

**WHAT JESUS SAID ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS****LUKE 24:13-35**

When the Bible scholar Tom Wright was asked what he would tell his children on his deathbed he said, "Look at Jesus." He explained why those might be his final or his last words. "The [Person] who walks out of [the pages of the Gospels] to meet us is just central and irreplaceable. He is always a surprise. We never have Jesus in our pockets. He is always coming at us from different angles.... If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what it means to be human, look at Jesus. If you want to know what love is, look at Jesus. And go on looking until you're not just a spectator, but part of the drama that has him as the central character."

We've begun a study of Jesus' real last words. Not the words He spoke while dying on the cross for our sins, but instead His final words between His resurrection on Easter Day and His ascension back to Heaven. That was about a 40 day period of time according to Scripture. Those were very powerful, very meaningful, and very important statements. They're the real last words of Jesus – at least the final words He spoke here on Earth between His return to Heaven and when He comes back again. Today's message is about a conversation Jesus had on the very first Easter Day with two of His followers who were traveling from the city of Jerusalem to a little suburb called Emmaus about seven miles away. It's a wonderful story about when the expected didn't happen and the unexpected did happen. Let's read about it just now.

How many of you have noticed that sometimes as we walk through life, what we expect to happen doesn't always happen? By the same token, the unexpected often happens instead! And at many of those key moments in our walk through life, Jesus sort of catches up with us – like He caught up with these two followers in our story today. Like Cleopas and his friend, it takes a while to realize we've just been with Jesus, the risen Lord. But it's those encounters with the risen, living Jesus that make this life wonderful, meaningful, and purposeful. As I said, this story is all about ...

**WHEN THE EXPECTED DOESN'T HAPPEN.**

Let's use our imagination this morning. It's mid-afternoon on the very first Easter Day. Jesus had already appeared and spoken to Mary Magdalene early in the morning. As far as we know, no one else had seen the risen Jesus yet. Two heart-broken figures trudge down a dusty, hot road towards the little town of Emmaus. Imagine with me their stooped shoulders, their bowed heads, their shuffling feet, and their muffled voices. Walk up now beside them and look into their faces. Do you see the pain and the shock written there? Can you sense the fear, the confusion, and the discouragement in their body language and voices? As you listen to their conversation, you realize they're discussing Jesus and all of the unbelievable, tragic events of the last several days.

What were they discussing? Perhaps it went something like this. One of them says, "Jesus was so very different than any other rabbi I've ever heard." The other replies, "Yes, He was unique. He was a prophet sent to us by God. But like all of our other

prophets, our leaders killed Him.... Such power, such authority in His stories – in everything He said and did... Do you remember when He healed the lame man and gave sight to blind Bartimaeus?... Yes, and I was there when He raised His friend, Lazarus, from the dead. What a day that was! Surely, He was sent to us by God.... Just a week ago, we helped to welcome Him into Jerusalem waving palm branches and shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’ Just a week ago – unbelievable!... I was so certain Jesus was the Messiah. Sent from God to drive out the Romans and establish the kingdom of Israel once again... How did it all fall apart so quickly? The next thing we know Jesus is being tried and beaten senseless. No one should have to suffer like that – least of all someone like Jesus.... I can still hear the sound of the hammer hitting those nails – still feel that heavy darkness that hung like a blanket over everything for hours – still remember what Jesus said while He hung on the cross.... How could we have been so wrong about someone who seemed so right?... Yes, it’s impossible – isn’t it? - that God would ever allow the real Messiah to suffer such humiliation and degradation. We must have been wrong about Jesus.”

Disappointment. Discouragement. Disillusionment. What these two followers of Jesus expected to happen didn’t happen. The Bible says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” (Pro 13:12 NLT) Cleopas and his friend embodied that truth on that first Easter afternoon. Why didn’t they recognize Jesus immediately? Maybe they were just too depressed. Maybe Jesus’ physical appearance was quite different after He rose from the dead. But they didn’t recognize Jesus – that’s for sure. Not at first. For all they knew, this man was just a stranger returning to his home just like them. When you’re discouraged, you’re irritated more easily. Did you pick up a note of annoyance in Cleopas’ remark directed at Jesus? “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard what’s happened during the last few days?” (Lk 24:18 MSG) In other words, “Where have you been? What rock have you been hiding under?”

