

Hearts on Fire **Luke 24:13-35 (ESV)**

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He is risen! {He is risen, indeed!} We're going to be looking at a passage from Luke's gospel. It's the passage in which there are two men that walk with a stranger, and the stranger talks with them. And of course, they discover at the very end that the stranger is Jesus. But Jesus opens up the Scripture for them and explains how all the Bible really is about Him. And so we're going to read that today, and then we're going to do something a little different, at least for me. I've done this a couple times. We're going to have a first-person narrative. And so, I'm going to no longer be Pastor Ritch. I'm going to become Cleopas for a moment, here with you in the time we have together.

As we read, won't you pray that God would set your heart on fire? That's the effect of this walk with Jesus on the life of Cleopas and his friend. And it's the intended effect, I believe, upon every disciple—that our hearts would be on fire with joy, with love, with devotion, with passion for Jesus.

13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. 18 Then 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?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. 22 Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 23 and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

28 So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 29 but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. 32

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?" 33 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

May God encourage us through His Word, today!

Hello! My name is Cleopas. Thank you for inviting me to your wonderful church. Your faithful servant Jan gave me this name tag so you will remember my name. And I see that many of you are wearing name tags, too. You know, that really warms my heart, especially as a guest, because it makes me feel really welcome. When you wear your name tag, it doesn't seem like such a strange place to me. So, thank you for wearing name tags and helping me to feel at home here in this new place.

As a follower of Jesus through His earthly ministry, I am here to tell you about one encounter I had with Jesus on the first Easter morning. It's an encounter that keeps my heart burning with love for Him to this very day. I take you back to Sunday, April 5, 33 AD. My good friend Thaddaeus and I are overwhelmed at this moment. We're just overwhelmed with sorrow over the events of this past weekend. We're walking and talking on this road between Jerusalem and a little town called Emmaus. Our conversation is very animated. It's very emotional. We're trying to make sense of the chaos, the confusion that this weekend had brought us.

You see, we had been disciples of Jesus for a long time. When we first met Him, we were undone by Him. He spoke to us and made us realize the great depth of our need and that we needed to repent of our sin. And then as He taught, and as we watched Him work, we became 100% convinced that this is the Savior. This is the Promised One. This is the Messiah! In Him we saw the very glory of God the Father, so full of grace and truth. We absolutely knew that the Father's promises all throughout His Holy Word were fulfilled in this one, in this Messiah. He fulfilled the covenant that God had made with our father Abraham, and then with the greatest king of all, King David. We were thrilled that God had now sent His King to rule and to reign over us. We followed Him with such enthusiasm, such eagerness, celebrating every miracle, rejoicing in each healing, listening to Him teach each sermon as He taught with such insight, such authority!

We knew He was soon to lead us as a nation into God's righteousness and to peace and to prosperity. So on Sunday, March 29, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young colt of a donkey, our hopes swelled to near bursting. We thought, "This is it! This is the moment!" Jesus rides from the Mount of Olives down into this deep valley, the Kidron Valley, and then up into the steep slope of the city of Jerusalem. All the while, the crowds, which had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, our Jewish brothers and sisters arriving from all places to come here to celebrate what God had done way back in the time of Moses. The crowds, when they saw Jesus on this donkey, they just began rejoicing and

shouting and singing. They began laying down palm branches and their cloaks. And they began singing, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

We all knew that we were singing a messianic psalm, Psalm 118. The people knew that this is the One who had claimed to be the Messiah. He had done the works in accordance with the Messiah. And now they’re exulting in Him as the Messiah. We could only imagine that when He would get up into Jerusalem, that He then at that moment would take the throne of His father, David. They even shouted, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father, David!” They all expected Jesus, every one of us, to announce Himself right then as King with power, to take His seat upon the throne of David to rule over us. Oh, how we were so eager for Jesus to be our King! The crowds were eager for God’s promised kingdom to begin on earth. Thaddaeus and I danced and sang right along with them as we walked alongside Jesus on that donkey, up the hill toward Jerusalem.

