

April 19, 2015

“God is Sovereign”

Luke 24:13-36

That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. **15** As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. **16** But God kept them from recognizing him.

**17** He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. **18** Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days."

**19** "What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. **20** But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. **21** We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

**22** "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. **23** They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! **24** Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

**25** Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. **26** Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" **27** Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

**28** By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, **29** but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. **30** As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. **31** Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

**32** They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" **33** And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, **34** who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.\*"

**35** Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said.

I want to revisit this morning the topic Pastor Nick spoke to us about last week that God is Sovereign. You see without knowing what Pastor Nick was going to be

speaking on, that week before he preached God was speaking to me along the same lines. As a matter of fact we had a Church Board meeting the Thursday before Pastor Nick preached and I shared some thoughts with the board along the lines of God's Sovereignty. So I felt God wanted me to stick with this theme. Because...

Unfortunately, many believers fail to see the larger picture of the transforming work God seeks to do in them through the difficult time that they are in. The disorientation and pain of their current circumstances blinds them.

Karl Barth, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most famous theologians, was on a streetcar one day in Switzerland, in the city (Basel) where he lived and lectured. A tourist to the city also got on that same streetcar and sat right next to Barth. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth asked.

"Yes," said the tourist.

"Is there anything you would particularly like to see in the city?" asked Barth.

"Yes," he said, "I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning."

The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted as he thought to himself, "I met Karl Barth's barber today."

That tourist was in the presence of the very person he most wanted to meet, but even with the most obvious clue, he never realized that the man he was with and was talking to was the great man himself.

It reminds me of Mary's reaction on Easter morning. In her grief, she thinks the man she is speaking to is the gardener. It is not, of course. Until He called her name she did not realize that she was speaking with the risen Christ.

And, of course, it also reminds me of the scene on the road to Emmaus, when later that same Easter day, two disciples walked for a while with the resurrected Jesus, and they, too, had no idea with whom they were conversing.

These two men were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Apparently the two men were among those to whom the women shared their story of the empty tomb. As they were walking they were discussing everything that had happened. And as they continued to walk and talk with each other about their experiences, Jesus Himself came up and walked along with them; but, Luke tells us, they were both kept from recognizing Him.

That's interesting, don't you think? They had been His followers, but now He is walking along with them and they don't recognize Him. Maybe, and it could be the same with Mary, their disappointment with the way things turned out and their despair stood in the way of recognizing Him. That can happen. You lose hope and you are blinded to the good things that still surround you.

Pastor and author Leith Anderson, as a boy, grew up outside of New York City. During

those years he was an avid fan of the old Brooklyn Dodgers. One day his father took him to a World Series game between the Dodgers and the Yankees. Anderson was so excited, and he just knew the Dodgers would trounce the Yankees. Unfortunately, the Dodgers never got on base, and his excitement was shattered.

Years later he was engrossed in a conversation with a man whom he describes as “a walking sports almanac.” Leith told the man about attending this World Series game and added, “It was such a disappointment. I was a Dodger’s fan and the Dodgers never got on base.”

The man said, “You were there? You were at the game when Don Larsen pitched the first perfect game in all of World Series history?”

“Yeah,” Anderson replied, “but uh, we lost.” He then realized that he had been so caught up in his team’s defeat that he missed out on the fact that he was a witness to a far greater event – the first perfect game in World Series history.

Leith Anderson writes, “I wonder how often the same thing happens to us. We get so caught up in the ‘defeats’ in our lives, the times when things don’t turn out the way we want them to. So we’re depressed because an illness continues to linger, or when people don’t treat us the way we think they ought to, or when we face financial difficulties. But we are often so blinded by the pain and disappointment of our ‘defeat’ that we fail to appreciate the fact that we might be witness to something far greater that God is doing in our lives.”

Those are wise words. Don’t ever assume that any disappointment is God’s last word on any situation. Disappointments can blind us to the good God is doing or will do.

The followers of Jesus certainly thought their dreams had turned to dust. The last thing they expected was to discover that Christ was alive. Perhaps this is why they did not recognize Him. They were blinded by their disappointment.

Or maybe it was deliberate on Jesus’ part. Maybe He wasn’t ready to reveal Himself to them at this point. We don’t know. But it is evident this stranger was preparing these two men for an astounding revelation.

Notice that Jesus starts by asking them some questions (vv17-21).

He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?"

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"What things?" Jesus asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who

had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.

