

EYES WIDE OPEN

Series: Good God
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Jesus, Resurrection, Response, Witness
Luke 24:13-53

Don't you just love surprises? I *love* surprises...especially in food form. My wife, Melody, is not a big fan of surprises in general. She would rather know what's coming - to be able to prepare herself in advance. But every now and then, she gets a surprise she enjoys.

I remember our 5th wedding anniversary. That was now over a dozen years ago (!!) but I remember it well. Melody and I celebrated our 5th anniversary at Disney World - The Most Magical Place on Earth. You see, for us Americans, Disney World is one of those coveted holiday destinations.

Everything at Disney World is designed to give guests an over-the-top experience. The streets are perfect, the trees impeccably trimmed, the water pristine. Every employee has been trained to treat each guest as a VIP. Even the language they use is well-honed. Doors don't just open automatically, they open *automagically*. They don't have housekeepers, they have *mousekeepers*. Staff members are known as cast members - a nod to the fact that the entire Disney experience is one big show. It's not reality, and everyone knows it's not reality. It's entirely something else.

And Melody and I went to celebrate our anniversary. We didn't have any kids at the time. We were just 24 years old, and we had a blast! We explored all the nooks and crannies of Walt Disney's wonderfully-imagined world. We ate food from around the globe. We rode, I think, every ride in the park, including the dizzying teacups - which essentially just spin you round and round in a challenge to your intestinal fortitude.

I have a picture somewhere that captures that moment - Melody with her head leaned back, laughing hysterically as we spun around on those teacups. We had an amazing time. But the real treat was yet to come.

Because it was our anniversary, I had made reservations at the fanciest restaurant in the park: Cinderella's Royal Table. It was a small upscale place that is actually inside of the upper floor of the iconic Cinderella's Castle - for those with kids, it's that castle you see at the beginning of every Disney movie.

And we were *inside* of it. We went up a curved staircase and were shown to our table - *the* table - the best one in the whole place. It was a little two-top by one of the tall arched

windows. Looking out, we had a perfect view of the park, just as the sun was setting. There was a perfect rose placed just so in a vase on the table, and there we were, two 24 year olds, locked into a romantic dinner for two inside of a castle. Princess Melody was riding high. But it got better.

As we ate perfectly prepared food, we talked and laughed. I struggle to remember what we talked about before we had kids, but we must have had plenty of conversation material, because before we knew it, darkness had descended upon the park...and that's when the truly magical thing happened.

One of the restaurant staff...I mean *cast members*...came and lit a candle on our table. A few minutes later, the lights in the restaurant dimmed. Then, the magical moment: fireworks! Those iconic Disney fireworks - the ones most people see *behind* the castle - we got to see from *inside* - through our own private viewing window in our quaint corner of Cinderella's castle.

My wife looked at me in amazement - astonished that I could have pulled all this off. The perfect table by the perfect window in the perfect restaurant at the perfect time. If we weren't already married, I could have proposed right then and there and been assured of a resounding "yes." She was shocked. She was surprised. And she liked it.

You know who else was surprised? *This guy!* You see, the fact was, I *hadn't* arranged for any of this. My role in this whole thing was that earlier in the day, I had stopped in at the restaurant and made a reservation for two. In doing so, I knew this would be, by far, the most expensive meal we had ever eaten, (frankly, one that we couldn't afford) so that felt like a pretty nice anniversary gift.

When I made the reservation, the cast member casually asked if we were celebrating any special occasion, and I said, "Yeah, it's our anniversary."

That was it. That was the extent of my contribution. The rest of the plan was hatched in the imagination of Walt Disney's finest. The table, the window, the rose, the candle, the fireworks - I didn't do any of it. One of the best gifts (and certainly the best surprise) I ever gave my wife was almost completely someone else's doing. Somehow, I still manage to get some credit for it.

But when we talk about that night, we still do so with astonishment. It was a beautiful time for the two of us, and a real eye-opener for us about how meaningful this type of experience can be.

Today, as we continue our Good God series, I want to take a look at another young couple, and a surprising experience that they had while taking a walk together - one that would open

their eyes to something even greater than a magical Disney moment. I've called this talk "Eyes Wide Open."

Let's pray that God would open *our* eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

Prayer

Last week, Christians around the world celebrated Easter - the remembrance of Jesus' self-sacrificial death and his defeat of death through resurrection. And for those who were here, I gave you a ton of philosophical, theological, and historical information as to how the significance of those events have been understood throughout the past 2000+ years.

Today, I want to look at how those events were experienced *in the moment*. Or more specifically, *just after* they occurred. We're gonna be hanging out in the gospel of Luke - the third book in what we call the New Testament of our bible. We'll be in Luke, chapter 24, starting in verse 13, and I'm going to read from The Message paraphrase of the bible:

That same day [the day that Jesus was resurrected, and his followers found an empty tomb] two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. They were deep in conversation, going over all these things that had happened. In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them. But they were not able to recognize who he was.

