbelief. And so he goes further to prove to them that he is not merely an apparition, a ghost. He takes some food and eats it.

[44] Then he says to them, "All of this – the arrest, the trial, the crucifixion, the burial AND the resurrection is all the working out of the things I taught you... that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

[45] And then, for a third time, we see this supernatural intervention. It says in v45 that "***Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...***" They can't seem to open their minds or eyes for themselves, so he opens them and causes them to understand... what? What does he cause them to understand? NOT some new information, but old information in a new light. He causes them to see what has been right before them the whole time! And they do – they do see, and they do understand.

And after their minds have been so opened and made receptive to the words of God through Jesus, what is it that he says to them?

[46-48] *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

You are my witnesses... He makes a direct connection between their witnessing his resurrection and their telling others about it. One follows the other... **Revelation results in mission.** These things were not revealed to them just so they could be an exclusive club of special recipients. This is good news, and it is good news not just for the chosen few but for everyone! And we would see, if we continued in this story, that they took their mission, their commission seriously.

## Summary

But here in Luke 24, we have these three stories of the news of his resurrection, two of which involve an actual appearance, and yet within those three stories, four evidences of doubt and unbelief. We still need to answer the question...

## Why did they disbelieve?

You would think that of all people, his closest followers would have remained strong in their faith that he would rise from the dead. And

yet they seem as faithless and disappointed and heartbroken as everyone else. Faithless, disillusioned, disappointed, seemingly accepting as "fact" that the mission of the one they followed had ended in failure.

But we know, over on our side of history, that it hadn't. What had happened was exactly what was supposed to happen, and it happened the way that Scripture said it would.

It wasn't that Jesus hadn't told them what was going to happen; they just didn't understand. But why? Why didn't they get it? He seems to have said it clearly on a number of occasions...

In Luke 9:22, he said: *"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

Later in that same chapter, v. 44-45, he said: *"Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying, and **it was concealed from them**, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.*

Later still, in Luke 18:31-34, we read: *And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." But they understood none of these things. **This saying was hidden from them**, and they did not grasp what was said.*

What was the problem? Why couldn't they understand?

### **Blindness and Sight**

Let's go back to this idea of blindness and sight. Three times in Luke 24, it clearly says that Jesus was exercising authority over their minds and comprehension.

#### **1. Verse 16 – "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him..."**

2. **Verse 31 – “Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him...”**
3. **Verse 45 – “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...”**

Notice, in each case, it is by a will and a power other than their own that their eyes and minds are opened or closed. They were blocked or restrained from recognizing him by supernatural power, and then they were permitted to see and to understand by that same power.

Now, don't think that this is merely God playing puppet with his creatures. There is a purpose to this course of action.

Here's what's happening: we are seeing that God has his own timeline of events. God is doing everything through Jesus according to his perfect plan and his perfect timing. He knows best and he does best. Everything God does is an example of perfect wisdom. And this is a generous act of compassion that he continues to extend today. The resurrection is the key to understanding all the Scriptures.

If we were in charge of the events of history, we would often fail at this; we are far less patient and compassionate.

But we serve a Saviour who is not only risen but is also patient and compassionate. He is patient with our feeble human minds and our hearts that sometimes struggle to believe. And we should be more patient with each other... In Jude 20-22, we read: *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt...*

Some people doubt because they refuse to believe. Others, like the people in the stories we've looked at this morning, doubt because they want to believe but can't seem to. We should be patient with such people; we should be patient with ourselves. We should trust Jesus to bring new light to old truths.

I know many of you have had that experience, and I have had it too. "I've read that Scripture a thousand times, but now I see it, and I understand it!" God gives light in his timing. Don't chastise yourself if you realize something later than you think you should. God can turn that lightbulb on at the time of his choosing. He can break through your blindness at any time. So when he does that, don't say, "Ugh, I'm such a slow learner! Why didn't I see that before?!" Say, "Thank you, God! Please reveal more to me!"

You'll notice a pattern in these stories in Luke 24: They are kept from recognizing him or understanding the truth, then they are enlightened (given light, lit up), the Scriptures are explained or finally understood with clarity, and then a full recognition is achieved:

1. The women go to the tomb, expecting to find the body of Jesus. An angel appears to them and says, "Remember his words... remember what he told you..." and then they believe.
2. The men on the road to Emmaus are completely blind to his identity until after he has explained to them that all of the Scriptures were pointing toward him. Shortly afterwards, they finally recognize him.
3. Similarly, in his appearance to the disciples. He appears, they don't believe, they're scared... but again he explains the Scriptures to them and their minds are opened, and they believe and worship him.

So they don't merely recognize Jesus, but at the same time, the light goes on, and there is recognition of the fact that all this time they've misunderstood the biggest part of Jesus' mission.

We're back to what they had wrong on Palm Sunday. He didn't come to redeem Israel by the sword or by politics or by worldly influence. He didn't even come to deliver the literal ethnic people of Israel from political oppression. Everyone in these stories has the same misunderstanding: they all fail to grasp the meaning of the prophecies. They were all blind to the fulfillment of these prophecies before their eyes, and this is why they act the way they do. This is

why they doubt; this is why they are disappointed when things don't work out as they expect.

