**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**HOW DOUBT TURNS TO FAITH**

**Luke 24:13-35**

**INTRODUCTION**

When we began this series two years ago, I titled it “Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt”, because that is what Luke’s Gospel is all about. He wrote this book so that those who have doubts about Jesus may have them no longer.

This isn’t just referring to people who aren’t Christians. Non-Christians certainly have doubts about Jesus, but so do Christians. Remember that Luke wrote his gospel for a doubting Christian named Theophilus. We don’t know why he was doubting. It could have been because of the early persecution of the church, or because so many of the early Christians were poor and from the working class whereas he was likely an aristocrat. Whatever it was, it caused him to struggle with his faith. Luke wrote this book to help him with those struggles. He wanted his Christian friend’s doubts to be replaced with certainty.

There are different levels of doubt. On one level, doubts can be about the “big picture” doctrines of Christianity. Does God really exist? Is Jesus truly the Son of God? Are the Scriptures the authoritative, inspired Word of God? But on another level, doubts can exist in the “day to day” as well. Does God really love me? Are my sins truly forgiven? Am I really worth something to God?

Whatever the doubts, we need to recognize that, although having doubts is common, remaining in those doubts isn’t healthy. Darrell Bock said,

“Doubt hangs in a dangerous canyon between faith and unbelief.”

Doubt isn’t unbelief, but neither is it faith, and it will eventually resolve itself into one or the other: into the peace of faith, or the darkness of unbelief.

That’s where the disciples find themselves after the crucifixion of Jesus. They’re doubting. They’re doubting whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. They’re doubting whether God would ever redeem Israel. Even after they receive news about the resurrection they’re doubting whether those reports are true.

In the middle of all this doubt, Jesus arrives, not as a glowing heavenly being for all to see and believe, but as a silent, secretive observer. That’s because he doesn’t just want to resolve their doubts by letting them see him, at least not right away. He wants them to walk by faith, not by sight, because he knows that the time is coming when they’re going to have to believe even though they don’t see. That’s why this text is so valuable to us. It teaches us, who also must walk by faith, how to move from doubt to faith.

The title of this sermon is **How Doubt Turns to Faith**. My aim today is to show you that **Doubt Turns to Faith Through God’s Word and God’s Work.**

We will have three points today:

1. Hopeless Hearts
2. Burning Hearts
3. Believing Hearts

(1) **HOPELESS HEARTS**

Our text today is known as “The Road to Emmaus”, and it’s one of the most dramatic scenes in Luke’s Gospel. It’s full of irony, even humour, as Luke intentionally writes the account so that the reader knows more about what’s going on than the people in the text.

Verse 13 says, “That very day”, meaning Sunday, the day of the resurrection, “two of them (disciples) were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.” The two disciples are likely returning home after the Passover, and as they’re walking, they’re talking about what just happened two days ago in the city. Jesus had been crucified and killed, and that was deeply troubling to these two men, because they’re not just talking as interested observers. They’re talking as disciples, those who had followed Jesus, witnessed his miracles, and listened to his teaching.

Verse 15 says that, as they were talking and discussing together, “Jesus himself drew near and went with them.” This is the moment everyone has been waiting for. The tomb is empty, angels have appeared to announce his resurrection, and the women report the news to the disciples, but no one’s sure what to believe, because no one’s seen him yet. Some hold their breath, waiting for more news, while others flat out refuse to believe.

An appearance by Jesus would change all that. If they could see him walking and talking, breathing and eating, laughing and smiling, they would have no choice but to believe that he had risen from the dead. Seeing would be believing, so if Jesus wants them to believe, shouldn’t he let them see?

Not yet. Verse 16 says, “But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” Notice carefully what this says. It doesn’t say, “Their eyes didn’t recognize him.” It says, “Their eyes were *kept* from recognizing him.” Someone is keeping them from seeing Jesus for who he truly is, but who?

There are only two possible answers. It’s either God, or it’s Satan. In 1 Corinthians 4:4, Paul talks about Satan as one who has “blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”, but here, it’s not minds that are being blinded. It’s eyes. Physical eyes. Jesus still looked like the man he was before his resurrection, but they didn’t recognize him.

That can only mean one thing. God is the one who is keeping them from recognizing him. God is concealing Jesus’ identity from these two disciples. God does that sometimes. He hides things from us. Jesus spoke of God doing that in Chapter 10:21 when he said,

“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

We might think, “That’s not fair!” but why not? We’re not God. He is. He has every right to conceal or reveal as he pleases. And here, he has chosen to conceal, so that he might test these two disciples. And the question is, are they walking by faith, or by sight? Are they still believing in Jesus, even when they can’t see him?

