

Luke 24:13-35 (1984 NIV)
Jesus Walks With Us

Introduction

Story is told of a man named Ivan. After a long evening drinking in the pub, Ivan took a shortcut to his house that took him through a dark cemetery. He accidentally fell into a freshly dug grave.

Ivan tried to climb out, but discovered that the hole was too deep. So he decided to wait until the morning when someone would come to help him out. He sat in one corner, covered himself with his coat, and went to sleep.

Sometime later he was awakened by the sound of another guy who fell into the grave. The second guy didn't see Ivan in the corner. Ivan watched as the man tried again and again to climb out of the grave.

Finally, Ivan said with amusement and still in his drunken stupor, "Heh ... heh ... heh ... Stop ... your trying. You ... will never get out."

And you know what happened? The other guy made a mighty leap and jumped right out of the grave, almost scared to death!

Today is Easter Sunday and we are here to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ—His rising from the grave. But His rising from the grave is not the same as this man who leapt out of the grave. This man leapt out of the grave, almost scared to death. But Jesus rose from the dead, and scored a mighty victory over death.

Today, we join two followers of Jesus Christ on their walk to a village called Emmaus. They were returning from Jerusalem where they had just witnessed the greatest injustice ever committed—i.e. the death of Jesus Christ at the hands of His enemies even though He was declared innocent.

Emmaus was probably the home village of these two men. But as they walked towards home with troubled hearts, it was certainly not a happy home-going. They had earlier been part of the exciting things that Jesus Christ was doing. But then, they saw Him died on the Cross. So, they walked with heavy hearts and heavy steps.

Today, we celebrate Easter. We are not celebrating because Jesus Christ had died. We are celebrating because Jesus Christ had died AND He has risen!

There is good news for you and me this Easter—i.e. we need not walk alone as we journey in life because Jesus Christ is alive today. He walks with those who believe in Him.

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Just as He walked with the two men on the Emmaus Road ...

I. Jesus walks with us even in our despair (vv. 13-24).

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.
 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.
 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;
 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.
 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.
 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a 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.
 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;
 21 but 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.
 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning
 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.
 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

Heavy despair was on the heart of the two men on the Emmaus Road. Jesus had died. Jesus was their hero. They had expected Him to do great things, like freeing Israel from the Romans and ruling Israel as her king.

But Jesus seemed so helpless when He fell into the hands of His enemies. These men had such an upper hand over Him.

- They brought false charges against Him.
- They instigated the crowd to go against Him.
- They got the Romans to nail Him onto the Cross.
- They got Him dead!

As if this was not bad enough, His body was reported missing in the grave. And some women became so emotionally unstable that they claimed to see and hear from angels that He was alive.

Indeed, these two men on the Emmaus Road saw a total humiliation of Jesus Christ at the hands of His enemies. What actually happened seemed to be totally opposite of what they had expected. What despair!

There are and there will be times when we feel like these two men who were crushed by despair. And in our despair, we sense loneliness and abandonment.

One reason we sense loneliness and abandonment is because the world loves a winner. People always remember the champion but seldom the runner-up. When everything goes well with you, everyone wants to be your friend and be on your side. But when some things go wrong with you, people tend to stay far away from you—they don't want to be implicated; they don't want to be associated with a loser.

My wife and I know a couple who once went through the tragic experience of losing the younger of their two girls when she was only two years old. She was stricken with a kind of blood disorder.

While this couple was going through the pain and despair of seeing their little girl tormented by this fatal disease, they also experienced how some of their own family members and relatives were distancing themselves from them. They believed that some kind of evil curse had befallen on the couple and their children, and they were afraid to be associated with them lest they were also cursed.

My wife and I (and other Christian friends) felt led by the Lord Jesus to reach out to this couple (who were not Christians then). There was nothing much we could do except to pray and be present. But that was enough to assure them that they were not walking alone in their darkest hour of despair.

When the child eventually died, the couple was able to face it very bravely because they were touched and strengthened by the love and presence of the Lord Jesus as He used Christians to walk with them in their darkest hour.

Today, this couple are worshipping faithfully in a church. In fact, the man is now a church leader. The Lord also blessed the couple with a son not long after the death of the younger girl.

Another reason we sense loneliness and abandonment is because our pride leads us to mask ourselves. Our despair causes us to condemn and isolate ourselves.

- How can I ever get into such a mess?
- What would people think of me?

