

Encountering Jesus on the Road to Emmaus

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the four Gospels, the truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead very often does not so much roar onto the scene, as it creeps up on people in surprising ways. There are several examples of this in the New Testament, but the best example is in Luke 24. Two people are sadly walking a road to take them to a place called Emmaus. Along the way, the resurrection of Jesus quite literally sneaks up on them from behind. This is a story filled with intrigue, mystery, comedy, and finally, great joy. Let's dig into Luke 24 today on *Groundwork*.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are, Dave, now coming to the very, very end of Luke Chapter 24, and in fact, this is really the end of a series we did across the Lenten season, where we started following Jesus to Jerusalem at the end of Luke 9, and went all the way through his entry into Jerusalem on what we often call Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday, and now we have looked at the resurrection, which is the first eleven verses of Luke 24. By the way, it is very interesting to me that right before we get to the story we are going to read momentarily, the last line of the resurrection account itself has Peter wandering away from the empty tomb wondering what it means. We are still not told what it means. That is where Luke leaves it until we pick it up in this particular story at verse 13.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and nobody believes it yet except for some of the women, but the disciples dismiss their testimony as an idle tale – one version calls it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And nobody has seen him yet in Luke.

DAVE BAST

Right. So, we are going to try to really cover a lot of ground in this program by looking at all the rest of Luke 24, which is one of the tremendously rich chapters, and we will start reading at verse 13:

Now that same day (that is to say, Easter) two of them (two of the disciples) were going to a village called Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. ¹⁶But they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" ¹⁸They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them named Cleopas asked him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet; powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death and they crucified him; ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but did not find his body. ²³They came and told us

they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. ²⁴And some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. ²⁶Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all of the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us. It is nearly evening. The day is almost over.” So, he went in to stay with them. ³⁰And when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. ³¹And then their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he disappeared from their sight. ³²And they asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?” ³³And they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and those with them assembled together, ³⁴saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵And then the two told what had happened to them on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

DAVE BAST

Now, that is a story-and-a-half!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Luke is one of the best writers of the New Testament. We did a series on Acts recently on *Groundwork*, Dave, and we marveled at Luke’s narrative powers – at his great storytelling ability – and this is a good one. This is full of intrigue. There is some comedy here. They just do not know who Jesus is and they even rebuke him for not knowing about Jesus, not knowing that it is Jesus himself; but, there is also this realism here. These two are sad. They are heartbroken; not because they have not heard about the resurrection; they had. They just did not believe it.

DAVE BAST

Right. They could not wrap their minds around it. One of them is named; he is called Cleopas. The other is not, and it is tempting, and I think quite likely, that it was not a he at all, but a she.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they could have been a married couple.

DAVE BAST

This is a husband and wife; that is why they are living together; that is why they are headed home together; but, as you say, downcast, and maybe the saddest words in this whole story are the words *had hoped*; we had hoped, they say, that Jesus was the one; that he was going to be the deliverer; the one to bring salvation to Israel.

You know, when somebody says, “I had hoped,” that means they are no longer hoping. They have totally given it up. It is not just, “I hoped,” but, “I had hoped,” Hope has become extinct.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We had hoped our little boy would grow up healthy and strong, but he got killed on his bike when he was 9. We had hoped the doctors would treat Mom’s cancer, but it took off like a rocket and now she is dead. We had hoped Jim could retire after 35 years with the company, but two years from retirement he was fired and downsized. Had hoped. That double-past tense is a mighty, mighty sad thing. They had heard the story, but nothing has turned them around; and you cannot blame them, right? As we have said before when we have looked at these resurrection accounts, nobody believes the resurrection in an instant because that is not the way the world works. Dead people do not come back just because somebody said somebody did. You do not believe it. They are absolutely heartbroken here.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and they are headed home, so it is a seven-mile trip to Emmaus, we are told. Seven miles, what is that, maybe an hour-and-a-half walk or so?

SCOTT HOEZEE

A brisk walk; you would have to walk pretty briskly. A couple hours, at least.

