

Luke 24: Road to Emmaus
The Unexpected Resurrection of the King
Luke 24:13-49

Introduction: Existential Exile

The point of the resurrection: heaven when we die or end of exile from God?

Today is resurrection Sunday – Easter, the day in which we as Christians are reminded of the hope which we have in Jesus. However, in our Protestant, evangelical tradition, in my opinion and experience, has too often narrowed that hope to simply being about a heavenly afterlife. In other words, the good news of Jesus, and the main reason for having faith in Him, and becoming a Christian, is going to heaven after you die. In the minds of many evangelicals, the point of the resurrection of Jesus was to prove that Jesus really is the Son of God, and if we put our trust in Him, we too can go to heaven after we die to live with Him. Now, don't get me wrong – the Bible affirms an afterlife, and heaven, and its part our orthodox Christian belief.

But the good news of Easter, according to the New Testament, pushes us to go further in our understanding of Jesus, and His resurrection. Easter does prove that Jesus is the Son of God; and it affirms His promises of life after death; but more than this, the resurrection of Jesus announces to us that our isolation from God (which death is the greatest pinnacle) has now ended. The enemy of death has been defeated.

What I hope to show you today, friends, is that *the good news of Easter is that through Jesus Christ (the risen King), humanity's exile from God come to an end.* And this is good news not only about the afterlife, but the present life as well. I want to invite you to open your bibles to Luke 24...

Setting the Scene of the Text: The Resurrection of the Unexpected King

For those of you who are regular attenders of EBC, I am going to return to our Easter theme of the Unexpected King and finish the story which Pastor Michael began for us last week. For those of you just joining us today, this last week, Pastor Michael explained how Palm Sunday and Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem was a time of celebration, for the Messiah had arrived. However, it quickly went from a celebration to confusion, for Jesus was not acting like the Messiah they had been expecting. This Messiah would not take over Jerusalem as a triumphant king, but rather give His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the very people who were trying to crucify Him.

For those of you at our Good Friday service, this confusion over Jesus turned into frustration, and frustration led to rage, in which the crowds chanted over and over again, "crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him." And that is what they did. It was a sham trial, and the Lord Jesus, God's Son, was taken to that lonely hill outside of Jerusalem and was executed. What I want to do now is take you to the next scene Luke records for us in chapter 24. It's a conversation between two disciples as they take a long, lonely walk back from Jerusalem to their village called Emmaus. As they discuss the week in Jerusalem, and their grief and disappointment with the results concerning who and what they hoped Jesus would be, a mysterious stranger suddenly appears alongside them and joins the conversation. Lets turn to this story now...

Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-49

The unmet expectations of the two disciples

Luke 24:13-14 - Luke identifies these travelers as disciples, though we don't know which ones, or if they were part of the larger group. But as we will see they were processing their disappointment with what had happened. They thought Jesus was going to be the one to redeem Israel, but instead, sadly, He turned out to be just another prophet who gets what every faithful prophet always seems to get: death at the hands of those in power who reject His message. Yet something seemed different about Jesus – He did miracles, He healed people, but all to no avail. Along comes this stranger... Luke 24:15-21. To grasp their sadness and grief, I want to unpack briefly for you the hope they had for their nation.

Israel's Redemption in the Old Testament: National & Spiritual Restoration

What does the redemption and restoration of Israel mean?

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To summarize a long and complex strand of the Old Testament, I want to summarize their expectation and show you how there were two streams of prophetic expectation in the Old Testament: national restoration (under a Messianic king), and a spiritual restoration (with a renewed temple).

First, Israel's redemption was to be a *national restoration*, in which messianic king would rule not only Israel, but the nations, with Jerusalem at the center. The oppressors (Rome) would be taken down, and the borders secure, never to be bothered again. This requires a *king* (Messiah), and an actual territory to occupy (a kingdom). So, we could say an earthly ruler over an earthly kingdom, centered in Jerusalem. National Restoration: KING - *Messianic king ruling over His land from Jerusalem.*

Second, it was also a *spiritual redemption*. In many of the prophecies we have in the Old Testament, the redemption and restoration of Israel coincided with the renewal of the Temple, and worship. With the reigning Messiah, there was also the promised return of Yahweh to dwell with the people in His holy temple. With Yahweh there, the promise of the forgiveness of sins, purification from any defilement of idolatry would happen.

Spiritual Restoration: TEMPLE - *Yahweh dwelling among a forgiven, purified people.*

Israel's exile from God would be over...*Isaiah 59 as Example of Israel's Restoration*

I want to show you how Isaiah shows us a progression of national/spiritual renewal. According to the prophet Isaiah 59, Israel's sins had separated them from God; but, then God Himself intervenes on their behalf, and sends a redeemer who turns them from their transgressions. The result is that the Gentile nations would come and worship Israel's God! Let me show you:

Isaiah 59:1-2 (sins separated them from God), Isaiah 59:15-17 (Yahweh intervenes), Isaiah 59:19-20 (Redeemer comes, forgiveness of sins), Isaiah 59:21 (new covenant, God's Spirit), Isaiah 60:1-2 (Zion redeemed).