When the expected doesn’t happen. These two had certain expectations about Jesus that didn’t come to pass. They expected Jesus to deliver Israel from the tyranny of Rome. They expected Jesus to set up a literal kingdom in Jerusalem. Their mental picture of the Messiah was kind of a combination of George Washington and General George Patton mixed in with a little Rambo, William Wallace (Braveheart), and Luke Skywalker for good measure. What they expected didn’t happen precisely because God had a different – and a far better – plan. They wanted to see the kingdom of Israel restored. Jesus was all about expanding the kingdom of God instead. It’s a good thing those two were dead wrong about what Jesus had really come to do.

When the expected doesn’t happen. Has that ever happened to you on your walk through life? It seems that part and parcel of being a human being is facing the fact that some treasured expectations you hold will just never happen. Like what? You expect to stay in good health and sound mind until you’re very old, but then something happened and you get diagnosed with a terrible disease. You expect to be happily married, but then something happened and you find yourself divorced. You expect to enjoy great relationships with your children, your parents, your siblings, close friends,

but then something happened and now some of those key relationships are broken and damaged. You expect to have job security, but then something happened and you're suddenly unemployed. You expect to have more, to be more, to accomplish more with your life, but then things happened and you didn't meet your own standard of success. When the expected doesn't happen. Anytime a cherished, important expectation - something you planned and worked for or stuff you felt was somehow intrinsic to your happiness - gets dashed to the ground, we resemble Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus. Disappointment. Discouragement. Disillusionment.

Several years ago, I read a book by a psychiatrist who claimed depression can be healthy. He was referring to normal, everyday, run of the mill depression not clinical depression which often requires medication. But the idea that any kind of depression might be good was news to me at the time. I don't enjoy being depressed. I always considered it something bad and unhealthy. But he went on to explain that depression is the result of giving up something or someone you love. We've all heard about people who go through "mid-life crises," but the fact is all of us face many kinds of adjustments as we walk along the road of life. Often, it means letting go of cherished expectations. It means growing up and maturing. It's never easy, because it requires personal change and transformation. Change is something most of us resist because we have to give up something of our old self. When you're faced with the need for change or adjustment, one emotion can be depression. What you expected to happen in your life didn't happen. But if sadness, a sense of loss - normal depression, in other words - gets you to face your need to change something that must be changed, that's when normal depression can actually be something good, worthwhile, and healthy.

I've had my own life crises, and as a pastor I often walk with other people through their crises. What has God taught me along the way so far? First, God will not spare you the need for transformation. Some of your expectations about life are just plain wrong - like Cleopas and his friend on the way to Emmaus. Some of what we expect in life isn't true; or it's self-centered; or it doesn't honor God. God, in His mercy, won't let you have it. And, yes, God will let you experience depression to get your attention. Second, God will enter into your disappointment if you allow Him to do so. Jesus comes to you and me - just like He came to Cleopas and his friend on the way to Emmaus - in our moments of disillusionment, discouragement, and disappointment. He wants to get our hearts and minds readjusted. He helps us to see what we expected and didn't get was somehow wrong, or untrue, or unreal, or not God's best or us.

Third, if you open your life to the risen Jesus, you'll gain a better understanding of Him and life than you ever had before. Jesus took Cleopas and his friend through the Bible. Suddenly they got the big picture - the real picture - of why Jesus had come and what He had come to do. What's the lesson? When you're discouraged because what you expected didn't happen, open your life to Jesus. Seek Him out. The Bible says, "Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near." (Is 55:6 NLT) God Himself says, "If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me." (Jer. 29:13 NLT) Just like Cleopas and his friend, He will give you a new way of looking at Him and

looking at life. You'll encounter Jesus in a new, meaningful way. Your inner character will get molded and shaped. That's what happened to Cleopas and his friend. Why not you? So, how is it with you today? Perhaps you're emerging out of a crisis. Maybe you're right in the middle of one. Or, you might be on the threshold of going into a crisis. What you expected isn't going to happen, didn't happen, or won't happen. Don't despair. Don't quit. Don't give up. Jesus is very much alive and He will join you along life's road. Watch for Him! Like Cleopas and his friend, He might sneak up on you – especially in those moments when the expected doesn't happen.