DAVE BAST

Someone has pointed out that it may not be just that they are going home. They have given up hope. They do not want to hang around Jerusalem, but they want to get out of

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yeah, get out of Dodge.

DAVE BAST

It is sort of like if someone has had a tragic loss on the road, they do not want to go past that intersection where their loved one was killed because of all of the memories that it has. It just makes the pain alive. So, they do not want to stay in Jerusalem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is haunted with the memory of what had happened to their Jesus. But, of course, they are explaining this to Jesus, who – there is no doubt that there was continuity, and we will see some of that, too; but between Jesus' earthly body and his resurrected body, the Good Friday body on the cross and the body that – but, he was just different enough that people usually did not recognize him; and so, here too we are told that maybe Jesus kept a hood over his face or something, I do not know, but they did not know it was Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Or maybe it was something supernatural.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it could be that it was a divine mind trick that they – but, in any event, they have no idea who is talking to them, but they walk together the whole way, and what Jesus does first before they get to Emmaus is very, very interesting, and it sets a tone for this end of Luke, and we will look at what that is in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and today we are in the middle of the story of the road to Emmaus, where these two disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and perhaps his wife, are traveling along. They are dejected; they have been disappointed by Jesus' death. They have heard this fantastic story about the empty tomb and some women who said the angels told us he is alive, but they do not believe it. Then they are joined by this mysterious stranger, who is, of course, Jesus himself; ironically, they tell him what he has been doing; what has happened, and he keeps probing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he feigns ignorance. "What are you talking about?" "Well, everything that happened." "What happened?" "Jesus; you haven't heard of him? Boy, are you out of the loop, buddy."

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But then, what I find so interesting is Jesus does not throw off his cloak and say: Ta-da! It's me! No, he does what we are going to see happen again at the very end of Luke 24; how does the first Easter Sunday end? Bible study. It ends in a Bible study, of all things, as Jesus goes right back to Genesis, right back to the creation, back to the Torah, back to the Pentateuch, and goes through the whole Bible to say: Look, (he is talking about himself, but they do not know that), but he is saying: Look, this is what had to happen to God's Messiah; the whole Bible has witnessed to it. So, Jesus engages them in an on-the-road Bible study, of all things. Why not appear to them in a bolt of lightning? Why not bowl them over with the power of the resurrection? Why not throw off his cloak? Why do a Bible study, but that is what he does.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is even more striking if you just look at what he says. It is in verse 25. After they told him about all this stuff that has happened and how unbelievable it is, he said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe," and he does not say, "How slow to believe the witness of the angels, how slow to believe the testimony of the women and the empty tomb and the evidence. He says, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken." He points them right – as you say – right to the Bible, and clearly, his understanding – the understanding of the risen Jesus, as similarly to the pre-risen Jesus, the earthly Jesus is: Hey, the Book is about me if you only knew how to read it. All that stuff – and not just this little passage from Isaiah or this clearly messianic prophecy here, but everything beginning with Moses; everything from Genesis 1:1 through Malachi 4 verse whatever it is; 20-something. It is all about me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But what is interesting is that the longer he talks – they still do not know it is Jesus – but the longer he talks, the faster their pulses go.

DAVE BAST

Yes, "Did not our hearts burn within us?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is what John Calvin...

DAVE BAST

"As he spoke to us in the scriptures," yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is one of John Calvin's favorite lines; the burning heart. So, the longer he talked, their pulses quickened and they were amazed at this, and somehow hope was getting kindled in them; and then, in another funny scene they get to their house and Jesus says: Well, see ya. He just keeps trudging up the road, and they are like: Wait; stop! Dinner, come on. And then he comes in and does what Luke has shown us several times, and we will see the Apostles doing the same thing several times in the sequel to Luke, the book of Acts, a very familiar rhythm of Jesus with bread. He takes, he thanks, he breaks, he gives. It is a quadruple move, and in an instant, they see it is Jesus. That is exactly how he has given the bread how many times before, and then, wouldn't you know it? You no sooner recognize him than he is gone. He just disappears.

