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Series: Summer Q&A
Message: How Do I Make Sense of the Bible?

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Luke 24:14-49

There's a funny story that is told out of England about a substitute teacher who was assigned to teach Bible class to an elementary group. Not knowing exactly where they were in terms of their understanding of the Bible, the teacher thought he would begin with a question. So, he asked them: Who knocked down the walls of Jericho? There wasn't really any answer. He observed that the children were nervously squirming around in their seats. Finally, a little voice spoke up and he said, sir, my name is Bruce Jones. I don't know who knocked down the walls, but it wasn't me. Well, the teacher wasn't sure if little Bruce was being rude or disrespectful or exactly how to take it. So, he reported it to the principal. And the principal said, well, I know Bruce Jones. He's a good lad. He's an honest chap. And if he said he didn't do it, I believe him. I don't think he did it. Well, now the teacher was exasperated, thinking that the principal was also being rude and disrespectful. So, he wrote to the Department of Education, telling them about the whole incident. They wrote back and said, Dear Sir, we are sorry to hear about the walls of Jericho and that nobody has admitted to causing the damage. If you send us an estimate, we will see what we can do about the cost.

Well, you know, that is silly. But it does kind of reflect on the growing lack of knowledge and understanding that people have about the Bible. It is said, of course, of Christopher Columbus that when he made his journey of discovery, he didn't know where he was going. When he got there, he didn't know where he was. And when he got back home, he didn't know where he'd been. And I've got a feeling that sometimes we feel that way as we try to work our way through the Bible, trying to figure out where are we, where have we been, how are we supposed to understand this book that we love and we know we're to read and engage, but we're not always sure how to make our way around it.

So here we are in our summer Q&A series. We've asked the question: Is the Bible true? We've asked the question: Is the Bible trustworthy? This morning we want to ask the question: How do I make sense of the Bible? And hopefully our big idea will be of help to us because our big idea says the Bible is not about you. And it's not about me either. It's for you and it's for me. It's about Jesus and it's about God's amazing plan to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life.

For the last couple of Sundays as we've talked about this amazing, extraordinary book called the Bible, we've laid down these foundational statements reminding ourselves that yes, it's a library in a sense, isn't it? It's one book, but it's 66. It's one book, but it has 66 books that all thematically and beautifully align themselves with each other. 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. It's divided into two parts. We call it the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Covenant, because the word testament simply means covenant. The Old Testament, the Old Covenant and the New Testament and the New Covenant written by 40 different human authors over a period of time of some 1500 plus years, three different languages, three different continents, and obviously something only the Holy Spirit of God could do and accomplish. Because the Bible tells us how life works. It tells us how life works, how to know God, how to follow God, how to live life well, how to live under the lordship of King Jesus. That's really what we are going again to see.

So, this morning, very simple proposition. You can understand the Bible. Let's see how we can come to realize that truth. I want to simply begin by pointing out to you what Jesus claimed. What Jesus claimed about the word of God. That should be of great interest and importance to us.

I'm going to read a couple of verses and then we're going to dive in a little deeper to the third passage. But in Matthew 5:17, the first one where Jesus comments, He says, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. And verse 18, For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one, not an iota, not a dot will pass away from the law until all is accomplished. So, one word that we can take away from what Jesus says is there is fulfillment. A key word

to understand what Jesus says and believes about scripture is that there is fulfillment. There is fulfillment about Him.

Then the second passage is one that we looked at a while back in our study of the gospel of John. In the fifth chapter in verse 39, Jesus said this in His interaction with the religious leaders. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Now, that's of course a good statement. It's a true statement. They were corrupting, however, that whole process, weren't they? So, He says, You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they, the scriptures, that bear witness about Me. Yet, He says in verse 40, You refuse to come to Me that you may have life. So, here you would see Jesus saying, when He thinks of the scriptures, when He thinks of the Old Testament, He says, in effect, they're pointing to Him. They're about Me. What an amazing claim for Jesus to make before these religious leaders.

