

Easter Lesson

A Heartwarming Conversation

MAIN IDEA

Jesus explained the Scriptures to two of his followers on his resurrection day.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does the risen Christ want to communicate with us about his word?

STUDY AIM

To rejoice in the risen Christ and seek his guidance in understanding his word

QUICK READ

In their shock and grief, Jesus' disciples forgot his promised resurrection until they encountered him as the living Savior.



Introduction

I was thirteen when a beloved grandmother died of cancer. My heart felt completely crushed until I began to read through some of my grandmother's letters and found the notes she had penned in the margins of her Bible. In all of them, she expressed the joy of her eternal hope. Though she suffered from a terminal illness, she never lost faith in Christ's promise of salvation and life with him in glory. Her reminder that earthly goodbyes are temporary encouraged me. The certainty of a heavenly reunion with my grandmother tempered my grief.

The shock of his sudden death numbed the minds of Jesus' followers. The pain of grief drew their entire focus. Not only did Christ's disciples lose direction and purpose, but they also forgot the assurances Jesus had given them of his resurrection. It was not until they met him again, alive and glorified, that they remembered, understood, and believed his teachings.¹

Luke 24:1–6a, 13–35

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. **5** In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" **6** He is not here; he has risen!



13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15** As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16** but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. **18** One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

19 "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. **20** The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21** but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22** In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23** but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24** Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. **29** But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. **32** They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34** and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." **35** Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Christ's Word Fulfilled (24:1–6a)

The Passover Sabbath, the culmination of a week of religious observance, was one of the holiest days of the year for devout Jews. Joseph hurried to remove Jesus' body from the cross and get him into a tomb because the law would have forbidden such activity once the Sabbath began (Luke 23:50–54).

The Sabbath started at sundown Friday evening and ended at sundown on Saturday. Anyone who violated the strict injunctions against work or travel during that time could have been brought up on charges before the ruling council. That is why the women who wanted to prepare Jesus' body properly for burial had to wait until the Sabbath ended to do so. It would have been difficult for them to find the tomb's location in the dark, so they waited until daylight the following morning to begin their mission.

Distracting Tension

Luke used several different Greek words (*homiloun*, *syzetein*, *antiballete*) to describe the discussion between the two Emmaus disciples. The various connotations suggest vigorous debate, dispute, or an agitated exchange of ideas (literally, throwing them back and forth). Perhaps they could not agree on the credibility of the women's report of the empty tomb, or felt conflicted about leaving the other disciples in Jerusalem. No matter the subject, doubt and confusion created tension between them. Their entire foundation of faith and conviction had crumbled beneath them.

Note the incredible transformation that took place when these disciples learned the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Doubt gave way to amazement. Grief gave way to joy. Excitement and passion propelled them to tell others.

Too often, today's Christians engage in the first kinds of discussion. Some believers are quick to enter disputes or debates concerning everything from biblical interpretation to social issues. Could such choices prevent Christians from experiencing joy and excitement in their faith? Pray that God will renew the wonder of Christ's resurrection and that it will become the reality reflected in our priorities and our lives.

Because Jewish society did not embalm their dead, corpses decomposed quickly. Typically, mourners would wash the body, anoint it with pungent spices, and wrap it in linen to mask the odor of death. Although Joseph had treated Jesus' body with respect and honor, time constraints prevented him from completing the full preparation ritual. The women who loved Jesus decided to finish the job.

One of the women's worries may have been the logistical problem of getting into the tomb. The disk-shaped stone that rolled along a groove to cover the grave's entrance was much too cumbersome for the women to move. We can only imagine their shock at finding the stone already rolled back when they arrived. In some cases, this might have suggested the work of grave robbers, but the women knew that nothing of value had been buried with Jesus.

Determined to complete their task, the women entered the tomb. Here they were met with a greater surprise. The cave was empty! Although some ancient cultures were known to display the corpses of their enemies publicly, it was unlikely someone had stolen Jesus' body for such a macabre purpose. The Greek word used in Luke 24:4 to describe the women's reaction contains no connotation of fear, but conveys they were puzzled, perplexed, or at a loss to understand what was happening.

Suddenly, something happened that did frighten them. Two beings appeared from nowhere. Although they resembled men, the brilliant shine of their clothing convinced the ladies of the visitors' divine origin. The women bowed low as a sign of respect.

Jewish law specified the truth of a matter was to be decided upon the testimony of two or more witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). In this account, God had sent the requisite two witnesses to establish the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Their opening question embodied the entire essence of the resurrection, that of eternal life. Jesus was no longer numbered among the dead but had been raised back to life once and for all.

The angels' announcement in Mark 24:6–7 confirmed the truth of Jesus' resurrection, but also served as a mild rebuke to the women. As his disciples, the women should have prepared for Christ's death and his resurrection. They remembered everything Jesus taught, only after hearing what the angels had to say. It may have seemed suddenly clear to them that the stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out of the tomb, but to let the women in so they could see for themselves that their Lord had risen.

A High Calling

In flight, I overheard a conversation between two people behind me. A man argued that people of different religions worshiped the same god, but under different names. When asked, the man identified himself as a Hindu. His seatmate stumped the man momentarily by asking if his god cared for him personally or would be willing to help him in trouble. When he responded “No,” the woman then explained that her God did exactly that. She spent the rest of the flight sharing the details of Jesus’ love, death, and resurrection. How many of us would gladly seize such an opportunity?

A Second Encounter (24:13–27)

Following the report of the empty tomb and angels declaring Christ’s resurrection, Luke changed scenes. He focused on two of Jesus’ followers returning from Jerusalem, still in shock from the past days’ events.