DAVE BAST

Maybe they noticed the scars in his hands when he picked up the bread.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, that could be, too.

DAVE BAST

Wouldn't that be wonderful to think of; but acts that are reenacted every Sunday from that time until this in Christian worship; the acts of Communion or the Lord's Supper, where the bread is taken and blessed or

given thanks for, and broken and then distributed; and that is how their eyes were opened and they knew it was Jesus. But, they should have known. His point is, they should have known, and they should have anticipated and believed that he would rise again if they had only understood the scriptures correctly. There is a passage in John that I have just been reminded of as we have been talking about this. At the end of John 5, Jesus talks about how people should really have recognized and accepted him as the Messiah because God himself testified to whom Jesus was, and he did it supremely, Jesus says, in the word. He says to his critics, “You search the scriptures because in them you think you have salvation, and it is they that testify to me; and I will not be your judge; Moses will be your judge if you reject me, because he wrote about me.” So, Jesus has believed this all along. He has been convinced that the scriptures are really his story, and that is how he got his understanding and knowledge of what he was about and what he had to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So now, these two have had all that – all those dots connected for them, and now they have recognized him, finally, in the breaking of the bread, and they may have been – I do not know how long it took them to cover the seven miles on the way to Emmaus, but I think they did it in triple time – they sprint back to Jerusalem, find the disciples, and then they are together, and let’s just read the rest of most of Luke 24, and then we will talk a little bit more about it, including in the last segment of this; but here is what happens next:

³⁶While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I, myself. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹While they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³He took it and he ate it in their presence. ⁴⁴Then he said, “This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. ⁴⁵And then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. ⁴⁶He told them, “This is what is written; the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. ⁴⁷And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

And so, again, Dave, Bible study is how the first – this is still Easter; this is still Easter.

Dave Bast:

Right; Easter evening; yes. And they are gathered in the upper room and the two from Emmaus burst in with their incredible news. So, let’s get this straight – they know the tomb is empty; some of them have examined it themselves; the grave clothes of Jesus are still there. Who would steal a body and strip it of its grave clothes? Some have said, “We have seen him,” but they still did not believe after all this. Then Jesus himself suddenly is with them; in some mind-blowing, miraculous way, he appears in this room despite the fact that the doors are locked, and they still do not believe! They are terrified; they think he is a ghost; and it is so funny, he has to sit down and eat a piece of flounder or whatever... As frightened and as upset as they were, apparently someone was still cooking supper and they were eating together. So, Jesus says: Hey, can I have some? Just look; I am real.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, the more liberal critics of more recent times who have said that the disciples believed the resurrection because they did not know enough science; they were bumpkins; they were naïve. People back in the First Century, they would believe anything. That is not true. They did not believe in the resurrection easily. The guy had to eat a piece of fish to convince them that he was a physically alive, resurrected presence. I just find that the realism of all of that can be quite delightful.

DAVE BAST

Well, let’s talk in just a moment, though, about what it really can mean for us in our lives today.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are wrapping up, Dave, a look at the Gospel of Luke, and we just read, basically, the final chunk of Luke's entire Gospel. We are in Luke 24 and we read verses 36 to 49, where Jesus now appears to all of the disciples at once, proves to them that he is alive by showing them his scars, proves to them that he is alive (because they still do not buy it) by eating a piece of fish, and it does not just fall through the air onto the floor, it goes into a stomach, apparently, right? But then, remarkably, he teaches them the Bible, because you have to understand Moses on forward to really connect all the dots.

Sometimes when I have pointed out in sermons the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are a little understated – we like to do our Easter services with all of the lilies and all of the white vestments...