Two businessmen met for breakfast. They were greeted by a bubbly, gracious waitress who made them feel right at home. After serving them a great breakfast, she actually walked with them to the door of the restaurant, and then said something interesting, "Have a wonderful day! And, gentlemen, be sure to live alive all day!" On the way to their cars, they discussed her unusual comment: "Live alive all day." What did she mean? Intrigued, they decided to meet at the same place for breakfast the next morning. The same friendly waitress greeted them. One of them said, "Yesterday, when we left, you told us to 'live alive all day.' That's an interesting philosophy of life that you have there." She replied, "That's not a philosophy of life. That's Jesus. He's my answer. He brought me alive out of all kinds of sickness, darkness, and trouble. When I found Him, I found life." Right in the midst of their discouragement, Jesus joined Cleopas and his friend. And Jesus wants to join you right in the midst of your life crises, if you'll let Him. There's another way to look at this story. Yes, it's about when the expected doesn't happen. But it's also about...

### **WHEN THE UNEXPECTED DOES HAPPEN.**

God isn't always predictable, is He? He can be the God of the unexpected, the unimaginable, and the unbelievable. He thinks, acts, and lives on such a bigger scale than we do in every conceivable area. I imagine God often gets exasperated with our narrow, limited, small scale thinking, just like Jesus got exasperated with Cleopas and his friend in our story.

Here then is one of Jesus' real last words or statements. "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" (Lk 24:25-26 NLT) I wonder what else Jesus said to Cleopas and his friend. Perhaps it went something like this. "Look, Jesus Himself told you He was going to suffer and die for people's sins. He said He would die and rise again. These reports you're already heard about that His body is now missing.... If He's alive, wouldn't His body be missing? Why is it so hard for you to believe? Can't you see that the Messiah's real mission was so much bigger and grander than kicking out the Romans and sitting on some man-made throne in Jerusalem? I know your expectations about Jesus weren't fulfilled. What you expected didn't happen. But something far better has happened. The completely unexpected has happened! Jesus isn't dead; He's alive!"

In much the same way, Jesus joins you and me as we walk along the road of life. And just like Cleopas and his friend, Jesus challenges our interpretation of our life's events and experiences. God is sovereign and in control after all – not only of history itself, but of your life and my life. When the risen Jesus touches your life – what happens? The unexpected happens! He even brings good things out of bad things. What happened to those sins you confessed to Him? Yes, He forgave them, to be sure, but He also used the painful memories of those sins to work compassion into your heart for others who've made mistakes. What about those personal defeats and failures you've endured? Yes, He comforted you, to be sure, but He also used them to create humility, graciousness, tenderness, and strength in your life. What about those terrible sorrows and losses you've been through? Yes, He brought healing, to be sure, but He also brought joy and beauty into your life through them. You begin to realize God has had a purpose and plan for your life all along.

Billy Graham and his late wife, Ruth, visited a large refugee camp in Kuwait at the end of the first Gulf War back in 1991. These refugees were waiting to re-enter Kuwait following the Allied victory in Desert Storm. They'd traveled for days across the burning desert in buses to get to the camp. Billy noticed one woman with her family of small children who was very distressed. He discovered that she'd given birth to a baby just three days before being evacuated out of Kuwait. The woman and all of her children, including the baby, were dirty and smelly. Billy and Ruth decided to purchase everything necessary to help the family and even helped the mother get some urgent medical treatment. She was so grateful to them for the help. As they talked further, it became apparent she had once been a follower of Jesus. But the affluence of living in Kuwait had compromised her faith. Her love for Jesus had grown cold. Billy and Ruth assured her of God's desire to forgive her and she prayed to receive it. As she said good-bye to the Grahams, she made a remarkable statement, "I just thank God for allowing my family to lose everything in Kuwait, so I could find Him again." Wow! When the unexpected happens, it's often because God has a good purpose and a plan.

Is there anything more unexpected and wonderful than the fact Jesus is alive today and every day? Some people will try and tell you it's not really all that important whether Jesus actually rose from the dead or not. That's nonsense! It makes all the difference in the world! It certainly made a world of difference to discouraged Cleopas and his friend as they trudged home to Emmaus that first Easter Day. When they finally realized who it was they'd been talking with that day, it changed everything about their lives forever. If Jesus is truly alive, it changes everything. Life still has its bitter, painful moments, to be sure. Nevertheless, because Jesus is alive, you can live every moment of your life with joy, hope, grace, love, and trust in God.