But let me jump to Friday, now. Friday, April 3, 33 AD. Thaddaeus and I couldn’t have been more confused. We couldn’t have been more disheartened. We had heard and participated in the shouts of the crowds who shouted “Hosanna!” just five days earlier. But now, those very crowds were shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” With tears streaming down our faces, we saw it all. The mockings, the beatings, the crown of thorns, the brutal cat of nine tails lashing, the wooden beam, our strong, muscled Lord stumbling on the path toward Golgotha, the nails, the thud as the cross landed hard in its hole, the groanings, the cry of anguish, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me!” The eerie darkness that covered the noon day sun. “It is finished!” The breathing of His last breath. The malicious spear that pierced His side and blood and water came gushing out of the wound. And then they took His body down. Joseph asked for it and he was given permission. And then they placed that torn, battered body in Joseph’s new tomb.

I cannot describe the darkness of despair that descended upon our hearts. All hope had vanished from our soul. Our Deliverer was dead. We didn’t sleep Friday night, nor Saturday. We planned to get an early start on Sunday morning on the seven mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. We felt we had to get out of this terrible, depressing city where our Lord had died.

So on Sunday, just as we were starting on our journey, we ran into Joanna and Mary Magdalene. They both were nearly hysterical. They said that they went to the tomb of Jesus early that very day and they said it was empty. And then they talked to us about seeing these shining ones like angels. And the angels had told them that Jesus wasn’t there because He had risen from the dead. Well, we didn’t believe them. Would you? They just seemed like really emotional people right at this moment, giving a testimony of something that happened earlier in the day. We figured that their emotions had just completely taken over and they had manufactured some story to ease their pain. So we left Mary and Joanna and began walking toward Emmaus. And we were talking about Jesus. Our emotions were excited by everything that had happened. We were having this really, really intense spiritual conversation with each other.

Now, I want you to know something about us men. It's probably not different from the men in this age, in this culture. We who were disciples of Jesus, we were kind of tough men. We were carpenters, and fishermen, and farmers. We were people for the most part who worked with our hands. There were some tax collectors and others in our midst, but as men, we were used to talking about things like hunting and our jobs and politics and Rome, and even our families. But talking about God was really strange until we met Jesus, and then everything changed. He made us aware that we needed to talk about the most central thing in our lives together. And we learned that. And that's why we were on this road talking about God. We were talking about the Scriptures. We were talking about our dashed hopes. It wasn't always that way, I tell you. But Jesus changed everything for us.

So I want to ask you men in this culture, especially you men: Do you find it easy to talk about spiritual things, conversations about God that are really intense and really deep, with other men in your life? You know, Jesus will change that if you follow Him. If you're awkward, I understand that. That's where I was. But one of God's gifts to help His disciples grow in our faith is the spiritual conversations we have with other disciples of Jesus. We need these conversations to grow. And so, I want to give you a challenge today. Would you be willing to make it your goal to have one really meaningful spiritual conversation about God this week with a friend?

The spiritual conversation between me and Thaddeus set the stage for Jesus to meet us. You see, when we have spiritual conversations with other believers, Jesus delights to draw near and do amazing things. And out of nowhere, as we were walking along this road, this stranger joined us that Sunday morning. This stranger suddenly appeared and said, "Hey guys! What are you talking about?" Well, He said it in a way that it didn't seem nosy to us. He said it with such interest, such intrigue. We didn't even think to tell Him, "Get lost! This is a private conversation." We stood there silent for a moment when he asked us. The whole city of Jerusalem had been abuzz with the crucifixion of Jesus and this guy seemed to have no idea about everything that had happened in the capital city.

And so, we asked him: Are you the only visitor in all of Jerusalem who doesn't know the news? And he said, "What news?" So we told him. Well, the news about Jesus. The news that Jesus, a man who is a prophet, who did miracles and who taught with such authority, and was so welcomed by the people, so well-received. This Jesus, our chief priests, our own leaders delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and they crucified Him. That's what we're talking about. And we had hoped this entire time that this was the one who, as the Messiah, would redeem us as a whole people. We expected this Jesus to be sitting on the throne of David right now. Instead, the Romans are still there and we're still oppressed. Pilate is still ruling and Jesus is dead. We told him our hearts are just aching and in despair over these things.

