

Easter 3
May 8, 2011

Open Your Eyes... to Living Hope

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Luke 24:13-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Here is a classic sit-com script that I've seen time and again because it's always good for a laugh. It goes like this: two people are about to have a conversation. One is absolutely certain of what the other is going to say. The other says the *opposite* of what was expected. But the first was so certain about what was going to be said, the first doesn't actually hear what was said... but instead what was expected. So the humor unfolds as the first responds completely inappropriately.

They say that good humor always has an element of truth. And with this in particular you can probably say, "Been there, done that." Your spouse is saying something to you, and you're so sure of what he or she will say that you don't actually *listen* to the words. And you end up responding inappropriately because your spouse *didn't* say what you were positive they would say. Sound familiar?

Now the reason I bring this up is because we do this more often than we realize when we listen to God, his Word and his promises. Sometimes we're so sure about what God is going to say, that we fail to see (or hear) what he is really saying. And here's the thing, when we approach God with our eyes shut, because we're just sure what we'll see anyway.... Or if we approach God with deaf ears, because we're just sure what we're going to hear... we sink ourselves into despair and sadness. And here's why: God does the unexpected. Our God, time and again, does the unexpected. And the unexpected thing that he does, is love, forgive, and grant life. Love, forgive and grant life. When we fail to expect these blessings, we are robbed of a great blessing God wants us to have: hope. Sure, eternal, living hope.

Let's look at the word of God today so we can truly receive what God so wants us to have: sure, eternal, living hope.

We'll take another look at the Emmaus disciples. One was named Cleopas, the other is unidentified. They were followers of Jesus. What a weekend it had been. The bottom had fallen out of their lives. Jesus, their teacher and master, was executed on a cross. He was dead and buried. They were in a state of shock and fear. It was Sunday (what we now call Easter Sunday.) These two disciples are leaving Jerusalem, walking along a road to a village seven miles away called Emmaus. Where not told why they were making that trip, but it seems strange to me. Were the disciples of Jesus already scattering? Thinking that it was over? It sure seems like it the way they were talking.

As they were discussing the events of the weekend, Jesus himself came up beside them and walked along with them. "So, what are you talking about so intently?" Jesus asked them. They did not recognize Jesus. Jesus didn't want them to recognize him yet... he had something important to teach them. They stopped walking for a second, eyes downcast, not making eye contact with Jesus. Cleopas asked Jesus: "Are you a visitor to Jerusalem? How could you not know what's going on?!" Jesus played along, "What? What's been going on." Cleopas continued, "Well, it's about Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and the people. Our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death... and just like

that, he was. They crucified him. He's dead. We had hoped that he was the one that was going to redeem Israel. But here's where things really get weird. This morning some of the women in our group went to the tomb, and they didn't find his body. They said they had seen some angels who said he was alive. Then some of our friends went and looked for themselves. And sure enough, they didn't see him there!"

Jesus, whom they still did not recognize, said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

What was the problem here? Why did these disciples not get it? In spite of what the prophets clearly foretold, in spite of what Jesus clearly foretold, in spite of what actual eye witnesses really saw, they still didn't get it! Is this for real?

Absolutely. These disciples were blinded to the truth by a number of factors.

- Logic: They saw everything unfold with their own eyes. They knew Jesus died. Their logic and past experience told them that when people die, they don't come back to life. Following their logic, they could not see the truth.
- Emotions: They were overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. When you're filled with grief, you don't see clearly.
- Cultural expectations: They were expecting a Messiah who would rescue Israel from Roman rule and oppression. It's not what God had said, it's just what the Jews were expecting. So when a different kind of Messiah came, they were blind.
- Personal wants and desires: These men did not want a suffering, humiliated Savior. They wanted a glorious king who would rule them from Jerusalem and restore prosperity and power to Israel. Their personal wants and desires blinded them to the truth.