The restoration meant they had an identity (belonged to God!), a place (renewed Jerusalem), and a purpose (shine out the glory of God!). But what did they get? A crucified Messiah, who was dead 3 days. In terms of the duration of Jesus's death, according to Jewish tradition after 3 days the spirit had left the body, and the person was completely dead. To illustrate this idea from popular culture, if you have seen the classic movie the Princess Bride when Wesley is taken to Miracle Max right after his death, Miracle Max says, "**There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive. With all dead, well, with all dead there's usually only one thing you can do.**"

So by saying that it has been 3 days, they are saying Jesus is all dead. And with Jesus all dead, they had no hope. Worse still, someone had the audacity to steal the body! So they go back to their village dejected and depressed. Worse yet, there are now rumors that He's alive but they aren't sure if they can believe it... Luke 24:22-24

But watch what happens next! *Suffering, THEN glory: Jesus reinterprets the story*

Luke 24:25-27 Jesus rebukes them for their spiritual blindness, and then calls them to go back and re-read the scripture in light of Himself. Specifically, He emphasizes that the Messiah must suffer before entering His glory.

What does this mean? Throughout scripture, Jesus shows us that the Messiah, the coming one, who will redeem and end Israel's exile, will do so by suffering. What is the point of suffering? This – to bring the people out of exile, to have their sins forgiven, the redeemer must go through, and experience exile Himself – the separation which death brings us from God. Let me show you some examples: Ezekiel (Spirit leaves temple, dry bones can live?, come back together); Psalm 22 (my God why have you forsaken me, turns to joy). Zechariah 12-13 (as they look upon the one they pierce, He cleanses them from sin/idolatry).

Perhaps the most poignant and one you are most familiar with is Isaiah: Isa. 53:1-6; 11

Let's come back to our story...*Jesus opens their eyes.* Luke 24:28-35. Their sadness turns into joy! They rush back to Jerusalem to tell the others – we have seen Jesus! Then Luke tells us that Jesus appears to them, eats with them.

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Jesus eats with disciples - Luke 24:36-43. Listen to what Jesus says: Luke 24:44-48. And then Jesus again will open their eyes to help them understand the scriptures – the story of the Old Testament and the promises of the prophets – in light of Himself, fulfilled in an unexpected way.

So, let's go back to Isaiah 59, and see if we can make sense of the story from the perspective that Jesus seems to be saying.

A Christological Reading of Isaiah 59, the Redeemer, and Forgiveness of Sins

Christologize these texts... Isaiah 59:1-2 (sins separated them from God), Rom. 3:23, Isaiah 59:15-19 (Yahweh intervenes), Gal. 4:4-5, Isaiah 59:20 (Redeemer comes, forgiveness of sins), Rom. 5:8, Isaiah 59:21 (new covenant, God's Spirit), Rom. 5:5, Isaiah 60:1-2 (Zion redeemed), Rom. 6:4. In other words, your exile is over; the redeemer has come, God is with you; not in a way you expected, but greater realization not just for Jerusalem, but the whole world. Note how it ends... Luke 24:50-53.

The story begins in the temple, with Zechariah and the promised birth of John (the forerunner to Jesus), and now ends at the temple, celebrating that that which the temple pointed towards has already come about through Jesus...Through the resurrection of Jesus, humanity's exile has come to an end!

Summary:

Jesus is the King, who conquers death

Jesus is the Temple, where God's presence dwells

Jesus gives the Spirit, so all of God's people can have access to Him – both now (before death) and forever (after death)

In short: **What's the good news of Jesus's resurrection?**

The curse of sin and death, which exiled people from God, has been defeated and overcome through the resurrection of Jesus. Now (all) people (everywhere) can be forgiven, reconciled, and (one day) resurrected to be with God the Father and the Lord Jesus for all eternity. So, what does this have to do with you and me today?

Application:

God is Dead? Cultural Celebration of our Exile from God

In 1966, the cover of Time magazine asked the question, "Is God Dead?" The article followed a group of contemporary theologians, philosophers and thinkers who were trying to construct an understanding of life, society, without having to resort to a traditional understanding of God (taught in major religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity). They built their philosophy on the work of a famous German atheist philosopher named Frederick Nietzsche, who made the claim that "God is dead, and modern man has killed him." What Nietzsche meant by that was that the idea of God was dead, and no longer useful or necessary – so, having become liberated from the shackles of traditional theistic, God-focused religion, human beings are finally freed to create meaning for themselves; and for Nietzsche this required great courage, but also great opportunity. The group that Time magazine highlighted in 1960's was seeking to carry Nietzsche's work forward and pave a way to help the human community be more just, more caring, more united, and to do so without having to rely on some conception of God.

This project carries on today, with the emphasis on "being a good human", with kindness as the key virtue. Traditional religion, and belief in God is what has started wars and gotten us into all the trouble we are in. The wars in places like the middle east and the culture wars in our own country are all about God. If we could get rid of the idea of God, society would be a better place.

