

On the Road

SCOTT HOEZEE

When your fondest hope gets dashed; when a dream has apparently died; when the bottom drops out on your life, where do you go? And once you get to wherever it is you are going, what do you find when you get there? All of us know what it is like to land in a dark place of desperation and despair; but is it possible that we will find Jesus even there? Today on *Groundwork*, let's go to a beloved story from Luke 24, and see what hope it gives to us even in moments of hopelessness.

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

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; happy Easter, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And also with you.

DAVE BAST

Yes; Christ is risen; He is risen indeed; and this is a program celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the capstone to our salvation and the true ending of the story of the cross. It did not end with his burial on Friday afternoon, thank God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He rose again, and that is the great climax of all scripture in a lot of ways, that he rose again; and interestingly, all four of the Gospels, with the exception of Mark, which ends really quite quickly, but Matthew, Luke and John all have a few post-resurrection stories, but they are never quite what you think. We are used to them – we have become very used to them, but, including the story we are looking at today from Luke 24, if you really look at it, it is not quite what you might expect; and so it will be kind of fun to look at what is going on there in Luke.

DAVE BAST

Well, one of the things that is intriguing about these post-Easter stories, or resurrection stories, is the fact that there seems to have been something about Jesus that made him difficult to recognize. Somehow or other, whether it was because people were not expecting it, or his appearance was different, but there were lots and lots of instances where they did not know it was him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I heard a German theologian say one time that you could look at all of the post-Easter stories in all four of the Gospels and never once do you find somebody see Jesus and say: Ah, there you are again. So good to see you. It just doesn't go that way.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is good.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it does not go that way here either; so what we have here... You know, everybody, Dave, everybody loves surprise ending stories and stories of recognition. In fact, if you go the YouTube, where you can watch millions of videos on the Internet, sometimes a video goes *viral*, they say, which means that just everybody in the world starts clicking on this, and a lot of the ones that go viral are exactly these surprise stories of recognition: The father who has been a soldier in Afghanistan comes home but his little girl doesn't know it, and so he goes to her school in disguise and talks to some of the students – talks even to her and she doesn't know it is her daddy, and she even tells him: Oh, I miss my daddy; he is a soldier in Afghanistan – and then the moment we are all waiting for, he takes off the disguise, it is her daddy and everybody cries. We love stories like that.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think, too, we especially love them when we are in on the secret. If we know who the person really is. I think of a famous biblical example in the Old Testament, the story of Joseph and his brothers, where Joseph has become the prime minister of Egypt, and his brothers had betrayed him, sold him as a slave; they think he is dead. Now it is years later; they are appealing to him for mercy: Please, will you sell us some food – and he is there, and we know, we know who he really is, and they don't, and then that moment when he reveals himself to them. That is a great story!

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a great story; and every once in a while, though, we do find ourselves not in the know; and so, there is that very famous thing that happened just a couple of years ago when on the TV show Britain's Got Talent, this woman named Susan Boyle was frumpy and kind of not very smoothly spoken, and she was coming out to sing and everybody who watched the show, myself included, thought: Oh, no. This woman is so awkward. This is going to be a disaster. She is going to be a terrible singer. Everybody in the audience was rolling their eyes as she was being interviewed before her song. All the judges were saying: Oh, no. And then she opened her mouth and she sang like an angel, and jaws dropped all over the world. That video went viral, too. So, there was one surprise recognition of a great singer, and we did not know that one. Then you get in on the joy on the ground level.

DAVE BAST

Well, in a sense, we've got both things happening in the story of Easter afternoon. Kind of interesting, we know about the empty tomb; I trust we have heard that again and again. What we would like to focus on in this program is something that happened later in the day to two of Jesus' followers as they are walking to a little village called Emmaus, and this is from Luke 24.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, let's listen to just the setup of the story beginning at verse 13 of Luke 24; and again, it is Easter – it is the first Easter, and it is evening:

¹³Now that same day, two of them 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?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them named Cleopas asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and you do not know what things 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 now the third day since all that took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. ²³They went to the tomb early this morning, but did not find his body. They came and told us that 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."

So they heard the Gospel, and who could believe it? They did not believe it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there are two disciples here. One of them is Cleopas – he is named – the other one is not named, and of course there has been a lot of speculation, well, who was the other one? I frankly like the suggestion that it was Cleopas's wife.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It could have been a married couple, yes.

