

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." And that rule will probably protect you from scams (e.g., your bank won't give you a discount if you pay in Wal-Mart gift cards; that Nigerian prince doesn't need your help moving \$14 million). But sometimes what seems too good to be true is (e.g., Apollo 13). When it comes to the best news in the world, the truth of our resurrected Savior, I would say, what sounds too good to be true is **actually so good it has to be true.**

Take a Walk: Today, we'll meet two disciples as they try to understand the magnitude of the good news.

- They heard reports of angels, an empty tomb, and even the *rumor* that Jesus was alive. "That *sounds* amazing, but there's no way it's real." So they start walking home.
- We get to join them on the seven-mile (60 stadia) journey and witness their transformation. Once they believe the truth of the risen Jesus, everything changes.
 - Grasping the resurrection transforms confusion into purpose.
- Jesus walks, talks, and eats with these disciples. And I would invite you to join them on the road, sit at the table, and listen to the conversation. In their journey, I pray you will understand the truth of the resurrection and be transformed.

1. Jesus Meets Us in Our Confusion (vv. 13-24)

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."

Sunday: 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. Upon arrival, they *found* the stone

rolled away, but did not *find* the body of the Lord Jesus. Two angels tell them “[Jesus] has risen” from the dead, just as he said. Imagine the emotions: from fear and confusion to joy and amazement. They quickly run back to tell the others.¹ There remains an air of confusion and disbelief.

- So we pick up that very day **on the road** with two followers of Jesus... they are walking **away** from Jerusalem back to their little town. They are walking away from hope with all of the confusion and disappointment of the crucifixion behind them.

Ordinary Disciples: There’s a conversation between two disciples (these weren’t the apostles, the Big 12,² 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.³ These are **ordinary** people trying to make sense of their circumstances. **God does some of his greatest work in the most forgettable places.**
 - This story’s specific, vivid, yet ordinary details (e.g., the unknown city of Emmaus,⁴ the unknown disciple, etc.) are hallmarks of a true story.
 - If this were a *fake* story, you would pick well-known places and well-known disciples, not small, otherwise insignificant towns.

Silly Question: They were having a conversation among themselves when Jesus, unbeknownst to them, butts into the conversation and asks: ¹⁷“What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?”

- They are *shocked* by his question. It’s like salt in the wound (And they stood still, looking sad). They are sad, upset, and disappointed.
- Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” **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., major news story).**
 - 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.**

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).

² The eleven (τοῖς ἑνδεκά), i.e., the apostles (τοὺς ἀποστόλους), were with other disciples, i.e. “the rest” (πᾶσιν τοῖς λοιποῖς), Lk 24:9-10

³ Κλεοπᾶς appears only in Luke 24:18. Some think he might be the same as Clopas (Jn 19:25). Some church tradition suggests Cleopas may have been part of Jesus’ extended family, but Scripture itself doesn’t confirm that.

⁴ Unknown like Aramethea. These cities are not clearly identifiable today which makes them likely small, otherwise insignificant town (a hallmark of a real place).

- 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 vocabulary⁵ hints that their discussion was intense, verging on an argument. 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.

- "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, Messiahs aren't supposed to die. Messiahs are supposed to be **blessed, empowered, and supported** by God, **not crucified**.
- 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.
- 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!**⁶
 - E.g., Islam, which says a lot about Jesus, *changes* the story to say he was not *actually killed*; it was only made to appear so. In this way, they avoid the scandal of the cross and the necessity of his resurrection.⁷ They reckon God would never allow His prophet to be humiliated and executed by enemies.
 - But if Jesus didn't die, then he didn't rise. If the cross is avoided, the resurrection is emptied.
- Be careful not to **misunderstand the Messiah**. Some people love a good **Christmas Jesus** who brings peace, goodwill, and holiday vibes. Or even a **serving 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, and every area of my life is often too much!

⁵ ὁμιλεῖν; συζητεῖν; v. 15

⁶ 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.

⁷ Qur'an 4:157–58

Unbelievable: They heard the fantastical story of an empty tomb and angels (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). But there was still no body (but him they did not see)!

- “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.⁸
- Is it possible that Jesus' *apparent* absence in your life has more to do with your misplaced expectations than his actual presence?

Walk with Me: One of my favorite parts of this story is that Jesus patiently walks with them even when they don’t realize it. He’s been with them the whole time; they just didn’t see him.

- And the same is true for us.

Jesus meets us in our confusion and loves us enough to correct our misunderstanding.

2. Jesus Corrects Us with Scripture (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.

I Told You So: The apostles and church fathers all make the point: the death and resurrection of Jesus was God’s plan, clearly prophesied, and explicitly foretold.

- The prophet Isaiah: “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Is 53:5).
- In the same passage Jesus quoted on the cross (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?),⁹ the Psalter prophesied through David: “I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps 22:17-18)
- 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).

⁸ 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).

⁹ Ps 22:1

- Despite being all over the Hebrew Bible and frequently described by Jesus himself, they missed it; not because it was **unclear**, but because it was **unexpected**.