Do you know what it's like to share about the death of the person that you love more than anyone else in all the world? I look out here, and I know some of you do. Some of you have experienced that kind of pain, of losing the most important person and then having

to talk about it. That's the state of our heart. That's where we were that morning. So we continued to tell the stranger: Besides all this, it's the third day that this has happened. And another thing we're talking about is how we ran across these two friends of ours, and they're friends of Jesus. They told us an amazing thing! They told us that they went to visit the tomb this very morning, and it's empty. These angels had told them that He'd risen from the dead, that he was alive! So that's what we're talking about.

Jesus' Heart-Healing Admonishment

Well, the stranger looked at us and this is what He said to us. "O foolish ones." We've never met this guy, and right away, He's saying... We're just pouring out our hearts. He still sees our faces stained with tears, and He says, "O foolish ones." Well, that kind of stunned us. And then He said, "You're slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." We were talking about the Bible. How could he say that? We needed consolation, and this stranger offers correction. We needed restoration and the stranger offered us a rebuke.

Let me ask you: Do you think this stranger was wise and gracious in His words to us? I have to tell you that at first, I didn't. I really struggled when the stranger told us these things. But I know now that these words, as much as they stung at the time, were exactly what we needed. This stranger was acting as the Great Physician of our soul, pulling a giant thorn out of our hearts so that we could be whole again. The stranger was basically telling us, "Hey guys! Take your eyes off of what you see and hear and feel and think. Simply open your Bibles and read the promises of God through the prophets!" He was saying, "Trust in God's Word. Don't trust in your own perceptions, your own understandings, your own feelings." You see, our own understanding, our own perceptions were leading us into despair and we needed to be lifted out of that pit. Too often we believe what we feel to be true rather than believe what God says is true. That's where we were. Much of the dark despair that we experience in our broken world flows from a forgetfulness of God's Word! It flows from us trusting in and leaning upon our own understanding of life.

As long as Thaddaeus and I viewed our problem without the light of God's Word, we would continue to spiral down, down, down into a dark abyss of hopelessness. This stranger, through rebuke, He pointed us to the light of Scripture. He urged us to think over God's revelation instead of dwelling upon our own feelings. You see, when God comforts us, He does so often through a rebuke of our foolish unbelief. That's often the way God works. It's certainly true what He did for us. True comfort can come only after the long thorns of unbelief that have pierced our soul, the thorns of self-pity, are twisted out of our feet and twisted out of our hands. Yes, it's painful when they get twisted out, but this stranger's purpose was not to bruise us, but to bring healing. He was so gentle, but He was not weak and He was not timid in confronting our unbelieving hearts.

And then the stranger said this. "Wasn't it necessary that Christ, the Messiah, should suffer these things and enter into glory?" Well, Thaddaeus and I looked at each other just kind of dumbstruck when He said that. We had not even considered that these sufferings

we had just seen Jesus experience were absolutely necessary. And yet, as the stranger said it, we wondered almost out loud, why we had not even considered that. We remembered right away that Jesus Himself, even that very week, just that past Wednesday, plainly told us, “As you know, Passover begins in two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”(Matthew 26:2 NLT-SE) So this was not something unexpected by Jesus. And the stranger gave us the very greatest gift then. He talked us through all the Scriptures beginning with Moses at the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis, all the way to the end, all the way to the prophet Malachi. And He explained that God’s Book was all about Jesus. He wanted us to know that our faith in Jesus was not disproven by the sufferings of our Lord, but rather, our faith should be strengthened by the sufferings of our Lord. This was actually a fulfillment of God’s plan. It was not a detour away from God’s plan, but it was at the very center of God’s sovereign design.

