

Introduction

Hope is the fuel that keeps us going each day. The belief that something better is on the horizon, perhaps just beyond our current reach, but one day we might be able to achieve. For a Christian, the book of Hebrews would tell us that our hope is what we put our faith in - that one day all of the things we know are wrong are going to be made right - one day we will be united with our Savior, Jesus - and one day there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more loss and suffering.

But sometimes, it is so hard to have hope. It can seem like the world and its brokenness are in a concentrated effort to snuff out hope, to extinguish the ember of hope present in your heart. If you can hold on to hope, then all isn't lost - there is still something to live for. Some purpose, some reason. Hope, as the old Italian proverb says, is the last thing to be lost.

Sometimes Christians are not the best at talking about hopelessness. When faced with people, especially other Christians, who are in the midst of losing hope, we throw out well-meaning cliches like "trust God more, read your Bible, pray some more, have more faith!" There is truth in all of that - they are all important. But often the heart behind these platitudes is not necessarily genuine concern but rather one of discomfort, a distaste for the negative, and these sorts of exhortations are thrown out as an escape mechanism, and way to divert away from the discomfort of not knowing what to do with someone who seems to be losing their hope. Like a smoke bomb that you throw and then run away.

So today, as uncomfortable as it may be, as painful as it may be, I want us to sit with the question: What happens when hope dies? What happens when heartbreak, loss, disappointment, disillusionment begin to build and smother your hope? How does it feel to entrust your life to Jesus and yet start to question whether he really loves you? In other words - what happens when you just aren't sure that you can believe that Jesus is really who he says he is?

This is what is happening in Luke 24. We read about two disciples - only one of them is named. This is a strange story to be included, these disciples aren't part of the group of 12 disciples that we hear the most about. Luke, ever the detailed researcher and writer, departs from the other gospel accounts to include this story, which is found in neither Matthew, Mark, or John.

This story is deeply emotional, personal. Here are two disciples, three days after seeing Jesus die, slowly making their way back home. I see no reason to interpret this any other way - they were going home. They had put their hope, given their very lives to Jesus, and now that hope had died. That's really what had happened three days ago - hope had died. The one who they thought was going to redeem Israel, provide salvation for mankind, had been brutally murdered on a cross like a common criminal.

They had lost their teacher, their friend, and now it had been three days. The day that these disciples were walking away from Jerusalem, away from everything that Jesus had done, was the day that we celebrate as Easter. But that first Easter didn't feel much like a celebration. The spark of hope was going out - so now they were just going to go home. It was over, whatever "it" was, and although they might have had hopes of changing the world, those hopes had died with Jesus.

As they took step after step, the dust rising from their feet, walking the road back home, their heartbreak didn't decrease as they walked away. It settled in their hearts like a heavy weight, crushing them. As is so often the case, pain causes us to lash out at others. So, as they talked about everything that had happened, debating it back and forth, trying to make sense of it, they began to argue, both so caught up in their pain that they had to take it out on someone or something. What had happened? Why had it happened? Jesus had done miracles, forgiven sins, said that the Kingdom of God was here.

And now he was dead. And it had been three days.

Ultimately - the issue wasn't that Jesus had died, although that was heartbreaking. The real issue was that it seemed like Jesus was not who he said he was. And since Jesus didn't seem to be who he said he was, their hope had died.

As they walk this road, heartbroken, discussing, arguing, a figure begins to walk alongside them. We don't know how long this person was walking along with them, or even if they noticed him at first. They were probably in the heat of conversation and debate, and so probably did not realize that this mysterious man was drawing up close to them, overhearing their conversation.

But, we know from the text something that these disillusioned disciples did not know - this man did not need to draw close to hear their conversation, he already knew their words before their mouths even formed them, and he also knew the broken hearts those words proceeded from.

This man was Jesus, and Jesus was pursuing them as they were walking away.

I. Jesus Pursues (13 - 24)

A. Their eyes were prevented from seeing him - they don't recognize him

1. Something divine is at play here.
2. Jesus does not reveal himself to them at first.

B. Jesus asks them what they are discussing.

1. They stop and one of them, Cleopas, says "are you the only one that doesn't know what's going on?"
2. The tone seems a bit insulting - don't you *know*?
3. This had been the talk of the town - it wasn't a small event.

C. They tell the story

1. "we had hoped"
 - a) You can hear the disappointment and heartbreak in their voice
2. The way they tell the story betrays how their hopes had been shattered and how they did not believe that Jesus was who he said he was

- a) Jesus has been downgraded in their eyes to just a good prophet
- D. Their unbelief
1. It is easy to want to let these disciples off too easy - they had just been through a traumatic, heartbreaking event
 2. During his life, Jesus had told his disciples many times, using the OT to explain how he had to suffer and die and be raised on the third day. It seems that his disciples just didn't get it - and they still didn't get it
 - a) Jesus' body was gone - they assumed he had been taken by a gardener or something
 - b) The women had said they had seen an angel - but they didn't believe them
 3. The way the disciples explain the story reveals their hopelessness and unbelief, despite having been told the truth over and over

After explaining, it seems that the disciples were ready to keep walking. They wanted to put as much space between themselves and Jerusalem as possible, and to get away from this strange man who seemed to be the only one oblivious to everything that had happened.