Then, let's go to Luke chapter 24. And here we're going to take a little more time and develop this amazing passage. Luke 24. I think it's fair to say that if you were to come up with a top ten list of passages from the Bible, I don't know how you could leave Luke 24 out of that list. In fact, I'm not so sure that if you were to come up with a top five passages in all the Bible, I don't know if you could keep Luke 24 out of that list. This is an amazing and remarkable passage that Luke gives to us in this 24th chapter. Because, in effect, what Luke does is he answers the question: What's the Bible all about? I mean, that's as fundamental as it gets, right? What is the Bible all about?

If you had stepped back to John chapter 5, and you had the opportunity to talk to those religious leaders to whom Jesus said that these scriptures are about me, if you had said to those guys: What do you think the Bible's about? Obviously, it was the Old Testament. If you had said to them: What do you think the Old Testament is about? I'm almost sure that they would have said, well, it's about us. It's about us. We're Jews. The whole Old Testament, it's all about us.

And, of course, they wouldn't have been totally wrong in that answer, would they? Except that they were wrong in that answer. It's kind of like being in a Bible study, and a

verse is read, and somebody immediately says, what do you think that verse means to you? Now, if that ever happens, and you're in a Bible study here at Covenant Community Church, and somebody reads a verse, and then the first question is, what does that verse mean to you? Would you please call the CCC hotline? Because we're going to come right over to that Bible study group, and we're going to say, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. That is not the first question you ask after you read a verse.

I mean, we want to get there, don't we? We want to understand what that verse means to me. How do I apply that? How do I live that? What does it say to me? That's not the first question. That's not the first question. That's an absolute violation of the handling the Word of God accurately and well, because every passage of Scripture, every verse in the Bible has a context. There's history there. There's a setting. There's something that we're to learn and observe before we ever jump immediately to the question, what does that have to do with me? How does this verse impact me?

My friends, the Bible is not given to us as an inspirational thought for the day. This book is not to be treated and handled. You open it up at some point and you put your finger on a verse. You read it, and you say, this is the verse for me for today. That's not the way God wants us to handle His Word. There is so much wrong with that approach. It takes all the context away, and it makes the Bible not about the subject matter that it is rightly about, but it makes it about us. And so we don't want to fall into that trap.

But let's look at what Luke says. Luke 24, I want to touch on four things. The first one is the background of this passage, and it's in verses 13-16. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. And while they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. Verse 13 tells us this is Resurrection Easter Sunday. It's probably afternoon. Maybe they've had lunch. Maybe they hung out in Jerusalem for a time, and now they're headed for home. They're headed back to Emmaus.

Luke tells us that seven miles away, we get into this story. We realize very quickly that these two disciples are very sad. They are bewildered. It's probably not wrong to say

they're depressed. They're completely confused about these things. That very day, they're walking back, they're talking about these things that happened. It's just all about what they know and have experienced and heard and seen about the life and ministry of Jesus. From the beginning up until now, just a week ago Sunday from that day, they had perhaps even seen the triumphal entry. They get towards the end of that week, and they hear that Jesus has been arrested. Word gets out that He's being beaten and this fake trial is going on, and then horror of horrors, it ends with the crucifixion. These are the things that they're grappling with. They're trying to wrap their head around. They're confused. They can't figure out how did all of this go so badly. We thought He was the one. They're going to say just in a little bit.

Jesus joins them. They don't even know at this point who He is. They can't recognize Him. I'm sure this was a divine and supernatural matter. God didn't allow them to physically see and understand that this was Jesus Himself, which there is a spiritual picture there, isn't there? Because we don't see that either. We don't understand that either until the Holy Spirit of God opens our eyes and gives us that understanding. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.14, the natural person does not understand the things of God, neither can He know them, because they are spiritually discerned. So, it does take a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to understand just as we'll see here.