Well, by now, you’ve guessed that this stranger is Jesus. Now, we didn’t know it at the time. Please keep that in mind as I tell this story. But I love that Jesus taught us that every part of God’s Book is really about Himself. From cover to cover, the Book sets in front of us, Jesus. He’s the sun around which all the planets of every verse revolve. He is the grand theme which everything else in the Bible describes. He is the diamond that sparkles in the setting, in the backdrop of all that history. From cover to cover, God’s Word, that Book you have in your hands, points you to Jesus. Please know that. This Book that God has given us is not primarily a book about morals or ethics or philosophy. It’s not even primarily a book about theology. It’s a book intended to point us to a person, God’s Son. The Bible is a book about Jesus, who is our Messiah, our King, our High Priest. He’s the Lamb of God, the Redeemer, God the Son, our Lord, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Holy One, God of very God, yet fully man. Think of that for a moment! If we lose sight of Jesus in our reading of God’s Book, we will flounder and flail like a rudderless ship on a stormy sea.

And that’s the reason why I want to challenge you. Some of you perhaps have opened up God’s Book and you say, “I don’t understand anything in it.” And the first thing I would ask you is, do you know Jesus? Because if you don’t know Jesus personally as your Savior, as your Lord, you’ll never understand anything in that Book. Jesus is the key that unlocks the whole. He’s the window through which we can see what God has revealed to us. So Jesus opened up the Bible to us and showed us how the Messiah had to suffer. I wish we had some hours to share with you what Jesus showed us that day, but let’s just talk about a few of those things.

Jesus’ Heart-warming Instruction

The Stranger started with Genesis. He recited Genesis 3:15 on the road. It’s the place where God curses Satan who inhabited the serpent that tempted the first couple away from worship and into self-worship, into idolatry, into sin. And God promised in Genesis 3, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The stranger explained that God promised from the beginning to send an offspring of Eve who would

endure a bitter bite from the devil's rage. You see, the crucifixion was an instrument of Satan to attack the very glory of God in Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus was not a tragic loss of our biblical hope, but it was a triumphant fulfillment of the hope. And we had been looking at it all wrong. God promised long ago to end Satan's control over mankind through the devil's "bruise" on the offspring's heel. Indeed, Satan bruised Jesus' heel in the crucifixion. We observed the spiritual darkness that had overcome the world in those last three days. But in the process of bruising His heel, this stranger explained that Satan's head was crushed once for all. The very purpose that Jesus came to this world was to destroy the works of the devil and to lead us away from eternal condemnation with Him.

The stranger then retold the story of Abraham and Isaac. Do you remember that in Genesis 22? Abraham, over 3,000 years earlier, ascended up a hill with his son, Isaac. And do you know, we all knew it...It was the very same hill that Jesus ascended with His cross. We had never put those things together. And Isaac said, "Father, Daddy. Here's the wood, here's the fire, but where is the lamb that is to be sacrificed?" And Abraham said, "God will provide a lamb." God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son and He provided a ram. But the stranger explained that while God stopped Abraham, that God the Father sent God the Son. But this time, the sacrifice was made. And He sent Him up that exact same hill. God provided a Lamb. It was a Lamb so that sins could be forgiven. Again, we were looking at this all wrong. We were thinking of the crucifixion as some sort of victory against Jesus, and Jesus as being conquered. But no! This was a fulfillment of God's very salvation. The death of Jesus was the very purpose for His coming. It was something to rejoice in, and not to despair over.

The stranger then pointed us to the sacrificial system that God commanded for us as people. The Temple...we could still see it there yet in view while the stranger talked to us. It was up on the hill. It was a place of daily sacrifices to atone for sin. And yet, day by day, the priests offered these sacrifices. None of them could permanently take away sin. And the stranger explained that they were all pointing to something greater. They were used by God to tell us that there was an ultimate solution. God never ever establishes a system that is not complete. All those sacrifices were pointing to the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God. God would send the Messiah to bring salvation. Jesus' death didn't dash the hopes of a national salvation. Instead, it instituted the new covenant in His blood for the restoration of His people, Israel.

And then the stranger took us to Psalm 118. Remember that just one week earlier, this was the very psalm that the people were singing when they said, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (Psalm 118:26) And as He recited that, we said, yes. That's why we believed that He was going to establish His kingdom right now, right then. The stranger exclaimed, "Don't you see, though?! Think further into Psalm 118. Before the declaration was made, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,' that same psalm says

Psalm 118:22-23 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

The Father's plan all along was for the leaders of the nation of Israel, the builders, to reject the very cornerstone that God sent to build up the nation. But that rejection, while it was prophesied, while it had to happen, was not permanent. That stone would still become the chief cornerstone. And this is the Lord's doing. It is God's sovereign work. It's marvelous! It's mysterious! It's wonderful! Rejection by man does not frustrate the purposes of God. It never does! Rather, such rejection is the instrument by which God fulfills His purpose.