DAVE BAST

Trumpets! You have got to have trumpets!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, you have to have all of the brass, the organ and the orchestra, everybody blaring – it is high, bright, light, and clear – and sometimes when I have said, “You know, the Gospels are not that way. The resurrection accounts in the Gospels are quiet and people are stunned, and there is Bible study. So, sometimes people say, “Well, what? We cannot be excited on Easter?” And my answer is, “Well, of course, you can. Of course, we must; but let's not miss the depths, too. This required Bible study for the very first disciples to understand it.” So, there is great depth and riches here beyond surface celebrations.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think the recurring theme – at least, we have tried to point this out – is how over and over, starting with the two on the way to Emmaus, and then with the Apostles, the disciples, soon to be Apostles, as they are gathered in the upper room; Jesus opens their minds; Jesus presents to them the scriptures; Jesus shows them from beginning to end how it is all about him; and interestingly, the one guy who really got this, I think, was the Apostle who was not there; namely Paul.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, right.

DAVE BAST

Because he had not yet been a believer or a follower of Jesus. He had not yet seen the risen Lord Jesus. That would all happen in due course quite a bit later, but he says at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15:

³I delivered to you what I also received. (He is talking about the basic Gospel message.) How Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, ⁴and he was buried, and he rose again on the third day according to the scriptures.

So, that point, obviously, got driven home here in the upper room; because when Paul finally came and said: You know what? I have seen him, too. I am a believer now. Peter and the others must have said to him, well it is all according to the scriptures, because this is how Jesus showed us; and Paul picked up on that. The same thing goes on today. We see it in the scriptures and we come to believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. In fact, one of the great creeds of the Christian Church is the Nicene Creed, and as you know, when we say in that: On the third day he rose again *according to the scriptures*. That is right in the Nicene Creed.

That is important because if the resurrection – wonderful though it is – if it were just a random event; if it were just a quirk of history that one guy rose again; it might not have as much meaning. The true depth of what Easter means is that it is part of a huge, cosmic story, which imbues the entire universe and all of our lives and every creature under heaven with purpose because it was not just a random, quirky thing that happened to one guy once; no, no, no. This is part of a plan; a plan of a very loving God who created all things, and in Christ has now redeemed all things. It fits in with a big, big, big story.

DAVE BAST

And it is not a contingency plan. It is not: Oh, what do I do now? They crucified my Son; oh, let me think. And three days later he comes up with this idea: Oh, I will raise him from the dead. Hey, how about that? This is in the divine wisdom and power and love of God; a fantastic thing he revealed ahead of time for those who could – and you know, one of the things it means for me is if you read the Bible and miss Jesus, you have missed the point. If somehow – we can sometimes turn the Bible into a list of rules or a set of principles, or even a source – a quarry – for digging out theological nuggets – but it is really all about Jesus; and what is meant if we are really reading the Bible and understanding it as God intends it to be understood – it is meant to lead us to Jesus, to make us come to him, love him, and start to follow him; live like him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think, too, in terms of seeing how that all fits and paying attention to the witness of scripture, maybe in closing, one last thing to note: One of the reasons I love the realism of the resurrection accounts of all four Gospels – in their understated way – is that it fits my life and your life. My life is not a never-ending Easter celebration. My life is not brass blowing and organs playing at full throttle every day. My life, a lot of time is like those two people on the road to Emmaus; we are downcast; life is hard; there are a lot of people in despair.

DAVE BAST

We find it hard to believe; hard to believe the good news.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, Jesus comes to us. The great preacher, Frederick Buechner, in a very famous sermon on Luke 24, pointed that out. He said: Sometimes we are like these two people. We go somewhere to get away from it all. We go to the movies. We go out to eat by ourselves. We go to the bar. Because we are sad and we are despairing or we are uncertain or we are full of doubt – and guess what? That is where we meet Jesus. He comes to us on the road. He comes to us in the place where we went to get away from it all. This is an Easter that fits the real world. We live in a world where a resurrection happened, as I think your pastor always says, and because that is true we can expect to find Jesus. The disciples in Luke 24 – when they went to the place of Jesus' death – did not find him. Him they did not see.

DAVE BAST

The angel – what did he say: he is not here. He is risen. Do not look for him here because his grave is empty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, we will not find Jesus at the place of his death, but at the places of our death, our despair, that is where we find Jesus today because we serve a risen savior.

DAVE BAST

Amen to that. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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