In short, false expectations and immediate circumstances caused them to not see what should have been obvious and evident! Again, it's like the sitcom where two people fail to communicate because of an incorrect certainty in what the other should be communicating. But there's nothing funny about this failure to understand. The consequence was that they were in despair, lost hope and were greatly discouraged.

APPLICATION: It's easy for us to look back and with 20/20 hindsight say, "Yeah, really, how could they have been so foolish and slow to believe?!" But not so fast. In our lives as well, we do the same thing. Time and again, we are foolish and slow to believe what God has said and promised. And the same things that blinded that pair of disciples does the same to us. When faced with difficult circumstances, when challenged in our faith, when suffering, when it seems like we've hit a string of bad luck, when happiness continually eludes us, we are blinded just as those first disciples were!

- Logic blinds us. We think we know how things should be, so we listen to our own logic, instead of God's promises.
- Emotions: Overwhelmed with grief, sorrow, or loneliness, or discouragement, or whatever it is that's overwhelming our emotions, we don't see clearly what God wants us to see.

- Cultural expectations can blind us. Wealth, success, happiness, companionship... our culture tells us these things come to the person who does good and loves others. But God says, "no, not always!"
- Personal wants and desires: This one is the biggest, in my opinion. We think we know what is best for us. We are certain of the path that would be best for us. Therefore we are blind to what God says. Sometimes in spite of what God says, we are determined to continue to want what *we* want. We remain blind!

Just as with those first disciples, false expectations and immediate circumstances blind us to the bigger truth and eternal hope that God wants us to have.

But here's the good news. At this point, Jesus doesn't abandon them and go find other disciples who weren't so foolish. Jesus instead reaches out to them in love and leads them to understanding. And how does he do it? Using the entire Old Testament, Jesus walks them through once again what kind of Messiah God had promised. This Messiah would come and do battle with Satan. He would be holy and perfect... fully obedient to the Father. He would resist all temptation. He would preach the good news. Heal the sick. Drive out demons. He would suffer for the sins of all people. He would die, being hung on a tree. And he would rise triumphant from the grave. People of all nations would come to him for forgiveness, life and salvation. God would pour out his Holy Spirit on his people that they may believe and boldly proclaim the Good News! Every one of these truths is in the Old Testament. Jesus patiently explained it for those two disciples. But he wants us today to know those exact same truths as well. Jesus is the exact Messiah and Savior that we so desperately need... even if we are sometimes blind to who he is, why he came, what he accomplished, who we are now in him, and what is in store for us in the future. God is patient with us and leads us to sure and certain hope in these truths!

When the disciples got to Emmaus, they still didn't know it was Jesus. It appeared he intended to travel on, but they urged him to come into their home and eat. In their home, he took bread, he gave thanks, and when he broke it, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus. And he disappeared from their site.

Suddenly, everything in their world changed. Not their circumstances, not their lot in life, not their wealth, health or social standing. But something much bigger changed instantly. Christ was risen! And that meant he was the promised Messiah. Sins were forgiven. Heaven was their home. God was their Father. In short, they had a sure, living and eternal hope in the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Friends, you do too. I pray that through the words of Christ today, he opened your eyes just as he opened the eyes of those Emmaus disciples. They acknowledged that Jesus' unfolding of Scripture for them made their hearts burn within them. They were so overjoyed at the truth of Jesus that they ran 7 miles back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples.

Today, as you sit in church, you may think your eyes are open. You may be listening to what your logic says about your circumstances... and you're discouraged. You may be listening to your emotions... and have no hope. You may be looking at the world as everyone around you does... and everything seems meaningless. You may be looking at the world through the filter of your personal wants and desires... and are depressed that they're not fulfilled.

Friends, take off the blinders, because what you think you see and hear is not the way it really is. Open your eyes and see the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Listen to *his* Word of truth. See how you are forgiven and accepted by the Almighty God. See how he has called you his children. See how heaven is your eternal home. Open your eyes, and see what Jesus wants you to see... the sure, living and eternal hope that is your through your risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Amen.