And then, just one more. It's so wonderful! This is where the stranger ended. He ended with Isaiah chapters 52 and 53. I had never understood that chapter when I read it. I had a theology of an exalted Messiah, but not of a suffering one. That's why Jesus' death brought such despair to my heart. The stranger asked us, "Of whom do you think Isaiah is speaking when he writes, 'Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.' (Isaiah 52:13 ESV)?"

Thaddaeus and I again, we both said, that is our Messiah. We believe that he's talking about Jesus! But Jesus was not exalted, He was crucified. He was made low. I guess Isaiah could not have been talking about Him, right? Well, He put His arms around us and again He said, "Why are you so slow to believe?" Listen to Isaiah speak about the suffering of God's future Servant. Right after he says, "he'll be high and lifted up," this is what Isaiah taught us.

Isaiah 52:14 As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

As the stranger was speaking and reciting the Scripture, Thaddeus and I, our minds went back immediately to the image of Jesus beaten and hanging upon the cross. And yes, I can't describe it friends. His appearance was so marred that you could hardly make out that He was human. The stranger continued.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

I have to tell you that when the stranger quoted that, we both began to cry because that's what we did. Even as our Lord was suffering, we just wanted to hide our faces from Him. We esteemed him not. Our minds went back to the image of Jesus beaten and hanging upon the cross. Our minds chased back to Jesus' mocking by the guards, His rejection by the crowds as they chose Barabbas over Him, the curses by both criminals next to Him. He was despised by the religious leaders as they taunted him. "You saved others. Save yourself."

Isaiah 53:4-5 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he

was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

In order for us to have peace, it was necessary for our healing. That word, pierced...when the stranger recited those words... Pierced! What a simple word. And yet that word had taken on emotional meaning to us. Pierced! We were there as we saw the nails pounded through bone and flesh. I'll never for the rest of my life, forget the sound a hammer makes as it stakes a man to a wooden beam. The stranger explained that God foretold that the Messiah would be smitten by God, though. We remembered Jesus saying that no one would take His life from Him, but rather, He would voluntarily lay it down as an offering for sin.

So the stranger was helping us to see that Jesus' suffering didn't disprove His claims to be the Messiah, as we thought. Rather, His suffering proved that He really is the Messiah. He really is the fulfillment of all that God had purposed and promised. He is the Savior who bears our punishment in His own body, who bears our sins upon His very own person so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be granted life.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Thaddaeus and I again hung our heads in shame. On this very road, we were the sheep going astray. We were just wanting to get out of town. We were wanting to find a place of safety. We felt that we had to find our own way in life now. Yet the stranger reminded us that our God placed our sins upon Him so that we would not live lives of self-will and self-direction.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Silent! We reflected that He was silent at His trials during all the indignities and miseries that Friday brought down upon Him. He didn't open His mouth to defend Himself nor to rebuke His oppressors. How could I have missed this truth? I wondered as the stranger recited Isaiah 53. The Word of God struck our stony hearts like a hammer, breaking it open. Faith began to be reborn. I do not know how I missed that the Messiah must suffer first and then receive glory, but I did. This shows us that we need more than our minds to understand God's Word. We need God's grace to spiritually open our hearts to see the wonders God has for those who love Him. And then the Messiah quoted

Isaiah 53:8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

Suffering was necessary for Jesus to be our Messiah.