But Jesus is not going to let them get away that easily - instead of letting them walk away, he walks with them.

II. Jesus Walks (25 - 27)

A. Jesus' Rebuke

1. "Oh foolish ones and slow of heart"
2. I think we can interpret some gentleness in Jesus' tone here - he is empathizing with their pain and saying - "you still don't get it, do you?"

B. Jesus Explains

1. Jesus says - based on the OT - it was necessary that the Messiah would suffer all these things (spec. referring to Isaiah 53?)
2. Everything in the OT points to Jesus

- a) We can have some empathy with the disciples - can you read the OT and come away with the gospel? The coming of Jesus?

It is significant that Jesus *walks* with the disciples. They aren't going the "right" way - they are leaving behind Jerusalem, they are leaving behind the rest of Jesus' followers. They are walking the road of defeat and hopelessness and yet Jesus walks it *with them*.

We're waiting for what these disciples don't know is coming - Jesus revealing himself.

III. Jesus Reveals (28 - 35)

A. They arrive at Emmaus

1. They beg Jesus to stay - they still think he is a stranger
2. Jesus might not have stayed if they hadn't invited him in
 - a) Their hunger for the truth led them to invite him
3. There was something about Jesus that made them want him to stay - perhaps it was something stirring in their hearts as they listened to him speak, something that seemed familiar but so distant.

B. Jesus takes on the hosting responsibilities

1. Blessing and breaking the bread were typically done by the host - not by the guest
2. Perhaps it was his perceived authority

C. The Moment

1. Jesus blesses the bread and then breaks it - and they recognize him
2. "Their eyes were opened"
 - a) Perhaps they recognized him by seeing the nail-scarred hands breaking the bread

D. Return to Jerusalem

1. It was late, but they didn't care - they had to tell everyone
2. Think about the difference between the journey to Emmaus and the journey back
 - a) They shuffled home to Emmaus, downcast and broken
 - b) They run back to Jerusalem

E. It is true! Jesus is alive!

1. What they didn't dare to hope for had become a reality - Jesus is not dead, he is alive

But here is the most important thing - in contrast to what the disciples believed when they set out, Jesus is who he said he was. Everything was true.

This is a great story to read, and you might even feel some joy as the disciples go through this emotional rollercoaster of a day. You might feel some joy for them as they realize the Jesus is alive. But maybe, you don't see the connection between this story and you. The disciples got to *see* Jesus, to touch him, to talk with him. Although it's a nice story it doesn't really resonate with you. But what does this story tell us about the character of God revealed through Jesus?

Let's return, just for a minute, to your life. You may have been able to identify with the disciples in this story. You may have walked a road like the one they walked, or maybe you are walking one right now. It's a gradual thing, beginning to walk this road. It doesn't happen all at once - in fact, it can take awhile. But, as the hurts and heartbreaks of life begin to pile up, day by day, you feel yourself wandering. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you have all the right answers - you know who Jesus is. You've seen it. You yearn for the time when following Jesus was so full of joy, and peace. But right now, it just seems so hard to believe it.

You might be left with the same doubt that these two disciples had. The doubt that propels you down this road away from God. Is Jesus really who he says he is?

Now, I could beat you over the head with a thousand different reasons why Jesus is who he says he is, why you just need to "trust God more," or "read your Bible and pray," and perhaps there is a time for all of that. But you know all of that. You've heard it before, what feels like a million times.

Maybe that isn't helpful to you because you have started to believe that God is as uncomfortable with where you are as other Christians. Maybe you think that because you have started to wander that God no longer wants anything to do with you. He's back in Jerusalem, back in the holy place! You feel like God might be holding you at arms length, not wanting to engage with your brokenness, your doubts and your hurt.

For now, if you are in this place where you feel like your pain and your hurt have caused you to question if Jesus really is who he says he is, and if God wants to have anything to do with you as a result - I have some very good news for you.

I. Jesus pursues *you*.

II. Jesus walks with *you*.

III. Jesus reveals himself to *you*.

Jesus pursues you

The disciples had lost hope, not because Jesus hadn't told them the truth, not because they didn't know the right things, but because they did not believe Jesus was who he said he was. You might think that you have wandered away from God - down a road he won't follow you down, but there isn't anywhere you can go that he won't pursue you.

God pursuing his people is written all over the pages of the Bible!

Elijah in the cave

1 Kings 19:11 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face

in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Jonah

The lost sheep

Moses in the wilderness

Exodus 3:1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. **3** And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." **4** When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

There is nowhere that God is not.

The place that you have called hopeless Jesus calls holy. And it isn't because of you - full of doubt and worry and fear - it's because I am here - and you don't get to call something hopeless that the Creator God has called holy.

The disciples weren't going the right way, they were wandering. There is nowhere you can go that is not God-inhabited.

As hard as it might be for you to feel as if there is hope - please, don't give up. There's still little ember of hope inside you, I know there is. That little voice asking "could it really be true? Could Jesus really be who he says he is?" Listen to it.

I can't give you a 10 step plan out of where you are but I can tell you that God has not abandoned you. Your doubts and your fears are not too much for him.

Lift up your eyes. Jesus is closer than you think.