Perhaps the infamous 1971 song by John Lennon, singer of the Beatles, said it best:

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

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No hell below us

Above us, only sky

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion, too

Imagine all the people

Livin' life in peace

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one

In other words, exile from God is a good thing! Something to be celebrated! But how is this project actually going for our society? If the idea of God, or something transcendent, is abandoned, does it bring more freedom, liberation, and meaning, joy to people's lives? If it did, we should be, as Americans, the most joyful, peaceful, united society in the world. But statistically, we are the opposite. Underneath all of our affluence, prosperity, and progressive values, and celebration of not needing "god" anymore, is a growing sense of anxiety and isolation. According to sociologists, Western society is experiencing what some call a "loneliness epidemic". Relationships are more fragmented, people are isolated, and more desperate than before. Sociologists have identified three-types of loneliness:

- Emotional loneliness – 'the absence of meaningful relationships'
- Social loneliness – a 'perceived deficit in the quality of social connections'
- Existential loneliness – a 'feeling of fundamental separateness from others and the wider world'

Some theorists claim that the most concerning of these types of loneliness is *existential loneliness*, for with this form of loneliness, one loses all sense of meaning and purpose in life. In other words, with existential loneliness the universe becomes a cold, lonely, and dark place to be. If you couple John Lennon's lyrics in 1971 with the lyrics of another song from 2017, you have an interesting contrast. These lines are from the contemporary punk band Linkin Park, from the song 'Heavy':

I don't like my mind right now

Stacking up problems that are so unnecessary

Wish that I could slow things down

I wanna let go, but there's comfort in the panic

And I drive myself crazy

Thinking everything's about me

Yeah, I drive myself crazy

'Cause I can't escape the gravity

I'm holding on

Why is everything so heavy?

Holding on

To so much more than I can carry

I keep dragging around what's bringing me down

If I just let go, I'd be set free

Holding on

Why is everything so heavy?

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Sadly, after the release of this song, the lead singer of Linkin Park, Chester Bennington committed suicide after long battles with addiction and mental health issues. In one song, our isolation from God is celebrated, needed – and the other, the sad reality of living in a universe where all you have is yourself.

Couple existential loneliness and isolation with what are bombarded with each day: war in the far east, war in the middle east, war just south of us in Haiti – in all of these situations thousands are killed, millions displaced; and the culture war in our own country that leaves us all feeling uneasy about the upcoming election and future direction of the country. Is it any wonder that many are left simply asking: Where is the hope?

Luke's hope of resurrection: We have seen that Luke directs us as readers to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is alive! That is the most important thing He wants us to know. Not only that, but Jesus has come to life through suffering. When you read the story of Jesus in the gospels, like Luke, you find that Jesus was misrepresented, misunderstood, misjudged, betrayed, and abandoned by friends (not to mention, falsely accused, arrested, put to trial, and was crucified – murdered! – as an innocent person). In other words, Jesus experienced profound loneliness and social isolation, especially during those final moments when He hung upon the cross. If you are here this morning, and you are wondering about your identity, your place, your purpose, and don't think that Jesus can somehow relate to that, then you really don't understand Jesus at all, and you need to spend some time reading Luke.

But for all of that, at the end of his account, Luke directs us to where Jesus is now – in glory; at the right hand of His Father; and through the Spirit, dwelling among each of us who put our faith and trust in Him. He receives a new identity (not just the Son of God, but the risen Son of God and Lord of all); a new place (exalted at the right of the Father, given all authority over heaven and earth); and a new purpose (to enable His followers to take this message of the forgiveness of sins from Jerusalem and spread it throughout the earth). We see this in the book of Acts...this message has come all the way here, to you, today, on this Easter Sunday, 2024...

Today, Jesus is offering you to end your existential loneliness, isolation, from God.

QUOTE BOCK (1923, 1947 last lines)

For Luke's reader the account functions as a summary to provide assurance about the resurrection. God can work through crucifixion because it is followed by resurrection. His promise remains, as his work makes clear. The curve ball has not been thrown to humankind, but to death, to sin, and Satan. The Lord is risen. He lives and is in their midst. God's plan has not been thwarted.

In a world where many do not know their place, identity, or purpose, His resurrection means that disciples can know that God is at work, that Jesus is alive in glory, and that death is not the end. The key is Jesus who in resurrection reveals that life is worth living. He reveals that life is found in Him.

A life of purpose and unending relationship with God is possible. In short, resurrection means that humans can have their proper place with God. Jesus is at God's side, and He is among them. All that is needed is to believe what God has promised.

So, what say you today? What about Jesus?

C.A.R: How do I begin to follow Jesus?

C – Confess that He is who He says He is (you believe Him!)

A – Admit that you need what He offers, that you want to turn from your sins/unbelief, and experience His forgiveness (you need Him!)

R – Receive Him as your Lord, Savior, and King by learning to follow trust, love, and obey Him (you want Him!)