Jesus' Heart-enriching Communion

By this time, the sun was setting. We were nearing Emmaus now. We came to the end of our seven mile walk. The stranger acted as if He were going to continue on, and not stop. And we begged the stranger, "Please stay with us." We were just having our hearts aflame with faith again. And for a long while, we were not sure we could convince Him to stay. But finally, He decided to sit down at the table and eat supper with us. And this time of communion with Him was so very strengthening, so life-giving. We know now that we were fellowshiping with the risen Lord Jesus. Friends, you might even envy me for that opportunity to be there on that Sunday right after His resurrection. But I want to tell you that what Jesus offered to us, He offers to every one of you. He says

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

You see, the truth is, the resurrected Lord delights to walk with His own disciples. He delights for us to have close-up, first-person encounters with Him. This is one of the great reasons that Easter is such a joy! Because Jesus is risen, we can walk with Him day by day in sweet communion. Let me ask you: Have you ever enjoyed fellowship with Jesus so much that when the time came for you to part ways, you just begged Him to stay longer for the conversation?

Jesus' Heart-rejoicing Revelation

The stranger then took bread and He blessed it. He broke it and He gave it to us. It was at this moment...I can't describe how or exactly what, but it was like these curtains just fell off our eyes. The scales were gone and we saw Him. Perhaps we gained a glimpse of the nail prints in His hands as He extended bread to us. I can't even understand exactly myself. But there we saw Him, and we saw Him for who He truly is. This is the risen Lord!

We were about ready to jump up and grab hold of Him and embrace Him with great joy, when, poof! He was gone! We looked around the room. What happened? And we stood just stunned and in silence for a moment. And then Thaddeus and I gasped, "The women were right! Jesus has risen from the dead!" Wow! Did you feel the same thing I was feeling this whole time? Thaddeus said, "Yeah! It was like our hearts were on fire with faith, on fire with zeal. We went from being so despairing and giving up, wanting to quit, wanting to just go hide in some corner, to having our hearts aflame with a desire to worship God.

We went right away to Jerusalem. I know it was dark. I know it was dangerous. We couldn't wait! We had to tell the other disciples. You see, when we find joy in our resurrected Lord, we will share it with the world. That's what became our life. And it's my life to this day. That's why I'm so glad to be here with y'all to give testimony of the risen Lord. So many people in this world don't know that the Messiah has come. The

Messiah died for sins and the Messiah is risen from the grave. They need to hear it! They need to hear it from people who know that it is true.

Do you know why Jesus met with us that day? He met with us to set our hearts on fire. He met with us to help us glory in His cross, to show us the power of His resurrection, to reveal the wonder of His glory. Jesus loves to open the eyes of His people and to reveal Himself in power and glory. He loves to set His people's hearts on fire.

I want to leave you with some words of application.

1. Anyone can walk with Jesus and know Him personally if we come to Him in faith as the resurrected Lord Jesus.

That's where it all begins. That's where a life with God begins. That's where hope begins. That's where a connection to the very purpose of your life begins. It's in Jesus. He is the Source of all life. And before you leave today, I would ask you, have you asked the question: Is Jesus the Messiah? Did He really die for my sins? Has He truly risen from the grave? And if the answer to that question is "yes," I would urge you not to just let that be some intellectual affirmation. But grab hold of that in your heart and say, "I will live now for my Messiah. He saved me!" That's how salvation can come to your house.

2. If we are to walk with God, we must listen to Him instruct us in God's Word and then invite Him to stay longer.

There's no substitute. It's interesting that Jesus, who was with us in person, didn't explain about his person just by being with us in person. In other words, Jesus recognized that the key to understanding Him and His Person is God's revealed Word. I've talked with some of the Christians here in this culture, in this time. And they've told me that they hardly ever open the Bible in the morning to talk with Jesus. And I always ask them, are you sure you're a disciple? It's just sort of what disciples do. We walk with Jesus and we recognize that his Word is the path through which we understand who He is, and we listen to His voice. I want to encourage you in that way.

I believe the great need of all time, throughout all of Christian history is the need for hearts to be set on fire, for churches to be set on fire with zeal, faith, hope and love.

3. If we are to have our hearts set on fire, God must work a miracle.

We can't set our hearts on fire for ourselves. God must meet us and He must do a miracle. So I would urge you, won't you this week pray for that miracle? If your hearts have been cold, if your hearts have not been stirred for a long time, I tell you that's not a healthy heart. It's not the natural state of a person who knows God. Won't you pray that God would set your heart on fire? And then watch God do a miracle.