

Too Good to Be Untrue

Luke 24:13-35

Introduction

Too Good to Be Untrue: There's practical wisdom in the idea, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," until you think about it. In fact, many things that are true are almost impossible to believe until you witness them yourself (iPhone, generative AI, iPhones; plot of Apollo 13).

Skipping Ahead: We'll skip to the last chapter of Luke (e.g., read the book's conclusion first; we'll come back to chapter 4 next week). There are **four scenes** in chapter 24 that happen after the resurrection of Jesus.

- The empty **tomb** (vv. 1-12) *Lauren read.
- The **road** to Emmaus (vv. 13-35)
- The upper **room** (vv. 36-49).
- The ascension from the mount near Bethany (vv. 50-53).

The tomb, the road, the room, and the mount. I thought about teaching them all but... time. So today, we'll join two obscure disciples of Jesus **on the road** and see how Jesus appears to his confused disciples, inviting them to understand his resurrection. **Once they grasp it, the resurrection changes everything.** During their seven-mile (60 stadia) journey, we see Jesus walk, talk, and eat with them, **ultimately transforming their confusion from doubt to purpose.**

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 are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹ And he said to them, "What things?" 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. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." ²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the 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. ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes

were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

1. He Walked with Them (vv. 13-24)

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Busy Day: On Sunday (unanimous testimony of the Gospels, and why we worship on Sundays), the first day of the week, a group of women had gotten up early ([deep] dawn) to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, as was the custom of mourning. But when they got there, they *found* the stone rolled away but they did not *find* the body of the Lord Jesus. Two angels remind them that Jesus had already told them he would die and be raised from the dead. They experience every emotion, from fear and confusion to joy and amazement. So they run back to tell the disciples, only for many of them to believe this is simply an *idle tale*.¹ There remains an air of confusion and disbelief. So we pick up **on the road**...

Ordinary Disciples: There’s a conversation between two disciples (not disciples as in the Big 12, but other followers of Jesus). These are not famous. One isn’t named, and the other, Cleopas, appears nowhere else in the Bible and is lost to history. These are **ordinary** people trying to make sense of their circumstances.

- This story’s specific, vivid, yet ordinary details (e.g., the unknown city of Emmaus, the unknown disciple, etc.) are hallmarks of a true story. If this was a fake story, you wouldn’t

¹ Peter seems to one of the disciples that has learned his lesson (surely the hard way). “He has learned to believe what Jesus says, even when it goes against whatever convictions he might have. His denials have taught him to trust Jesus” (Bock).

include these places or these names, and you wouldn't make the disciples look unbelieving and ignorant (especially if you were one of them making this up years later).

Insulting Question: ¹⁷ And [Jesus] said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then... Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Incredulous! Are you the only one who hasn't heard? Has your head been stuck in the sand? Jesus had caused quite a stir, gathering crowds and frustrating Jerusalem's religious leadership. Who hadn't heard? (e.g., Bridge collapse or other major news).

- They marvel at *his* ignorance, yet *they* are ignorant.
- So often, we think God must be ignorant because he doesn't see what we see when, in reality, we are the ones who don't see what he sees.

Hidden Jesus: We don't know what is keeping them from recognizing Jesus. Is God blinding them? Are they blinding themselves? It seems hard for many disciples to recognize Jesus after his resurrection.

- Mary Magdalene (Jn 20) mistook him for the gardener until he called her by name.
- The disciples in the locked room (Jn 20, Lk 24) at first think he might be a ghost until they touch him.
- When he shows up to them fishing, they don't realize it's him on the shore until they make a miraculous catch (following his directions), and it clicks.

There is something about his appearance that is different enough that they don't recognize him right away and something about it that, once they realize, they know it's him (same, same, but different). There's a **continuity** and a **discontinuity** between his pre- and post-Easter body (just like there will be between our pre- and post-glorification bodies).

- I think they also struggle to recognize him because they can't imagine he's alive. That doesn't even seem like an option (e.g., geocentric vs. heliocentric; often, we don't see something because we can't imagine it could be true).

Misunderstanding Messiah: The vocabulary (ὁμιλεῖν; συζητεῖν; v. 15) hints that their discussion was intense, verging on an argument. They are sad, upset, and disappointed.

- They can't understand how Jesus, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people could be rejected by [their] chief priests and rulers... condemned to death, and crucified. They've heard the fantastical story of an empty tomb and angels, but still no body!
- "Our" religious leaders didn't accept Jesus. They still haven't fully grasped his identity. They call him a prophet, but he's so much more than that. They seem to understand he's special, maybe even the Messiah (the one to redeem Israel), but they don't understand what God's Messiah came to do.
 - In their mind, Messiah's aren't supposed to die. Messiahs are supposed to be **blessed, empowered, and supported** by God, **not crucified**.
 - They think his mission has failed because he died when in reality, to succeed, he *had* to die (must) and rise again! Death was the path to life!