Let’s find out. In verse 17, Jesus asks, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” Jesus is feigning ignorance. He’s pretending to know nothing about what had just happened in Jerusalem concerning his own crucifixion and the reports of his resurrection. The question, however, stops them in their tracks, and verse 17 says they were “looking sad”. They’re still grieving the death of their Lord. When they see that this stranger has no response to this, one of them, named Cleopas, responds with surprise. “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in these days?” Jesus continues his act. “What things?”

Cleopas then gives him a rundown of what had taken place starting in verse 19: “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people”. Cleopas’ faith is evident. He believes that Jesus was a prophet. He believes that Jesus did miracles and spoke the word of God. And he believes that Jesus was sent by God. But he also believes that all of it was for nothing.

Verses 20-21: “our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.” Now note the hopelessness of verse 21: “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” *We had hoped*. Past tense. We had hoped, but we hope no longer, because Jesus is dead and he’s not coming back.

In the canyon of doubt, Cleopas was dangerously close to unbelief, because all his hopes and dreams for what Jesus would do for him and his people had been crushed. When Jesus was here, the future was bright and promising. He had come to redeem Israel from all its oppression and usher in a kingdom of blessing that would last forever! But not anymore, because Jesus was gone. There was nothing to look forward to now, because the one who was mighty in deed and word had been murdered by his own people.

News of Jesus’ resurrection didn’t change this bleak outlook at all. In verses 22-24 Cleopas tells Jesus about all the things that happened after Jesus’ crucifixion: the empty tomb, the report of the women, the message from the angels, and the confirmation of other disciples that the tomb was indeed empty. But notice what he says at the end of verse 24: “but him they did not see”. In other words, Cleopas is saying, “I don’t care what other people say. Unless I see Jesus myself, I’m not going to believe that he’s alive.”

This is what hopelessness looks like. When Cleopas looked to the future, he couldn’t see redemption. He couldn’t see the accomplishment of God’s plans. All he could see was more and more sorrow and sadness. He had become a hopeless man.

The irony behind all this, of course, is that Jesus is right there. Even as Cleopas says that no one had seen Jesus, he’s looking right at him. Even as he says that Israel had no hope, the hope of Israel was standing there alive and well, bringing his redemption with him.

We may chuckle at the irony of the passage, but we need to realize that we can be just like our friend Cleopas here. We can be just as hopeless. Maybe that’s you today. When you look at your life, and your circumstances, you think, “Life’s not going to get any better. It’s only going to get worse”, because all you can see is more sorrow, and more sadness.

Perhaps you’re here as a single person who longs for a relationship, but it doesn’t seem like it will ever happen, and you feel like you’re bound for a lifetime of loneliness. Or perhaps you’ve spent most of your life pouring out your life into your kids, but as you look at them now as adults, you feel disappointed, and you don’t have any real hope that they’ll change.

Whatever it may be, when we find ourselves in a hopeless frame of mind, we need to remember that we’re just like Cleopas. *We don’t see clearly*. There are times when God keeps us from seeing what he is doing. Why? Because he wants us to walk by faith, not by sight. He wants us to trust his promises, not trust in our own judgment. Walking by sight would be fine if we could see everything clearly, but we don’t, and we’re not meant to. We are meant to trust that God is at work, and that his promises are true, even when we don’t see it ourselves.

(2) **BURNING HEARTS**

That’s where Cleopas went wrong. That’s why he became hopeless. He became hopeless because he started trusting his own judgment rather than God’s promises. He limited what God was doing to what he could see, and he forgot all about what God had said. That’s why Jesus does what he does next. He reminds Cleopas of what God has said in his Word, which leads to our second point: Burning Hearts.

As Jesus listens to Cleopas describe his hopelessness and misery, he finally decides to respond in verse 25. He says, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” Jesus makes it clear that the real issue for Cleopas wasn’t ignorance. It was foolishness. He was foolish because he didn’t “believe all that the prophets have spoken”. And what did the prophets speak about? Verse 26: about the necessity of the Christ’s suffering.

Now we know why God kept Cleopas from recognizing Jesus. God kept him from recognizing Jesus with his physical eyes, because he didn’t trust God with his spiritual eyes. He did not see, because he did not believe God’s Word.

If he had, if he would have looked at the prophets and believed, he would have seen that Jesus’ death was God’s plan all along. Everything was unfolding exactly as God had said it would, including Jesus’ crucifixion. If he had just looked into God’s Word, he would not have despaired or become hopeless. But he didn’t, and that was foolish.

If that’s what foolishness looks like, then we are all fools. If foolishness is the failure to believe God’s Word, all of us are guilty, because all of us are “slow of heart” to believe what God has said in his Word.