Belief Problem: *The problem wasn't evidence; it was doubt.* They are slow of heart to believe.

- **Good news, you're not alone! You're in good company**
 - 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, and got the insider scoop, *still* doubted.
 - It's not just doubting Thomas¹⁰ ("these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them").¹¹ They misunderstood, they waivered, they struggled.
- **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 that 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.
- 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).¹²
 - 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.**

¹⁰ Jn 20:25

¹¹ Lk 24:11

¹² 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). "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; tapestry threads; mosaic pieces.

- 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 (Lk 24:44-45).
- 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** (all of it, *especially* the OT).¹³
 - 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, Jesus, and 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 rose 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.

They've heard the truth, but they still don't recognize him. Because knowing *about* Jesus is not the same as *seeing Jesus*.

3. Jesus Opens Our Eyes (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

¹³ Not just the NT, which wasn't around yet; the HB was the Bible of the day.

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: Everyone is going out to eat, and you start to leave, not because you don’t want to go, but because you need to be invited? (“Y’all have fun.” “Join us”). Jesus ‘feigned going further’ (acted as if he were going farther) as a way of drawing out their desire. He is not trying to leave them; he is just seeing if they want him to stay.

- Sometimes Jesus *feels* distant, not because he’s leaving, but because he’s inviting you to pursue him.
- If you won’t go where Jesus goes or invite him into your life, you can’t complain that he feels far from you.
- They didn’t walk this far with Jesus not to finish. **Did you come this far not to finish?**

Eats: He eats with them **here** and **later** in the chapter with the disciples;¹⁴ 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 **still has a body** (he even kept his scars). **In eternity, our bodies will be glorified, not ghostified.**¹⁵
 - I’m thankful that my Easter candy body will be transformed into an Easter body in heaven, but it’s still a 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.¹⁶

Blessing: ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

- This is the same language of the Last Supper: **He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19).**¹⁷
 - The bread that is broken is a picture of his body that is broken.

¹⁴ Lk 24:41-43

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ 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... [despite being] beaten, tortured, [or imprisoned]... Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world, and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks.” 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. The Lord has risen indeed.

¹⁷ Also the Lord’s Supper (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-24).

- Breaking feels like a tragedy, but in this case, it is salvation.
- We are healed by Jesus' body broken on the cross.
- Maybe they can see now how **the breaking was the plan**.
- They invited him to be their **guest**, but now he is the **host**. He went in to stay with them, but ended up taking over.
 - The broken bread becomes the gracious moment of revelation. What looked like the end of Jesus' life becomes the means of ours.
- In Genesis, the serpent told Adam and Eve to "take and eat."¹⁸ They listened to the lie of Satan and disobeyed God. But in Jesus, God has reversed the curse. He says, "Take and eat, this is my body *given* for you." In Adam and Eve, "take and eat" are verbs of disobedience and death, in Jesus, they are "verbs of salvation" (Derek Kidner) and generosity.¹⁹ All the other gods of the ancient world required their worshippers to feed them. Only the true God feeds us.²⁰

Eyes Wide Open: 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?"

- They don't open their eyes; God opens their eyes. They had proximity, conversation, and evidence, but still didn't see until God made them see.
- The Scripture was already working on them before they realized it; they had the only good kind of heartburn.
- When the Word of God reaches your heart, the light turns on.
- Is God stirring your heart? Fan the flame, don't pour cold water on it.

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.

- They're walking toward an unknown place with no purpose, but once they grasp the resurrection, they turn around with clarity and direction. **This is too big to keep to themselves**²¹ (e.g., pregnancy, passing a big test, graduation, etc.).
 - Once they understood the reality of the risen Christ, their attitudes, behavior, hope, and purpose changed. They had to tell, so they immediately returned the seven miles they had walked to tell others.
- The resurrection changes everything, including us. If Jesus is alive, you can't live as if he isn't.

Conclusion

The Resurrection Changes Everything: These disciples began confused, disappointed, and walking away. They think the story is over. They think Jesus is gone. They think hope has died.

- But when Jesus opens their eyes, everything changes.

¹⁸ Gen 3:1-7

¹⁹ HT Kidner

²⁰ HT Duncan

²¹ 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!

- They don't keep walking in the same direction.
- They turn around.

Walk with Me: So let me ask you: where are you walking right now?

- (1) Are you walking away from Jesus? Disappointed, confused, cynical, stuck in sin, just going through the motions?
- (2) Or have you seen him for who he really is? Not just a teacher, not just a comforting idea, not just a suffering Savior, but the risen Lord?
- Because when you grasp the resurrection, you cannot keep going in the same direction.
 - **Lost:** If you have never trusted Christ, this is your call: turn around. Stop walking away from him. Bring him your sin, your doubts, your confusion, your failure, and trust the crucified and risen Jesus.
 - **Saved:** And if you do know Christ, stop living like he is still in the grave. Stop walking in despair. Stop walking in fear. Stop walking in the old direction.
- Turn around. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And if Jesus is alive, your life cannot stay the same.