These men are mourning, it's obvious, "sadness written across their faces," and Jesus acts very wisely towards them. He did not at once begin by saying, "I know why you are sad and this is what you should do." No; He waited for them to speak, and in His patience drew out of them the specifics of their troubled heart. We need to learn to do the same with people who are mourning or hurting, learn the Lord's way of wisdom. Do not talk too much yourself. Let the hurting heart relieve itself. Even Job felt a little better after pouring out his complaint. It is good to let sorrow speak and to let sympathy listen. Hold back advice until you have heard them. You will be better able to deal with them, and they will be better prepared to receive your words. Often, just being able to talk - and you might have to draw it out by your questions but- just being able to talk and know you have a caring and listening ear will help a person in sorrow. Many doubts and fears vanish when we have a chance to describe what we are feeling and experiencing. So learn to be a comforter, by letting the hurting one speak before giving advice and in some cases that is all you should do, listen and not give any advice at all.

Then notice what the Lord in His wisdom does next (vv25-27).

Then Jesus said to them, "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?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

The Greek word translated fool means thoughtless, failing to understand. Jesus calls people foolish when they thoughtlessly hear and read Scripture but don't take time to understand it. He goes on to say they find it hard to believe what the Scriptures say. They are slow to understand, slow to put their faith in, and slow to apply Scripture to their lives. I can't stress enough how important it is to know and PROPERLY apply God's Word.

God never wants us to live in denial, but always to face reality. That means paying attention to and admitting our feelings. It is not being asked "How are you feeling?" after a loss or disappointment in our lives and responding with, "Couldn't be better! You know God's working all things for good. I just can't see it all yet!" Read the book of Job and how he screamed out his pain, holding nothing back. Read the Psalms, you'll find that most of them are laments, complaints to God. The Bible tells us to pay attention to our feelings, and yet, in the word you will find strength, hope, faith, guidance when it is truly and thoughtfully understood meditated on and applied.

Well, the two men walking with Jesus, though not recognizing Him, were nearing their home in Emmaus. They begged this stranger to stay with them. So Jesus went home with them. Then we come to one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture (vv30-36)

As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!

They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter." Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said.

From a place of deep wrestling with their faith and with God, from this difficult place of hurt, confusion, and disappointment these men from Emmaus, and Mary, and the apostles experience God's love and grace. They are transformed. Our faith grows in the darkness.

Now, believe it or not, we are threatened by such a free God because it takes away all of our ability to control or engineer the process. It leaves us powerless, and changes the language from any language of performance or achievement to that of surrender, trust and vulnerability.... That is the so-called "wildness" of God. We cannot control God by any means whatsoever, not even by our good behavior, which tends to be our first and natural instinct.... That utter and absolute freedom of God is fortunately used totally in our favor, even though we are still afraid of it. It is called providence, forgiveness... mercy.... But to us, it feels like wildness – precisely because we cannot control it, manipulate it, direct it, earn it or lose it. Anyone into controlling God by his or her actions will feel very useless, impotent and ineffective.

- Richard Rohr

"That utter and absolute freedom of God is fortunately used totally in our favor, even though we are still afraid of it."

No one wants to go through difficult circumstances. We are afraid of what God might allow. Yet, fortunately what He does is used totally in our favor. At the end of the book of Job, after all he had been through, Job prayed...

Job 42:5

I had only heard about you before,  
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.

There is someone in this room today who is distracted from your faith by a great disappointment or defeat. Maybe you, too, are blinded by your circumstances. You don't even know that, when you are in this room, you too are in the presence of the risen Christ.

Matthew 18:20 THE MESSAGE

And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there."

You have heard the expression that "seeing is believing." But perhaps you also heard the reverse of that – that there are some things that have to be believed to be seen. This is true as well. There are two ways to look at life. One is through the eyes of skepticism and doubt. The other is through the eyes of faith and hope. The only people Jesus appeared to after His resurrection were His followers – people who already believed in Him. In other words, you had to believe in order to see. This is a powerful lesson about the nature of faith. The amazing thing is how often when you are looking through the eyes of faith you see the handiwork of God. Seeing His handiwork, in turn, increases your faith and your awareness of God's presence.

I believe it was no accident that Jesus had these two men on the road to Emmaus recount all the events of the week that had just past. He wanted them to focus on all they had been through together and all He had meant to them so that they would be prepared for Him to reveal Himself to them. This is why it is of great value for us to gather each week in worship. I have no doubt that those who make the effort to be here see God's hand at work in their lives much, much more than those who are casual about worship. That's the way it works. In order to see Christ, you need to believe in Him, and you need to be regularly in Christ's presence.

Put off doubt and put on faith- and life will take on new meaning and new wonder. Even those who were closest to Christ did not recognize Him in their disappointment and despair. But when they put on faith and realized He was in their midst, their hearts burned within them in peace that the Lord Jesus Christ was alive.

"I'm a romantic. I have a plan. But I'm also a realist. The plan unfolds slowly and not without what seems to you to be irreparable glitches. But know this: nothing takes Me by surprise, and nothing can stand for long in the way of My plan."

- Larry Crabb, *66 Love Letters, Page 242*