Did you catch how Cleopas and his friend described what happened to them once they realized they'd spent the afternoon with Jesus? "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?" (Lk 24:32 MSG) That's what happens when you truly experience Jesus! It changes everything! Are you on fire spiritually today? You should be if you've ever truly encountered Jesus somewhere

along the road of life. Here's a few things that happen to you when you're on fire spiritually. First, you begin to live in light of the fact that Jesus' resurrection changes everything. Some of you here today have yet to turn away from pursuing your own agenda in life and surrendering to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. That's how you get the fire. You need to do that today. Some of you here today met Jesus way back when, but then something happened and today there's this spiritual distance between you and Him. You need to get the fire back. You do that by re-dedicating your life to Jesus and making a new beginning. You also can do that today.

Here's something else that happens to you when you're on fire spiritually. You live with hope and joy consistently. Maybe not every day; we're all human. But I do believe anyone who has ever truly met Jesus finds a way to live most of life with hope and joy. Maybe you feel hopeless and joyless today for whatever reason. I encourage you to invite Jesus into whatever is troubling you. He will give you a new hope and a new joy if you seek Him! Here's something else that happens to you when you're on fire spiritually. You want to tell others about Jesus. Cleopas and his friend got so excited about talking with Jesus, they walked all the way back to Jerusalem to tell people about it. Are you excited enough about Jesus today to actually tell someone else about Him? Do you have that kind of spiritual fire? If you've been with Jesus, there will be a warmth, a radiance, and a reality to your life. And those God is already drawing to Himself will be drawn by you toward Jesus.

Hazel loved Jesus. She loved church. And she loved to sing. But Hazel couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. That didn't bother her. She sang anyway. She sang in the church choir until they asked to her please find another way to praise God. Didn't faze her. Out in the congregation, she still sang out loudly helping everyone else around her to sing off-key as well. Hazel was 60 years old and lived on a fixed income. When her rent went up, she was forced to move into a rundown apartment in a rough neighborhood. She could no longer afford gasoline, so she sold her car and began riding the bus. Her walks from the bus stop to her apartment revealed that she now lived in a very tough neighborhood indeed.

One man who lived in her building scared everybody. He was big, mean, scruffy, and maybe a little bit crazy. Hazel was afraid of him, but she didn't let it stop her from doing the things she loved to do. She loved singing at the Wednesday night church service. Late one Wednesday night, as Hazel was coming into her building, she saw someone waiting in the shadows behind the front door into the lobby. The silhouette was huge and Hazel was terrified. She had nowhere to run and no one to call for help. Instead, she stepped right through the front door and started singing at the top of her lungs. No, it wasn't even a hymn. It was a show tune. "When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high and don't be afraid of the dark." She forgot most of the words and she was completely off tune. But she belted out the chorus just the same. "Walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart and you'll never walk alone." She walked right by that hulking shadow in the lobby, up the stairs, and into her apartment. She was trembling as she locked the door behind her, but she was safe.

The next morning she found a note slipped under her door sometime during the night. “Dear Lady: I don’t know who you are, but I want to thank you for singing to me last night. I was ready to cash it in – to take my own life. Then I heard you singing out there in the hall. It sounded like you didn’t have a care in the world. You got me thinking about never walking alone. You saved my life. I’m going home to start over. It’s time for me to go back and let my parents know I’m OK. I’m leaving today. I just wanted to thank you for your song.” The writing was almost illegible, but the signature was clear. It was written by the big, mean, scruffy, maybe a little bit crazy man who lived in the building. No, he hadn’t been the shadowy figure in the lobby, but he’d been listening in his apartment just the same. Hazel never dreamt her song would poke a hole in anyone’s darkness, but God used her anyway.

None of us are walking on the actual road to Emmaus today – true enough. But all of us are walking a road we call life. The fact is sometimes the way gets very dark and very discouraging. The expected doesn’t happen. The unexpected does happen. But when Jesus joins us suddenly along the way, as He did with Cleopas and his friend, He always brings new life and fresh perspective. And then He has a wonderful way of using us to get the message out about Him. Like Tom Wright says, “Look at Jesus.” And let’s keep looking at Jesus!