DAVE BAST

Because there is a woman called Mary who is described as being near the cross, and the wife of Clopas, which is a form of Cleopas, so perhaps a husband and wife, and they are on their way back home, out of Jerusalem. They lived about six miles or so – seven miles – to the west of Jerusalem in a little village called Emmaus; and as you point out, what are they doing going home because they have heard a report that Jesus is alive. You would think they would stay and check it out with the other disciples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But they just could not believe it, right? And you know, you cannot blame them. Everybody had been devastated. They had watched him die; they had watched him breathe his last; they had watched him get stuck into a tomb. I mean, once death comes, that is it – end of story – game over – pass the potato salad at the funeral lunch and go home. Who could believe it? And they did not believe it. They summed up their grief with a very poignant phrase: We *had* hoped – and *had* hoped is one of the saddest phrases you can think of. It is not just we hoped. We *had* hoped...

DAVE BAST

Had hoped – because it means we are no longer hoping – we have given up hope.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is dead; it is gone; and that is a sad thing to say about anything in your life, much less about the one you thought was the very savior. They had hoped, but of course the irony is, they said that to the very Jesus in whom they had placed their hope, and he is alive again. They do not see it yet, but he has some things to say to them; and we can look at that after the break.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with Scott Hoezee, I am Dave Bast; and Scott, before we move on with this story of Easter afternoon on the road to Emmaus and what happened to these two disciples, I want to pause and just kind of stress something that I think is really important, because these followers of Jesus were not expecting to see him again; none of his disciples were; in fact, they were skeptics, and they say to Jesus, the risen Christ, ironically, they say that they have heard a report from some of the women that his grave was empty, but of course: Ah, who can believe women, you know. They are probably hallucinating. And one of the things that you hear quite often I think from sophisticated critics is that the resurrection story of Jesus is just something – it is sort of wishful thinking that his disciples projected. They invented the story. It is really a mythical account of the fact they felt he was still alive. They had hope and they did not want to let go of him so they come up with this story that cannot be believed by modern people; and the opposite is true. They had no hope. "We *had* hoped," as you point out and stress so rightly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These people may have lived two thousand years ago, but they knew that when you are dead you are dead, and dead people do not come back. I mean, they did not have the sophisticated medical technology we have, and all the rest; but who cares? Dead is dead, and they knew dead when they saw it, and Jesus was dead, and

they do not come back. So, right; the Gospel had been proclaimed to Cleopas and this other disciple. They had heard the Gospel. They were some of the first people in the whole wide world to hear the Gospel...

DAVE BAST

The Gospel meaning the news that Jesus has risen from the dead, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus arose – he is alive; and they did not believe it; but again, we cannot blame them. I mean, if I saw a loved one die, if I saw them in the casket, if I saw the casket go into the ground, if we held a funeral lunch, if a week later somebody said: Hey, I saw your loved one having coffee at Starbuck's, I would think: You are a very mean person. That does not happen. Why would you say that to me in my grief? So, we can understand, this was not expected; this was not a made-up story; it was the last thing in the world they actually expected.

DAVE BAST

And it is a powerful testimony to the reality of the resurrection. I think of a quote that I ran across years ago from a New Testament scholar named Charles Moule: If the existence of the Christians, he said in effect, tears a great hole in history the size and shape of the resurrection, with what does the secular historian propose to stop it up – to fill that hole? In other words, what made the Church? What caused it to happen? And the answer in the New Testament is, they were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Absolutely convinced.

DAVE BAST

If you don't believe that, how do you explain the existence of the Church? Where did that come from? Because these were not people who were expecting this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right. A lot of them ended up dying for that truth, and you do not die for a lie. Nobody defends a lie right up to the point of death. So, they were not expecting it. These two were not expecting it. They had to get out of Jerusalem and they had to get out of town. There were too many memories in Jerusalem. Those last three days had been horrible, so hit the road – get out of town; and Jesus comes up, as we saw in the first segment; Jesus himself comes, but they do not know it is him. What is interesting is, Jesus does not at some point jump out in front of them and say: Ta-daaaa. It is me. It's Jesus. Not right away. Instead, let's listen to a couple more verses from Luke 24, starting at 25 when they had just said: Well, some said he is alive, but nobody has seen him, and then Jesus said to them: ²⁵“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 the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

So, he is going to be recognized by these two later – we will see that – but first Jesus, on Easter Sunday evening, when you think all the trumpets would be blaring and the white banners flapping and the lilies all over the... no, what does Jesus do? Bible study.