- There was an abundance of **messianic expectation** in the time of Jesus. A Messiah who would free Israel from Roman occupation and maybe even purify the temple from corrupt leadership. A righteous **warrior**? Sure. A **prophet** of God's law? Ok. A **priest** to restore purity to Israel's religion? We'll take it. But not a messiah who would suffer and die.
 - First-century Judaism was the last place anyone thought God could become a human being. I get it; it's too good to be true. In fact, it's so good it has to be true. It's a paradigm-shattering historical event.
- We see this today. Some people love a good **Christmas Jesus** who brings peace, goodwill, and holiday vibes. Or even a **suffering Savior** who sacrifices himself for us. We love a **comforting Christ** who tells us everything will be alright. But a **risen Jesus** is a **conquering King** with rightful authority over life and death, including your life!

I Told You So: Despite being all over the Hebrew Bible and frequently described by Jesus himself, they missed it.

- The angels reminded the women at the tomb that morning: "Don't you remember [what] he told you?" (v. 6). Jesus himself 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" (Lk 9:22), and "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" (Lk 18:32-33).
- "The resurrection was too unbelievable to register with the disciples until after it occurred" (Bock). It didn't compute. It was not on their radar. They were looking for the **wrong thing** in the **wrong place**, and they missed Jesus walking right beside them.

Is it possible that Jesus's apparent absence in your life has more to do with your misplaced expectations than his actual presence?

Walk with Me: But Jesus himself shows up, and walks with us, amid our doubt. One of my favorite parts of this story is that Jesus patiently walks with them even when they don't realize it.

2. He Talked with Them (vv. 25-27)

²⁵ And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the 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.

True Problem: The problem wasn't evidence; it was doubt. They are slow of heart to believe. Good news, you're not alone! Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted (Matt 28:16-17). The guys who heard all of Jesus' sermons, ate meals with him, got the insider scoop *still* doubted. It's not just doubting Thomas. They misunderstood, they waived, they struggled. **You're in good company.**

- **Disbelief is not the same thing as unbelief.** Struggling to understand is not the same thing as refusing to accept. **Doubt is not a dealbreaker.**
- There are real, important intellectual, philosophical, theological, and historical unknowns that we have to work through. I am not diminishing those! But my experience has been those are the easier challenges to overcome. The harder obstacles involve emotional turmoil, personal disappointments, and cultural pressures (when God lets us down or doesn't do what we expect; when the healing doesn't come; when we want to sin more than we want to obey). These deeply personal areas are usually the more fertile ground for doubt.

Belief and Knowledge: It's not that Jesus didn't tell them he would die and be raised, or that the evidence doesn't show he rose. It's their slow hearts and disbelief.

- For the past 200+ years, there has been a concerted effort to separate faith from history and belief from fact. This shows a misunderstanding of faith and fact and how any of us know anything. The pendulum has swung so far that we now speak of “**honest doubts**” and “**blind faith.**”
- Faith and knowledge are not opposed, but work together. “Faith seeking understanding” (Anselm). True knowledge actually develops in a relational matrix of trust. We need trusting relationships to know fully.
 - If you leave a child to grow up in isolation in the woods, they don't learn to talk, bathe, eat with a fork, do multiplication, etc. That only happens with loving parents, teachers, etc.
 - We also are not robots that you can simply input information. Knowledge has to be delivered in a way that motivates learning and considers individual challenges.
- Faith can actually be the gateway to true knowledge (e.g., a doctor's advice on health or a scientist's advice on research). It is not whether you have faith or not, but whether the person, ideology, or object you place your faith in is trustworthy. **Jesus has proven himself completely trustworthy.**
- “Doubt says ‘I'm not going to take one step forward until I'm certain.’ Faith says, ‘Help my unbelief as I venture’” (Bowen). Doubt cripples us from trying, and faith frees us to risk because we live in dependence on God rather than our own understanding (which has intense limits).

Clarify Scripture: The resurrection reorients our understanding of what God already promised to do. It's like a lens that takes the fuzzy promises of the Old Testament and brings them into vibrant clarity (that's what you meant!). E.g., Adam glasses. E.g., mosaic, tapestry, puzzle pieces, etc.

- ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
- ⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (vv. 44-45).

God had already prophesied the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus through Scripture. They missed it, not because it wasn't there but because they weren't looking (e.g., DNA structure was missed because they didn't realize it was twisted; double helix; not a simple ladder).