The story is told that many years ago, a man conned his way into the orchestra of the emperor of China although he could not play a note. Whenever the group practiced or performed, he would hold his flute against his lips, pretending to play but not making a sound. He received a good salary and enjoyed a comfortable living.

Then one day the emperor requested a solo from each musician. The flutist got nervous. There wasn't enough time to learn the instrument. He pretended to be sick, but the royal physician wasn't fooled. On the day of his solo performance, the impostor took poison and killed himself. In the English language, you can say that he's too proud to face the music.

People are often too proud to let their dark struggles be exposed. They would rather "mask their face" than "face the music", wanting to look good in the crowd but despairing inside themselves, and feeling deep sense of loneliness and abandonment.

(<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/167401-just-like-jesus-a-heart-like-his>)

Are you troubled by a sense of loneliness and abandonment because of some despair in your life? If so, then know this—the Lord Jesus wants to walk with you at this time. The world loves a winner, but Jesus Christ is in the business of walking with losers and making winners out of them.

Our Bible account today tells us how two followers of Jesus Christ walked away from Jerusalem with deep despair in their hearts. But Jesus walked with them even though they could not recognize Him for the most part.

Yes, we need not walk alone as we journey in life because Jesus Christ is alive today. He walks with those who believe in Him.

Just as He walked with the two men on the Emmaus Road ...

II. Jesus walks with us even in our doubt (vv. 25-35).

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 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?"

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

A close companion of despair is doubt. We see this in the case of the two followers of Jesus Christ on the Emmaus Road. Yes, they did hear something about Jesus being alive again while they were still in Jerusalem. But their despair caused them to doubt what they had heard. They doubted because they had expected their hero to be all conquering, not one who's badly tortured, stripped, and left to die on the Cross.

They doubted because they concluded that Jesus was defeated, dead, and gone. They bet on the wrong horse! So, they would shut out anything that would contradict this conclusion. They refused to believe that He would ever rise from the dead—that was why the testimony of some women in Jerusalem about Jesus coming back alive sounded so amazing but unbelievable to them (vv. 22-23). Some among you today may also find the news of Jesus rising from the dead amazing but unbelievable.

But Christians believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe it to be NOT an act of man, but an act of God. If it depends on man, many things are impossible. But if it depends on God, then nothing is impossible IF He so chooses to act—even the fully dead, the half dead, and the brain dead can come back to life! And God had chosen to raise Jesus Christ from the dead on that first Easter Sunday.

One common reason why we doubt Jesus is because of the reality of suffering in life. We want a religion or faith that speaks of and promises us no suffering and pain.

The underlying belief is that if Jesus is real, good, and powerful, He can and should protect us from all suffering and pain. If suffering and pain is real, then Jesus is not real or good or powerful. And yes, if Jesus is all that powerful, why couldn't He save Himself from suffering on the Cross in the first place?

Isn't it true that when suffering/pain strikes, people tend to doubt God and the things of God?

This was perhaps how these two followers were feeling as they travelled on the Emmaus Road. They were troubled by many doubts.

- They doubted themselves, wondering if they had allowed themselves to be deceived in the first place.
- They doubted others who still spoke favourably for Jesus.
- They even doubted the goodness and power of Jesus Himself.

We read in our Bible account today that the risen Jesus reminded the two men what their ancient Scripture had taught concerning Himself—He gave them Bible Revision 101. As Jesus led the two followers on the Emmaus Road through the teachings of Scripture, they began to understand, and their hearts began to warm up from the coldness of despair and doubt. They began to understand that:

- Suffering is not untrue to the teachings of Scripture.
- Suffering can have a place in God's plan.
- God is still present and working even in the midst of suffering.

One reason why God doesn't end all suffering right now is because people can learn from suffering.

- Think of some enduring lessons you have learnt from a happy time in your life.
- Think of some enduring lessons you have learnt from a difficult time in your life.
- From which situation can you draw more valuable lessons?

If you are honest, you will admit that you can draw more valuable lessons from your times of hardship. This is because in most cases, bad times develop virtues in us while good times distort values in us.

- You develop courage because there is danger to face.
- You develop perseverance because there are obstacles to overcome.
- You develop compassion because there is someone in pain and in need, and you were in the same situation before.