Luke provided few details about these disciples. It is uncertain whether or not they were part of the group that traveled with Jesus during his years of ministry (Luke 10:1, Mark 15:40–41). However, Luke did reveal that they had been with the Eleven that morning and had heard the report from the women who returned from the empty tomb (Luke 24:9, 23–24). The two disciples could have been friends, relatives, or even a husband and wife returning home after their Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Only one of them, Cleopas, was named. Both of them, though, were clearly sorrowful and confused as they debriefed their recent experiences on the journey.

It was common safety practice in those days for individuals to join other travelers on the road. As they walked the seven miles toward home, the two disciples were not alarmed at Jesus’ approach. They were surprised and skeptical, however, when the stranger claimed ignorance of the week’s events.

Luke used the couple’s narration to summarize Christ’s life and death. Their tone may have registered disbelief as they described how the religious leaders—the ones who should have been first to recognize God’s promised Messiah—put Jesus to death. At the very least, the chief priests and rulers should have respected him as a mighty prophet who performed amazing

signs. The couple also reported the women's claim of Jesus' resurrection and self-identified as two of those who did not believe it. *Who could say how much of the women's vision might have resulted from hysteria, after all?*

The passive form of the Greek verb used in verse 16 ("were kept from recognizing") implies divine intervention. As the disciples spoke, they still did not realize the identity of their fellow traveler. After hearing their account, Jesus must have surprised them when he responded with a rebuke for their lack of faith and understanding. To explain the truth of the matter, Christ turned to Scripture.

The Old Testament is foundational to understanding the New Testament. I used to tell my high school Bible students that everything in the Old Testament means something. Everything is connected and everything points to Jesus. Jesus used that principle when teaching these two disciples. He may have visited passages such as Deuteronomy 18:15–18 or chapters 9, 11 and 53 of Isaiah. It would have taken days to cite every messianic reference in Old Testament Scripture. Christ's discourse probably echoed everything the disciples had mentioned about their messianic hope for Israel's redemption (Mark 24:21).

A Joyful Revelation (24:28–35)

Ancient Jewish custom mandated showing hospitality to strangers. It was polite to offer an invitation before a guest asked to stay the night. No one wanted to be on the road after dark, for fear of robbers.

The two disciples, perhaps relatives since they lived together, were eager to bring their fellow traveler home with them. According to the rules of courtesy, Jesus acted as though he would continue on his journey, but the disciples "urged him strongly" (24:29) to stay with them. His teaching amazed them, and they were hungry to hear more.

Once more conforming to the rules of hospitality, the couple offered their guest some bread, a staple of the Jewish diet. In an unexpected move, Jesus turned the tables and assumed the host's role by saying a blessing and breaking the bread. It was the same position Jesus had held among his disciples. As Christ's followers, the couple had probably seen him repeat that action time after time. The small act precipitated recognition. God allowed their

eyes to open, and they finally realized the identity of their visitor. Like the women at the tomb that morning, Christ's teaching suddenly made sense. In a flash, they understood everything he had been trying to tell them. And in that instant, Jesus vanished from their sight.

Imagine the animated conversation that followed! The two disciples must have realized the hunger and eagerness with which they had listened to Christ's teaching was God's Spirit moving in their hearts to confirm the truth of Jesus' words. Their sorrow was gone and their confusion disappeared. They had encountered the living Lord! Never again would they doubt the power and authority of their resurrected Messiah.

Cleopas and his companion were too happy and excited to wait until morning. Unmindful of bandits, wild animals, or any other hazard on the road, the two left immediately for the seven-mile-walk back to Jerusalem. They wanted the other disciples, still waiting in fear and uncertainty, to hear the truth: Jesus was alive!

The couple arrived in Jerusalem to find that Jesus had already appeared to Peter, as well. When they heard the joyful report, the two from Emmaus shared their encounter with the risen Savior, confirming the truth of Peter's and the women's reports. Within moments, Christ himself would appear, and everyone present would witness firsthand the incredible miracle. Jesus had indeed risen from the dead!

Implications and Actions

When I was a child, Easter meant new dresses and cut-flower corsages. But after I received God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life, Christ's death took on new meaning. The enormity of Jesus' sacrifice both grieved and thrilled me. For years, the cruelty of Calvary's cross garnered most of my attention. Only as I matured spiritually did I begin to understand the significance of Jesus' resurrection.

Without Jesus' resurrection, there is no power or authority over eternal death. Only through the resurrection are the chains of slavery to sin broken. Because Jesus rose to life and ascended to heaven, his Spirit indwells believers and leads us into truth. Through the Spirit's guidance, God's word is living and active in our lives. Jesus continues to teach us today as fervently

Our Next New Study

(Available for use beginning June 2017)

Called to Serve

UNIT ONE: OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Lesson 1	Responding to God's Call to Service	1 Samuel 3
Lesson 2	Serving through an Expression of Kindness	2 Samuel 9
Lesson 3	Serving by Meeting One Another's Needs	2 Kings 4:8–37
Lesson 4	Serving in Spite of Opposition	Nehemiah 6:1–16
Lesson 5	The Suffering Servant	Isaiah 52:13–53:12

UNIT TWO: JESUS ON SERVICE

Lesson 6	Setting a Humble Example	John 13:1–17
Lesson 7	Serving through Loving Sacrifice	John 15:9–17
Lesson 8	Serving Christ by Serving Those in Need	Matthew 25:31–46

UNIT THREE: NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Lesson 9	Serving through Our Giftedness	1 Corinthians 12:4–13, 27–31
Lesson 10	Serving as Ambassadors of Reconciliation	2 Corinthians 5:11–21
Lesson 11	Serving through Generous Giving	2 Corinthians 8:1–15
Lesson 12	Acts of Service Reveal Our Faith	James 2:14–26
Lesson 13	The Attitude of Service	Philippians 2:1–11