The second thing we see is the inquiry. The inquiry in verses 17 through the beginning of verse 19. And He said to them, what is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? And I can imagine there was some animation. There was some energy, even though it was sadness. Their confusion and bewilderment must have been expressed in the emotions with which they spoke. He saw that. The inquiry just stops them in their tracks, right? They can't believe what they just heard from this stranger. What things are you talking about?

One of them is named Cleopas. Now here's just a little interesting historic note. In the Gospel of John, the 19th chapter, there's a lady named Mary at the cross, and her name is Mary, and the word Cleopas, only spelled C-L-O-P-A-S. So, it's thought by many that this

is a husband-wife walking along. Cleopas is the husband, Mary is the wife. We don't know that for sure, but it is possible.

One of them named Cleopas answered him. Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And he said to them, What things? So this inquiry starts with Jesus saying to them in verse 17, and his question, as I said, just stops them in their tracks. Verse 18, you know, we've seen repeatedly in the Gospel of John how John loves irony. Well, Luke loves irony too. And this may be the most ironic passage in all the Bible, because here they are saying to Jesus, Good grief, dude! You're the only one in this whole region who has no idea what just happened. Where have you been? Do you not check your phone? Are you not getting any text messages from friends? Are you not aware of what's happened?

And here's the irony. They're saying this to the one who knows better than anyone exactly what has happened. They think he's clueless. They think he doesn't know what's happened. And he's literally the only one who knows exactly what's happened. And you know, when you see Jesus entering into this dialogue with them, this is just, as you study the life of Christ, we've seen it again in the Gospel of John, repeatedly. He loves to come alongside people. He loves to engage people, and he loves to ask them questions.

I think that's something that we should learn from. There's great value in just asking people questions, aren't there? Engaging them in things that they're interested in. Things that will perhaps draw them into spiritual conversations. Jesus has no problem, he has no issue, stepping into their disillusionment. He has no problem stepping into their despair, into their confusion. He just meets them right where they are. And he asks them these questions to draw out from them what's going on in their life. I think it's a beautiful picture and a beautiful example for us.

This third thing, the Gospel according to Cleopas. Verses 19 through 24. We're not going to read all these verses, but in verses 19 through 24, you have one of the longest speeches in the Gospel of Luke. And I've entitled it the Gospel according to Cleopas. But unfortunately, it's not good news. Because Cleopas, as you read through that account, he actually has it all wrong. He doesn't understand at all what has happened. He says in verse

19, they said to him concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet. He was. He was a prophet. He wasn't a Messiah now anymore in their mind. He was a prophet who was mighty indeed and worded before God and all the people.

Let's look at what Jesus says back. Because he gives us the good news. The Gospel according to Jesus. Verses 25 through 27. But he said to them, O, foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. Starts off with what I've just described as a gentle rebuke. Now, some Bible teachers think this was a very stern rebuke. I can understand that. I could see it that way. But I just think in the overall context, I like to think of this as more of a gentle rebuke. O foolish ones. There's a lot of things Jesus could have said to them at that point, right? Maybe we would say, I don't know. If you say to somebody, you're clueless. Is that harsh? To me, this is what this sounds like. You guys are kind of clueless about what's happened. Let me show you again, he says. Let me show you again. You should know this but let me show you again.

Look at that 26th verse. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? You realize that this is the reoccurring theme that you see often in Scripture. There's suffering, and then there's glory. There's suffering, and then there's glory. It certainly is true in the example of our Lord, and Jesus himself speaks to that later when he's meeting with all of the disciples in this same chapter. But Paul speaks of it regarding our life, doesn't he? In 2 Corinthians 4, verse 16, he talks about this light affliction. And I know some of you are going through things that can't be characterized as light affliction. They're hard. They're difficult. They're trying. But never lose sight of the fact that as we go through the difficulties of life in this fallen world, that it truly is in light of eternity this light affliction because of the glory that is to come. And that's what Jesus points them to. This suffering, then glory.