God allows suffering in this world (and even in Jesus) because He is in the business of soul building, not just pain relieving. He builds up the human soul not only for this life, but for eternity. Honestly, I certainly don't wish for suffering and pain. However, I believe if God shields us from all suffering and pain, we will become the most reckless, self-centred creatures in the universe. We will have no restraint or fear in doing harm and wrong to one another.

In 1873, a Belgian priest named Joseph Damien went to Molokai, Hawaii to serve among lepers. As soon as he arrived, he began trying to build friendships with the lepers, but they rejected him. He built a small chapel to hold worship services. But hardly anyone came.

After 12 long years, he gave up. While standing on the pier about to

board the ship that would take him back home, he looked down at his hands. The white spots he saw could mean only one thing—he had contracted leprosy. So instead of going home, he returned to his work in the lepers' colony.

The news of the missionary's disease spread through the community within hours. Soon hundreds of lepers had gathered outside his hut. The following Sunday when Damien arrived at the chapel, the small building was filled to overflowing. That was the beginning of a long and fruitful service in Hawaii.

What made the difference? The difference is that now the lepers knew Damien truly understood their condition. There was no question about whether he really cared or not.

In the same way, we have someone who not only can identify but has identified with our suffering and pain. He experienced all the suffering and pain of earthly existence—He was misunderstood, He was betrayed, He was falsely accused, He was whipped, He was stripped, He was nailed, He was killed, He died. He's Jesus.

(<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/66891/suffering-by-bruce-montgomery>)

What is the greatest problem in this world? The greatest problem in this world is not suffering. The greatest problem in this world is sin. And sin is not meeting the perfect standard of God. It is sin that has distorted God's perfect design for human beings and the world. Because of this distortion, there's death, there's sickness, there's wickedness, there are tears, there are natural and man-made tragedies, there's suffering.

But the good news today is this—though without sin, Jesus willingly suffered for the sins of the world in order to bring forgiveness of sins. More than dying for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus has conquered death, and He lives today to bring life forever to those who believe in Him.

This may not be the best possible world with all the suffering and pain around us. But the Bible tells us that God is preparing a place of blessed eternity for those who believe in Jesus Christ where suffering and pain will be no more. God is like a doctor treating a broken bone. He does not promise the patient no suffering and pain. But He is working and when the bone is completely healed one day, there will be no more suffering and pain.

Our Bible account towards the end tells us that the eyes of the two men on the Emmaus Road "were opened and they recognized Him" (v. 31). They recognized someone whom they had not expected to see. They recognized that He had been with them all the way on the Emmaus Road ... in the midst

of their despair and doubt. They realized that they were not forsaken by the risen Jesus.

The last part of our Bible account today is particularly interesting. It tells us that the two followers of Jesus Christ made a U-turn after they recognized Him as their travelling companion. They turned back to Jerusalem, the place of their heartache (v. 33). You know what that means? It means they had overcome their despair and doubt because Jesus was alive and with them all the way, even in their despair and doubt.

Perhaps you are travelling on your own Emmaus Road—one of despair and doubt. But take heart for you need not walk alone if you put your faith in Jesus Christ. He walks with you in your life journey. He wants to be your Helper, your Guide, your Companion, and your Friend as you journey through life, both in good times and in hard times.

Conclusion

For those of you who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ, I want to say that when you trust in Him, you will never walk alone in life. The Lord Jesus walks with you because He is alive and He cares for you. If you sense Him calling you to come to Him today, do not reject or resist. Instead, come to Him and let Him be your Helper and Companion in your life journey.

If it is your desire today to ask Jesus to come into your life, repeat this simple prayer after me silently in your heart as I lead you. You say it to Jesus and to Him only.

Jesus, I believe you died so that my sins can be forgiven. I believe you rose from the dead so that I can have a new life in you. I ask you now to forgive me of my sins. I ask you now to come into my life to be my Lord and Saviour. Help me to live this new life with you as my Master. Amen!

Let me now close this time in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for those who have asked your Son Jesus to come into their lives today as their personal Lord and Saviour. Watch over them and walk with them so that they can grow to be strong in their faith. Indeed, may all your children dedicate themselves afresh to you today and experience once again the power of the Resurrection in their daily living—to know that we will never walk alone because the Lord Jesus lives, and to never walk apart because we live for Him.

For those who have yet to believe, we pray that you will continue to speak and reveal to them in very special ways so that they might one day come to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour as well.

We pray all this in Jesus' name, the Lord who is alive today and forevermore. Amen!