* When we’re anxious about money, we’re being foolish and slow of heart to believe God’s promise that “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19)
* When we’re feeling condemned by our sin, we’re being foolish and slow of heart to believe God’s promise that “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)
* When death knocks at our doors and we respond with fear, we’re being foolish and slow of heart to believe that Jesus’ death has “delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 4:15).

How do fools become wise? How do those who are “slow of heart to believe” become those who are “quick of heart to believe”? The answer is found in verse 27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

The remedy is stunningly simple. Jesus is showing us that, when we lose sight of God’s Word, we must look at it again. We must fix our eyes once more on what we failed to see, to immerse ourselves in God’s Word, to fill our minds with God’s promises, to see Jesus in every page of Scripture from the Old Testament to the New. In times of hopelessness, we need more of Jesus, and the only way to get more of Jesus is to find him in his Word.

I would expect that, right now, most of you are thinking about how you can be more disciplined in your devotions, or spend time reading the Bible instead of watching TV, and those are good thoughts, but that’s not all that this means. After all, Jesus didn’t send these two disciples of his to their rooms to read their Bibles by themselves. He *taught* them. He brought the Word to them and showed them how it all pointed to himself.

I can’t say enough about the importance of personal Bible reading, but I also can’t say enough about the importance of *corporate* Bible reading. The world doesn’t just need more readers of the Word. It needs more teachers of the Word, because we see the truths of God’s Word more clearly when we are shown.

This is why preaching is so important. Preaching isn’t important because I’m important. Preaching is important because God says it’s important. Think about it. Here we have two disciples struggling with their faith and feeling hopeless, and what does Jesus do? He preaches an *epic* sermon. He shows them “in all the Scriptures” – from the first five books of the Bible written by Moses to the Prophets – how they all point to *him*.

This is the remedy to our doubts. This is how the foolish become wise. It’s by looking at the Book and seeing Christ, whether we’re seeing him ourselves in our private reading, or we’re seeing him with the help of others in our corporate reading.

When we do, something happens to our hopeless hearts. We see that in verses 28-29. As they drew near to Emmaus, Jesus “acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’” They wanted this stranger to stay with them, not only because it would be dangerous for him to travel on the road by himself, but because they didn’t want his epic sermon to end. They wanted to keep listening to him, because his exposition of the Scriptures was doing something to them. It was starting to give them hope.

We know this was the case because, after Jesus reveals himself to them in verses 30-31, they reflect on the effect of his teaching. In verse 32, they say, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” Their cold, hopeless hearts began to *burn* as the Scriptures were opened to them. They had fire in their hearts again. Excitement. Passion. *Hope*. All because Jesus took the time to teach them the Scriptures.

That’s the power of the Scriptures. That’s the power of God’s Word. It brings fuel to the flickering flame of our hearts and ignites our passion for God. It fans our affections for God into flame. It brings our dying hope alive again to burn with strength and confidence, even when everything around us seems hopeless.

(3) **BELIEVING HEARTS**

When we lose sight of God’s Word, we must look at it again, and again, and again, both by ourselves, and with the help of others. When Christ seems absent, we need to go searching for him in the Scriptures. And when we do, we will begin to realize that he was with us all along, and our hearts begin to change. This leads to our third and final point: believing hearts.

Verse 29 tells us that Jesus accepted their invitation to stay with them, and “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” Now notice what it says in verse 31: “And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.”

God had closed their eyes has now God had opened them, and in that moment, the two disciples saw the stranger for who he really was: *Jesus*, their Master, their Lord, their Teacher, their *Saviour*. Jesus was alive! On the road to Emmaus, they were starting to believe that Jesus’ suffering was all part of God’s plan as they listened to the exposition of the Scriptures, but now as they sat with him around a meal, they could *see* that it was all true! If Jesus was indeed alive again, it confirmed that his death wasn’t just the result of the cruelty of mankind. It was the result of God’s plan.

Some say that there isn’t any divine intervention going on here. The disciples simply needed time to recognize Jesus on their own, and they finally had occasion to do that as they observe Jesus essentially reenact the Lord’s Supper. As the stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it, they finally see the resemblance between him and their Lord, and they realize that he is in fact Jesus. But that doesn’t make any sense. For one thing, Jesus only celebrated the Lord’s Supper with the apostles, which wouldn’t have included these two disciples. They never would have seen Jesus bless and break the bread, so there’s no reason why doing it in their presence would remind them of Jesus. The second reason is the context. Verse 16 had said that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him”. As we saw earlier, it’s clear that they were being acted upon by God. God is closing their eyes, which means that God must open their eyes, and that’s precisely what’s happening in verse 31.