But look at what he says in verse 27. This is the greatest lesson that's ever been given. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Now this is the whole of the Old Testament. He

says, let me take you back to Moses and not just Moses, but all the prophets and in all Scripture. So, he's basically saying let me walk you through the whole of the Old Testament.

Jerusalem to Emmaus is like seven miles. So, this is like a two-hour sermon. This is an example that I think we should be following today, frankly. This is a lengthy exposition. But this is the greatest sermon that's ever been preached. I mean, who wouldn't want to join this couple walking with Jesus as he opens to them all the Scriptures and shows what those Scriptures say about him. It is the living word expounding the written word. It's an incredible, incredible passage that we're looking at here. It's the greatest example to us of answering the question, what is the Bible about? Jesus says here is the key to understanding all of Scripture. And what does he say? He says it's all about me. It's all about me.

When he says he started with Moses, he had to go back. I think he went back and said, you know Adam? Yeah. Adam in the garden? Yeah. He messed it all up, didn't he? Yeah, he sure did. And then you go to the Gospels and Jesus. Jesus is in the garden. And his garden is a lot heavier and a lot darker and a lot worse. And he prevails. He's the greater one, isn't he? He's the better one, as it is often said.

He certainly went to Genesis 3:15, the first preaching of the Gospel. After the fall into sin, the first promise that is given is the promise that through Eve would come the seed, through the seed of the woman, who would bring deliverance and salvation to all who would believe. He worked his way through the Old Testament Scriptures as they walked. Genesis, he's the seed of the woman. Exodus, he's the Passover lamb. Leviticus, he's the atoning sacrifice. Deuteronomy, he's the great prophet. Joshua, he's the unknown, unseen captain. Judges, he's the deliverer. Ruth, he's the kinsman redeemer. 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, he's the promised king. Ezra and Nehemiah, he's the restorer. Esther, he's the greater advocate. The Psalms, he's everything. Proverbs, he's our wisdom. Ecclesiastes, he's the goal and purpose and meaning of life. Song of Solomon, he's the beloved one. And then all the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, he's the prince of peace who's yet to come.

As they walk along, it had to be the most amazing sermon ever spoken in the history of humanity. For Jesus to open the Old Testament scriptures and say to these weary disciples, this is what you missed. The whole of the Old Testament is about me. I would say to you this morning, all the imagery of the Old Testament, everything about the priesthood, everything about the sacrifices, everything about the tabernacle, everything about the temple. I mean, just go down through the list. It is all there. Jesus is better than. Abraham left a land that he went to where he did not know where he was going. Jesus left the glory of heaven and came to this earth. Jesus is the better and the greater Abraham. Abraham took his son Isaac and was ready to offer him on the altar. But our heavenly Father didn't hear a voice from heaven that said, wait. Jesus is greater than Abraham. He's greater than Moses who gave the law on Mount Sinai. Jesus gives a New Covenant. He gives us something greater. He gives us something better. Just go through the whole of the Old Testament. Jesus said, it all points to me.

Now look at verse 32. The response of their hearts. They said to each other. Go back to verse 31. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures. They were moved from despair to hope. They were moved from being confused and bewildered to being amazed at what they just learned about the Old Testament Scriptures and pointing to Jesus. Don't you want your heart to burn within you? Don't you want that same sense of desire and interest and hunger for God's word? God wants so much more for us than to check some box that said we read the Bible today. We read a chapter. Well great, good. But God's not interested in our performing for him. He's interested in our hearts burning within us as we open the scriptures and see what it is that they say about our Savior. He wants us to see his grace and his truth and his beauty. Just as John said in the opening chapter in verse 14, we beheld his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

My friend, what the Bible reveals in five words. Remember we've heard these five words many times at Covenant. The first one is anticipation. The whole of the Old Testament anticipates the coming one. The whole Old Testament, Jesus said, is all about

him. You read about him on every page of the Bible. He's there. It's all anticipating his coming. You get to the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and it is manifestation. He's here. He's among us. You get to the book of Acts and we have to tell everybody so it's proclamation time. Go tell everybody what it is that is the good news. You get into the epistles and the letters to the churches and it's explanation about all this doctrine and all that has come to us in Christ and then of course it ends in Revelation in consummation.

