

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

It was a beautiful morning. The sun warmed the air as it rose high in the sky. The budding branches of the trees swayed in the light breeze. The sweet song of birds floated through the air made fragrant with the scent of spring flowers. It was a beautiful day for a long journey back home, but the two men going up and down the low hills outside of Jerusalem didn't notice.

The light crunching of the gravel beneath their feet became a rhythm as they walked. Occasionally a group of people passed them heading up to Jerusalem, but they didn't notice. In fact, the two men paid no attention to anything else, except their own hopelessness. The bright beauty of the day seemed to mock how sad they felt. "How could we ever be happy again?"

Looking at them, you'd think it was raining outside. Sadness and despair marred their faces. "If only they hadn't arrested him..." "If only Pilate had released him..." "If only he hadn't been crucified..." If that wasn't bad enough, strange things had happened that morning. "It doesn't make any sense! Why would Jesus not be in the tomb?" "I don't understand. Can we even believe those women?" Every time the two men thought they had it figured out, they ran into another roadblock, but things were even worse.

You see, they were men without hope. "Jesus was a great and powerful man. He might've even been the Messiah, but that doesn't matter now. He's dead, even if the women did see a vision of angels." "Maybe he could be alive!" "Come on! Think about what you just said! Remember what they did to Jesus. No man could survive that!" "...But it doesn't make sense! Why would the women say that? Even Peter and John saw the empty tomb!" They tried to wrap their minds around it, but all that speculating only made them sink deeper into sadness and despair. "It's hopeless!"

The gravel kept crunching beneath their feet. They were so caught up in their conversation that they didn't notice a man who looked a little familiar quietly come up beside them. "Shalom! May I walk with you?" With a passing glance, one of them said, "Yeah, alright." "Probably another pilgrim," they thought. So they ignored the stranger and kept talking.

"I can't help but overhear what you're saying. What are you talking about?" The two men stopped dead in their tracks. A look of saddened shock fell over their faces. The one named Cleopas asked, "Are you kidding? Have you been living in a hole the last week? You couldn't have missed it if you were in Jerusalem! Everyone knew about it! You really don't know about the things that happened in the last few days?" "***What things?***" the stranger asked. "You're serious. ***About Jesus of Nazareth...*** haven't you heard? This man Jesus was ***a prophet...*** (Notice he doesn't call him the Messiah, but just a prophet) ...***He was powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.*** He was an amazing man, but...", and his voice trailed off.

"...But our chief priests, our rulers had him arrested and sentenced to death. Then they had him crucified, and now he's dead. We had hoped he was the Messiah who would set us free. We had hoped..." He dropped his hands again. "We had so much hope, but it's the third day since he died. Now as we were getting ready to go this morning, some of our women startled us. They gave us the strangest news. They said they didn't find his body in the tomb, but they did see angels, who said he was alive. We thought they were dreaming, but a couple of our friends went out to the tomb and found it empty! No body. No Jesus. If only he would've been the Messiah...Oh, what's the point!" They fell silent and started walking again.

It didn't take long for the stranger to respond. "***How foolish you are! How slow to believe all the prophets have spoken!***" The two men looked at each other. "Who does this guy think he is?" Jesus shook his head. "You should know better. Don't you remember what you learned at synagogue? Don't you remember what the prophets said? C'mon! ***Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*** Don't you know it was necessary for the Christ to suffer these things? What happened to him wasn't because of injustice or hostility or indifference. It happened because God said it had to happen and then he would ***enter his glory.*** Remember what Moses wrote..." Then began the greatest Bible study ever.

Luke tells us, "***And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.***" In that one little statement, Luke describes what took nearly seven miles of walking and nearly a whole day to complete. Just imagine walking along and listening as Jesus points out the golden thread of the Messiah running through the full length of the fabric of the Old Testament. Needless to say, the two travelers were pretty impressed by his knowledge.