DAVE BAST

Yes; let's go back to the scriptures – let's go back to the Old Testament – what we call the Old Testament; and I think it is important to note the nature of their disappointment, because when they say, “We had hoped,” they go on to say, “We had hoped that he was the one,” that he was the Messiah; that he was the promised champion of Israel, and they had these preconceived notions of what that would mean – of what that Messiah would be and do, and it was all triumph and it was all glory and that was widespread, even among Jesus' disciples. So, Jesus has to say: No, wait a minute. Course correction. Let's back up and look at what the Old Testament actually says. Sure, there is a lot about glory and king and all that, but there is also this whole strand of suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we would think that on the day that Jesus actually rose from the dead that it would just be all celebration – you just cut right to the chase – pull out all the stops on the organ – bring in the brass; but Jesus wants them to understand first why he had to suffer and die and rise again; so he takes them back to Sunday school. He walks them through the Bible to show them: No, suffering and death and paying the penalty and reversing death, that has been part of the Messiah package all along; and so he shows them that from Isaiah and Jeremiah and Moses, and he just basically says: Your definition of Messiah has been wrong, and here, I can prove it to you from the Bible – from scripture.

DAVE BAST

Well, the interesting thing, too, is that he assumes that it is all about himself – Jesus does...

SCOTT HOEZEE

All of it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we did a series of programs recently on *Groundwork* about reading the whole Bible centered on Christ – focused on Christ, and that comes straight from Jesus himself. He is telling them: Look, this is not only about the Messiah, this is about me, when they are talking about his suffering; and the other interesting this is, as you were talking it just sort of popped into my head. It is the same for us. Suffering first and then glory. First the cross and then the crown, because the New Testament makes clear that we follow the same way, and we like to focus on the glory part. We don't so much like the suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, in one of his sermons, the preacher, Fred Craddock, says that the disciples turned apostles performed was Craddock calls a "majestic flip-flop" because he said: All along, the Jews who were waiting for the Messiah, they summed up their anticipation by saying: When the Messiah comes, no suffering... so, you see that blind man over there – see that crippled woman – do you see that broken family? Well, when the Messiah comes, you will not see those things. When the Messiah comes, no suffering; but then the disciples met Jesus, the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who suffered and died on a cross; and Craddock said: They did a majestic flip-flop. They reversed course and they began to proclaim: Wherever suffering is, that is where you find the Messiah.

DAVE BAST

That is right; that is where he is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is what Jesus begins to teach these two on the road to Emmaus, and it is Easter Sunday evening bible study. All of scripture said the Messiah had to engage everything that is broken and jagged in this world so as to heal it and reverse it.

DAVE BAST

And it is not going to happen instantly; I mean, he gives us signs of the coming glory. There are pointers; there are indicators; but for some reason, and we can only presume it is the deep counsels of God, God chooses to have us engage in the same way, with a broken and hurting and bleeding world, and to do our bit to bring signs of the kingdom and signs of the coming glory, and we all wonder: Why not glory instantly? Why not immediately? But that is the way it is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why I love how this story ends, that Jesus is finally recognized by them. They invite him for dinner, he comes to dinner, and he breaks the bread in a certain way that showed them, this is Jesus. They had seen him break the bread... but he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Now, he

immediately disappears, which is the interesting part of the story, but it was in that brokenness – this was communion, right? This was the Lord's body. They see him in the breaking of the bread, and that also is rich with symbolism for who the Messiah is and what he came to do.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's pursue that a little bit further in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

Scott, just before the break you were referring to the climax of this story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and meeting the risen Christ, not recognizing him at first and expressing their brokenness, their feelings of dashed hopes; and that story leads up to this: They reach their home, Jesus appears as if he is going to go on further and they prevail upon him to: Come and stay with us, please. The day is almost over. Come and have a meal with us; so, he went in, and then Luke says:

³⁰When he was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them; (which is a pregnant verse right there, isn't it?)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is the Lord's Supper.