If you look on the back of your outline, the chart there, just simply looking at the overflow of Scripture. I'm just going to take a couple minutes and walk through that with you. You see in those opening events: creation, fall, flood, Babel, patriarchs, Egypt, deliverance, law, wanderings, conquest. That's Genesis all the way to Ruth. Then you remember the children of Israel said, we want to be like the nations around us, and we want to have a king. God tells them exactly what's going to happen if he gives them a king, but he gives them their wish. Their kingdom is established, and it is a united kingdom of the 12 tribes. Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, that takes us from 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 11, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, all of that happens within that time frame.

And then because of disobedience, and idolatry, and forsaking the God that they have committed to follow, the nation is divided in discipline following the reign of Solomon. It's divided into the 10 northern tribes, often called Israel in the Bible, and the two southern tribes called Judah. And then the 10 northern tribes, because of their continued disobedience in the face of God calling them consistently to repentance through Jonah, through Amos, through Hosea, in 722 the Assyrians come and take them off to Assyria. They never return. Nineteen kings served the northern kingdom. Every one of them was wicked. Every one of them was evil. That's the sad story. The southern kingdom of two tribes, 20 kings, 8 of them good, 12 of them bad, were carried off into captivity by Babylon in 586.

You look down below and you can see the prophets in what is called the pre-exilic prophet. Pre-exilic just simply means before they went into exile. So those prophets were all prophesying to the nation, telling them to come back to the Lord, to repent. They didn't

do it. In 586, Babylon came and carried them off into Babylon. They were in Babylon for 70 years in exile. While they were in exile, you have the writing of Lamentations, Ezekiel, and of Daniel. Remember, Daniel is sitting there, and he's reading. He realizes that the 70 years is about up, and he's excited. He begins to pray about that very thing. It is Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. See how out of chronological order, this is giving you really the chronology of the Old Testament Scripture, because Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther come way at the end after the return from exile, and it is there that you have the ministry of the post-exilic prophets of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. And then, at the end of Malachi, 400 years of silence, and then Jesus comes. All of it points to the cross.

My friends, this morning, I simply ask this. What do we take away? What do we want to take away this morning? Listen, we have the same word to read. We have the same word to preach. We have the same word to teach that Jesus did. Jesus had the Old Testament Scriptures. We have those same Old Testament Scriptures, obviously, plus the New Testament. But when you read your Bible, look for Jesus. He's on every page. He's in every illustration. There's something there that we can see about Jesus, because Jesus said, from Moses through all the prophets, all of this is written about me. All of it culminates and takes us to the cross. The very purpose for which Jesus came into this world was to make a way for us to have our relationship with God restored. God created, man messed it up, and God is in the business of restoring.

That restoration, that redemption, that salvation comes through His Son, Jesus. And it comes through God's plan, not plan B. It was plan A from the beginning all the way to the end. There was only one plan, and that plan was that God would send His Son because He loves you and He loves me that much. Jesus was willing to die on the cross for my sin and yours. What God is wanting from us is not our works and not our efforts. What He wants from us is simply a heart that believes that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done. When we believe that, He gives us the forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

Let's pray. Father, we are amazed at Your Word. We are amazed at Your great love for us. We're amazed at our Savior, who was willing to leave the glory of heaven and come to this sin-sick world, be treated as no one else has ever been treated, die a terrible death

on the cross, be raised again, and ascended to Your right hand. And there He lives to make intercession for us. Father, I pray that Your Spirit would open eyes this morning that have not yet understood the glory of the gospel – that to believe is to receive the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. We thank You in Jesus' name, amen.