This is a theme that Luke will return to in his second volume, which we know as the Book of Acts. He shows us that God is the one who must open up hearts so that people respond to Jesus with faith. In Acts 16, the Apostle Paul has arrived in the city of Philippi to preach the gospel and he encounters a group of women by the river. This is what Luke wrote there:

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)

That’s what all of us need as well. We need God to open the eyes of our hearts so that we see Jesus as he truly is: the risen Saviour who died for our sins. We need the *Word* of God, but we also need the *work* of God in our hearts so that we’re not just gaining knowledge. We’re gaining faith.

This is such a crucial lesson. If we’re in the canyon of doubt, the only way we can move closer to faith and farther from unbelief is if God takes us there. That means that when we open up our Bibles to look for Jesus, it’s not enough to come equipped with Bible study tools. We need to cry out to God for help, that he would open our eyes to not only seen him, but believe in him.

This is the “supernatural” aspect of Bible reading we talked about a few months ago. We need God’s Word to work in us, and the only way that happens is if God supernatural intervenes. That’s how we get eyes to see what was right there in front of our faces all along, because reading God’s Word isn’t just an intellectual exercise. It’s a spiritual exercise that requires the spiritual work of God.

With their eyes now opened, everything makes sense to Cleopas and his friend. There’s no question in their minds now that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead, so verse 33 says that “they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem” to deliver this news to the eleven and to the rest of the disciples. But when they arrive, they’re shocked to find the believers there already saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Jesus didn’t just appear on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to Peter as well, who in turn reported this appearance to the rest of them.

What started out looking bleak and hopeless has now become full of excitement and joy, because Jesus is back. God has raised him from the dead, and he’s making the rounds visiting his disciples to confirm the truth of the resurrection.

**CONCLUSION**

So where do you find yourself today? Are you walking with God by faith, or are you in the canyon of doubt? Maybe you’re not sure where you are. You’d like to think that you’re walking by faith, but you’re not sure. Let me give you three categories to help you see what walking by faith looks like, so that if you’re there, you can give thanks to the Lord for bringing you there. And if you’re not, you can focus your prayers to cry out to God to give you the gift of faith.

First, **walking by faith means that you have hope even when your circumstances tell you otherwise**. When life goes sideways, and it doesn’t seem like anything is going well, you can still say with confidence, “God has a plan in all this. I don’t see it, but I believe that he has ordained this for my good and for his glory.” Or when you look at your life and you’re not anywhere near where you thought you’d be by this point in your life, you can still say, “I trust you, Lord. I trust that this is what I need right now, and you are using this to shape me into a godly person.”

Walking by faith means trusting that God is at work even when you don’t see him at work. It’s believing that God is in control of every single detail of your circumstances even when you feel like they’re going to overwhelm you. It’s seeing beyond your circumstances to the twin truths that God is both sovereign and good. The one who is in control is the one who loves you beyond measure, and because of that, you can have hope.

Second, **walking by faith means that you spend more time thinking about God’s Word than you do thinking about your circumstances**. Those who walk by sight set their minds on things that are below (their anxieties, their fears, and their circumstances). Those who walk by faith set their minds on things that are above (the truths that are revealed in God’s Word). This doesn’t mean that we neglect our earthly responsibilities, or ignore our earthly trials, and spend all our time reading the Bible in solitude like monks. But it does mean that our thinking about our responsibilities and trials is informed by God’s Word. We see it all in the context of God’s redemptive plans and faithful promises.

I know what it’s like to be so overwhelmed by some grief, or anxiety, or fear that I can’t think of anything else but that. I can barely open my Bible, and when I do, I’m distracted and unable to concentrate. That’s a dangerous place to be, because I’m not feeding my soul with the food of God’s Word, which is what I need to persevere. I know what that’s like. But I also know what it’s like to look upon my burdens and remain unshaken because I stand on the solid rock of Christ, not on the sinking sand of my strength. That’s where we need to be.

Lastly, **walking by faith means that you keep doing what you know is right, even when you don’t feel like it.** It’s going to church, even when it feels like you don’t get anything from it. It’s spending time in prayer, even when it feels like God is far away. It’s obeying God’s commands even when it’s hard to see the point. Why? Because as hard as it may be, you still trust God more than you trust yourself. You still believe that he knows better than you do.

Where does such a faith come from? It comes from looking at the cross. The cross tells us that God does his greatest work during the darkest of times, and therefore we can have hope in times of hopelessness. The cross tells us that we are depraved sinners, and therefore we trust God more than we trust ourselves. And the cross tells us that God loves us beyond measure, because he did not spare his own Son for us but gave him up for us all, and therefore we can believe that he will work all things for our good.