DAVE BAST

And then Luke concludes this story with them hurrying back to Jerusalem, finding the other disciples, probably in the upper room, telling them what happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread; that is the end of the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I like how that ends, too, because we were told at the beginning that Emmaus was about seven miles from Jerusalem. You know, if you are at a regular walking clip that is probably going to be a couple – three hours at least, you know; but I think they covered the distance back in breakneck speed because now they had the joyful news of the Gospel; and so I picture them as sprinting back to Jerusalem...

DAVE BAST

Their feet had wings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, covering the ground in no time at all, which is the wonderful conclusion to this story. I have always liked this story, and there was a wonderful sermon that the writer and preacher, Frederick Buechner, wrote on this long ago. What is wonderful about that image of their sprinting back as opposed to their shuffling along is that, as Frederick Buechner said, they just had to get out of Jerusalem. The last few days had been so bad, and Jesus was dead and their hopes were dashed – we had hoped – and so they just had to get away from it all. They do not want to talk to any of the other disciples. It is all over – game over; and so they leave. You know, I think we all sometimes get to that point in our lives where the bottom has dropped out, the walls are closing in and we just have to get away from it all, so we think maybe we can take a trip or let's go to the movies or maybe a little retail therapy: I will go to the mall and shop...

DAVE BAST

Shopping always makes me feel better.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or some people might say: I am going to go to the bar. Maybe a couple of beers will make me feel better; but of course, that does not work. It is sort of like what C. S. Lewis said after his wife died; he thought maybe his grief would be less if he only went to places where he and his wife had never been together so it would not remind him of her, but he said that did not work. Grief is like the sky, it is over everything. You really cannot get away from your troubles, but we try to – these two tried to.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but I think of this scene in their home. Actually, Rembrandt has a famous painting of this, where it is all darkness around, but the light is focused on Jesus and his hands holding the bread, and just the powerful... You mentioned even as I was kind of rehearsing this story, that one verse is unmistakable because it has those four actions that we talked about...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes: take – thank – break – give.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and those are the acts that still Christian ministers perform at the Lord's Supper; so Jesus does it here at the table, and in Luke's marvelous phrase: Suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Somebody has suggested it was the print of the nails in his hands; that is fanciful – we are not told that – but something about that action, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he was familiar... they recognized... and then he was gone...

DAVE BAST

Which is also startling; supernaturally, did he whoof – disappear? Or did he get up and slip out while they were dumbfounded?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it was enough, right? The glimpse was enough; and it is often for us, too. That is the other thing that I liked about Frederick Buechner's take on this. He said: Sometimes you go to Emmaus – you go to the mall, you go to the movies, you go to get away from it all – and every once in a while in the place to which you go to get away from it all, you bump into Jesus. You know, we have had that in our lives, and it is usually just a glimpse; but you see enough of Jesus to know: I am not alone. So, you are down, and a friend who has no idea that you are down on a certain day...

DAVE BAST

Says just the right thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, sends you an email out of the blue, and you see the email, and through it you see Jesus because it was just the word you needed.

DAVE BAST

I know, Scott, that this has happened to you as a preacher; it has happened to me, too, and it is always kind of a wonderful thing when someone will come up afterwards and say: You know, that was just the word I needed to hear that day. Somehow God used that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And sometimes it was something you did not actually say, but by the Spirit they heard it...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that was what they needed.

DAVE BAST

I think where we will find him most often is in the word, just as he opened it to those disciples, and he does it later to the twelve in the upper room, and shows himself to them in them. I just remember, one of the sermons I still remember I heard when I was a senior in college and I was absolutely down, rock bottom, feeling kind of worthless like I had ruined my life and nothing... and I happened to go to church on a Sunday evening and the minister's title was: God gives second chances; and there it happened...

SCOTT HOEZEE

There it was...

DAVE BAST

You catch a glimpse of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There is Jesus – just a glimpse, but it is enough.

DAVE BAST

Or at the table, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the breaking of the bread.

DAVE BAST

When the bread is broken he is there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we see it, and that is why, really, you know, for all the things the Church does and all that we have accomplished, at the end of the day, we have a book, we have a table, and it is enough because those are the places where we actually do see Jesus; and again, we do not get to grab ahold of him – you know, everybody wanted to grab ahold of Jesus in these post-resurrection stories, but he had other things he had to do; but seeing him even for a moment turns out that that is more than enough; and that is the Gospel hope with which Luke concludes; and really with which all of the Gospels conclude.

DAVE BAST

Amen!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keeps our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing. Suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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