Jesus took them through every instance where the prophets spoke of the Messiah to come. He took them to Genesis 3(:15), to the very first promise that a Savior would come to destroy Satan's power, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."** He reminded them how God had promised Abraham, **"Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed"** (Genesis 22:18). He showed them how Isaiah foretold his birth and death. **"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (which means God with us)"** (7:14) and **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"** (53:6). He took them through the Psalms where David sung about his descendant's resurrection 1,000 years before it happened, **"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay"** (16:10). Everywhere Jesus led them, they found his forgiveness. They found his peace. They found hope, and the miles flew by.

Before they knew it, they had reached Emmaus. The two started heading towards the village, but the stranger was going to go on. The two men ran over and begged him to join them, **"Stay with us. It's nearly evening. The day is almost over. Please stay with us tonight!"** "Alright. I'll join you."

That evening as they sat down for supper, the guest started acting as their host. He took some bread, said a brief prayer of thanks, and started handing it to them. Suddenly they seemed to wake up and realized, "That's...Jesus!!" No sooner had they recognized him than he disappeared. They looked at each other in shock. "Now I get it! **Weren't our hearts just burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?**" "That's how he knew the Scriptures so well!" "We have to go! We have to tell the others. Hurry up!" They threw on their cloaks and started running. Seven miles later, gasping for breath, they knocked on the disciples' door.

The door opened and they rushed inside. As they were about to tell the disciples about seeing Jesus, they found out they weren't the only ones. They caught their breath and started sharing their story, "We were on our way to Emmaus, when a stranger came up to us. Did he know his Scripture!"

As you walk this path of life, do you find yourself losing hope? It's been a couple weeks since Easter. Most of the lilies are gone as is most of the candy at home. The last sounds of the grand Easter festival have passed away. Life's returned to normal and certain things are taking your hope.

After seeing the source of your hope on grand display on Easter Sunday, perhaps you find the concerns, the problems, the worries, the stress of your daily life starting to push that hope aside again. You slip back into feelings of sadness or frustration or hopelessness just like those disciples.

Yet here in Luke 24, Jesus wants you to find real hope. How much time do you spend in his Word? How much time do you spend recharging your batteries with the power of the Gospel? Is this worship service the only time each week that you get into the Word? If this is it, then no wonder!

How can your hope remain strong if you aren't regularly reminded of the real hope you have in Christ? You see, when you're not in the Word regularly, you fall into the same gloomy trap like those two travelers on Easter. When you're in the Word, you see Jesus. You recognized him and what he's done for you. When you're in the Word, you get all the blessings that come from knowing Jesus, but when you're not in the Word, you forget about him. It's almost as if Jesus still remains in the tomb. Rather than reaping all the benefits of knowing Jesus, you end up cutting yourself off from him. So when worry over problems in your life or guilt over sin or sadness over the effects of sin comes into your life, where does your hope go? It vanishes. So you look inside for answers, but when you do that, all you find is nothing but a rotten mess of sin and death.

Then Jesus comes along through his Word and he restores your hope. There in his Word, you see Jesus, your living Savior! You recognize him as the Savior who came to set you free from that bondage of sadness and despair. Through that Word, you recognize him as the Savior who gives you real hope. Through that Word, Jesus revives and strengthens your hope in him. He offers forgiveness for your guilt-ridden soul. He takes the burden of your worry off your shoulders and tells you, "I've come to set you free. I promised it long ago and I have accomplished it all for you. See, I've come to give you hope in me. Come, let me show you how my love for sinners like you made my death and resurrection necessary to save you."

When Jesus comes to us through his Word, don't we find our hearts burning too? As you read that Word, the sure and certain hope of Easter fills your heart with the knowledge that Jesus endured all that for you. It gets you excited because you recognize Jesus for who he is—your living Savior.

So what will you do with your Easter hope? What did those two travelers do when they recognized their living Savior? They spared no effort to tell their friends what they had heard and seen. That reality moved them to run all the way back just to tell their friends about Jesus. What does that tell us? Your Easter hope compels you to share this good news with your loved ones. What a blessing it is to share real hope in Jesus with the hopeless!

Even with the lilies and the candy gone, you don't have any reason to give up hope. Dig into God's Word and when you do, see how Jesus restores your hope so that it lasts. You see, one day that hope will be fulfilled just as he promised, when your living Savior finally welcomes you into the glories of heaven. Now that will be a beautiful day! Amen.