- But now that it has happened, now that Jesus is in their midst, they understand what was in front of them all along: **the Bible points to Jesus** (and not just the NT, which wasn't around yet; the HB was the Bible of the day).
- We read and preach the Bible as Christians. We can't read it as if Jesus didn't rise from the dead (e.g., 6th Sense).
- Jesus is the topic of Scripture. If my sermon can be fully embraced and appreciated by a faithful Muslim or Jew, then I didn't preach it right.
- True preaching, according to the Bible, according to Jesus, according to the apostles, means "preaching Christ." It's not an inspirational TED talk, historical commentary, self-help, moral philosophy, or parenting advice. My sermon should only make sense and should only "work" if Jesus was crucified, buried, and risen from the dead.

What Does He Say?: He doesn't just **walk** with them; he **talks** to them. **He says he's already spoken through Scripture.** Jesus takes them back **to** and **through** the Scriptures. He's right there! He *could* tell them anything, *yet* he goes to the Scriptures. **God speaks through the Scriptures. Do you want to hear God speak? Read the Bible. Do you want to hear him speak audibly? Read the Bible out loud!**

Redefine Scripture: The resurrection transforms our doubts and redefines our understanding of Scripture by revealing Jesus as the fulfillment of all OT prophecies. The entire narrative arc of the Bible points to him. It's not a disparate collection but a cohesive narrative culminating in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

3. He Ate with Them (vv. 28-35)

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Intrigued: Now they are intrigued, he begins to continue on his journey but they beg him to stay.

Eats: He eats here with them and later in the chapter with the disciples; we also see this in John 21. Why does the text make such a big deal about his eating? Because ghosts don't eat, myths don't eat, and imaginations don't eat. **People with bodies** who need food eat.

- Jesus' body is *redeemed* after the resurrection, but it is **still a body** (he even kept his scars). **In eternity, our bodies will be glorified, not ghostified.** I'm thankful I'll have my Easter body in heaven, until then, I stick with my Easter candy body. Heaven is not a disembodied existence; it is physical. You'll shake hands, hug, eat meals, play music, create art, etc.
- This is a reality because Jesus was not just resurrected in our hearts, but in flesh, in history, in reality.
 - Some well-meaning theologians in the 18th and 19th centuries (e.g., Schleiermacher) tried to save Christianity from the threat of modernism, and the onslaught of scientific positivism by arguing the resurrection was a myth. It was a symbol of hope, not a historic reality.
 - A myth doesn't save you. A myth doesn't transform you. A myth is little more than a feel-good placebo.
 - In fact, Jesus goes out of his way in this text to say, "I'm not a symbol; I'm really here. I am not just an impression in your mind; I am not just a kind of spiritual presence. I'm here, flesh and bones. [Touch me. Feel me.] Give me something to eat" (Keller).
- Maybe they made it up? Charles Colson, former presidential aide to Richard Nixon, who went to federal prison for his role in the Watergate scandal, and later became a Christian, said: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never denying it. Each was beaten, tortured, stoned, or put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world, and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Impossible."
- Nothing explains the account of his resurrection except that it really happened: the transformation of his disciples, their willingness to go to the ends of the earth to spread this news, their willingness to die for this message.² The Lord has risen indeed.

Had to Tell: And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed.

- Once they understood the reality of the risen Christ, it changed their attitudes, behavior, hope, and purpose. They had to tell, so they immediately returned the seven miles they had walked to tell others. After the Wright Brothers' breakthrough in flight at Kitty Hawk, reporters, and scientists were skeptical, but the Brothers couldn't imagine not telling everyone because it would revolutionize the world! The resurrection changes everything, including us. If Jesus is alive, you can't live as if he isn't.

Conclusion

² People will die for false things, but not false things they know are false.

The Resurrection Changes Everything: Because Christ has conquered death, we can have life. He didn't just pay for our sins; he secured our eternity. He doesn't just comfort our hearts; he destroys our enemy. He doesn't just offer a temporary reprieve from sin; He inaugurates a new creation within us, transforming our hearts and minds to reflect his glory. Because he is alive, we can have life.

- Without the resurrection, our faith is meaningless, Christ is powerless, and our behavior doesn't matter. But since the resurrection is real, our faith is essential, Christ is sovereign over everything, and our lives are transformed.

Where Is Your Life?: Let me ask you the same question, the angels asked the women at the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (v. 5).

- The only true life, the life that is worth living and lasts forever is through Jesus, he came to give you life to the fullest (Jn 10:10), but it is only found in him. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).
- You won't find life in that drug, job, relationship, or accomplishment. No amount of friends, money, or degrees can give you what you need.
- Only in the resurrected Christ can your sins be forgiven and defeated and your heart transformed. Only in the resurrected Christ can death be defeated and your future secured.
- Do you have life in Christ? Have you placed your faith in him? O are you seeking life among the dead things of this world?