## **Conclusion**

**So that's their story...** Jesus's own disciples and closest followers didn't believe - and then they did. And we are like them - or at least we can be. Struggling to believe, wandering in the haze of misunderstanding, desperate for light, but sometimes neglecting to ask God to help us believe.

But we have something more than those early disciples had. They had enough—they had the revelation of the Old Testament—but we have so much more! If you're here this morning, you may be hearing this story for the first time, or you may be hearing it for the hundredth time. It doesn't really matter how many times. What matters is that the light of Scripture is shining on your mind and your heart right now. And so my challenge to you this morning is to ask God to remove any blindness from your eyes. Ask him to reveal to you the full truth about the resurrection of Jesus.

If you have never before believed in Jesus, then repent of your sins and ask God to raise you from spiritual death into spiritual life, to remove your spiritual blindness so that you can see Jesus Christ for who he is. It's possible that this is the truth that has been before you your entire life, and that this is the day that your blindness will be removed

And if you are already a believer this morning, then ask God to do what he did for the believers in the gospel stories we've heard this morning. Ask that he allow you to see the Scriptures more clearly and more fully, that he will give you a fresh understanding of old truths

This morning, believe in the resurrection. Believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you've never believed this before, believe it today. If you've chosen to believe it in the past, believe it again today! Believe in the resurrection, believe in the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ!

In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, he writes to remind them of the gospel that he preached to them. He wants them to remember these things, and he says these things are OF FIRST IMPORTANCE:

- That Christ died for our sins, just like it said he would in the Scriptures
- That he was buried
- That he was raised on the third, just like it said he would be in the scriptures
- And that he appeared, alive and well, to many after his resurrection

So whatever else the gospel encompasses, and whatever the implications are, these things come first. They are at the centre; if these things are not at the core of the gospel that you believe in, then the gospel you believe in is headed in the wrong direction!

But we believe these truths, and we preach them to others, but we must also continually preach them to ourselves. We make a big mistake as Christians, and especially as Christian leaders, in thinking that **only non-believers** need to hear and believe the Gospel. The truth is, we all need the Gospel every day. We are all far from perfection, and this is why we all need to be reminded of the Gospel every day.

Before we are saved, we need the Gospel in order to be reconciled, made right with God. And after we are saved, or as Paul puts it, while we are "being saved," we need the Gospel because we soon forget, and believe that we are saved by doing some things and not doing others. We forget that all of this saving is Jesus' doing, not ours.

So again I implore you, each one, all of us: Believe in the resurrection this morning. Believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel has the power to save you, and once you are saved you will be transformed.

### **What will convince you to believe?**

If you're a skeptic here this morning, if you're looking for evidence upon which to base your belief in the truth of the resurrection, you can't really look to the empty grave as proof. Peter saw that, and it

didn't convince him. Other disciples saw the empty grave, and they weren't convinced either.

You might think that if ONLY you had seen him after he was raised, that surely you would have believed. But his own disciples, the people who had spent nearly every waking moment with him for three years, saw him after he was raised and reacted with fear and thought they were seeing a ghost.

No, your confidence in the truth of the resurrection cannot be based on irrefutable, physical, tangible proof. It must be based primarily on the evidence and truth of what is presented in Scripture. It must be based on a conviction that Jesus's own prophecies about himself – about his own death and resurrection – were COMPLETELY true.

Your confidence in the truth of the resurrection must ultimately rest on the witness of the Word of God, not on tangible, irrefutable physical evidence. A resurrection certificate from the Jerusalem medical society would not convince you if you do not believe the witness of the Word of God. Authentication of the Shroud of Turin would not convince you if you do not believe the witness of the Word of God.

So, how about you? Will you call out to God this morning to remove your blindness? Will you be one who believes and is transformed?

You must decide what you believe. If it isn't true, if the resurrection didn't happen, then there is absolutely no point to our gathering here this morning. And there is no point to me standing here and proclaiming it to you and challenging you to believe it! If it didn't happen, then we are wasting our time, and we are wasting our lives.

This is Paul's point in 1 Cor. 15:12-19. There, he says:

*12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that*

*the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Be goes on to say this, to assert it unequivocally...

*20 But in fact **Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*

So if it is true, as Paul says it is... If it is true... Then how can your life ever be the same? How can you not surrender your life to his gracious gift? How can you keep your mouth shut about the good news? How can you NOT want new life, new freedom, and everlasting joy for everyone else around you?

On this Easter Sunday, believe in the resurrection. Trust in Jesus and in the Scriptures that tell us of his birth, life, death and resurrection. If you don't see it, ask him to reveal it to you. If you do see it there, let it resonate again. Let it stir your soul, and let your soul be satisfied in him.

Let's pray.

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: [cbcilderton.ca/contact-us](http://cbcilderton.ca/contact-us)