He asked, "What's this you're discussing so intently as you walk along?"

They just stood there, long-faced, like they had lost their best friend. Then one of them, his name was Cleopas, said, "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's happened during the last few days?"

He said, "What has happened?"

They said, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene. He was a man of God, a prophet, dynamic in work and word, blessed by both God and all the people. Then our high priests and leaders betrayed him, got him sentenced to death, and crucified him. And we had our hopes up that he was the One, the One about to deliver Israel. And it is now the third day since it happened. But now some of our women have completely confused us. Early this morning they were at the tomb and couldn't find his body. They came back with the story that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Some of our friends went off to the tomb to check and found it empty just as the women said, but they didn't see Jesus."

Then he said to them, "So thick-headed! So slow-hearted! Why can't you simply believe all that the prophets said? Don't you see that these things had to happen, that the Messiah had to suffer and only then enter into his glory?" Then he started at the beginning, with the Books of Moses, and went on through all the Prophets, pointing out everything in the Scriptures that referred to him.

They came to the edge of the village where they were headed. He acted as if he were going on but they pressed him: "Stay and have supper with us. It's nearly evening; the day is done." So he went in with them. And here is what happened: He sat down at the table with them. Taking the bread, he blessed and broke and gave it to them. At that moment, open-eyed, wide-eyed, they recognized him. And then he disappeared.

Back and forth they talked. "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

Luke 24:13-32

Now *that* is an eye-opener! These two people walked nearly 7 miles (11 km) with Jesus and didn't know it. All of a sudden, their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus...and then he just vanished! And this little episode is interesting in a few different ways.

First off, it's interesting because of who these people were. One of them, we're told, was a man named Cleopas. And most scholars believe that Cleopas was the same guy mentioned in the book of John, and by Jewish historians as Clopas. Clopas is a Hebrew name, but a very uncommon one. Cleopas is the Greek equivalent.

In fact, the name Clopas was so rare in those days, that it's almost certain that this guy was the same Clopas who, according to an early church historian, was the brother of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. He was Jesus' uncle. And his companion on the journey was most likely his wife, Mary, who is mentioned in the book of John as one of the women present at the foot of the cross.

So, these are not just some random followers of Jesus. This is his aunt and uncle - having witnessed his crucifixion and having left Jerusalem, utterly defeated, presumably returning back to their home in Emmaus. The hopes that they had of Jesus being the Messiah - the Chosen One who would free Israel from Roman captivity - those hopes had been crushed, and they bore the emotional scars of the past week as they trudged along that road.

So, it's interesting because of who these people were. And it's really interesting that they don't recognize Jesus - this was his aunt and uncle. The text isn't super clear *why* they didn't recognize him. Some scholars think that God supernaturally kept them from recognizing him. Others think that maybe Jesus' resurrected body actually looked different enough that he was initially unrecognizable - especially since Cleopas and Mary weren't really expecting to see Jesus alive.

Whatever the case, they don't recognize him, even as he walks that 7 miles with them, as he talks to them about all the ancient Hebrew writings - all the prophecies that pointed to Jesus.

And that's another interesting point. Here's Jesus, post-resurrection, taking time with this couple on a long walk, to explain the overarching story of scripture. And what does he talk to

them about? Probably things like, “Did you know that the ancient scriptures said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem...that he would be born of a virgin...that he would be betrayed by one of his closest friends - sold for 30 pieces of silver...that he would have his garments taken, his beard pulled out, and that he would be beaten by Gentile soldiers. Did you know those same ancient scriptures say that he would be pierced, that he would die for our transgressions, that he would be laid in a borrowed tomb among the rich, and that he would rise from the dead?”

Understand, some of the Old Testament writings that Christians today regularly point to as prophesying Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection weren’t at that time viewed in that light. I can imagine Jesus illuminating these passages for Cleopas and Mary for the first time, and this couple just staring in astonishment, like my wife looked at me during those Disney fireworks.

But their eyes wouldn’t *really* be opened until Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Now, if you’ve been around church, those words probably tickle some point of reference for you. This is the same phrase used during the Last Supper, Jesus’ final meal with his disciples. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

Now, there’s no indication that Cleopas and Mary would have been present in the upper room for the Last Supper. It does seem, however, that this was probably a very common thing for Jesus to do. Perhaps he even did it the same way each time - not unlike how many families will say the same prayer of thanksgiving and blessing before each meal.

But whether it was a supernatural occurrence, or just the recognition of a behavioral pattern in Jesus, when he broke that bread, this couple’s eyes were opened. They realized that they had been walking and talking with Jesus.

Then he disappeared!

One thing that’s interesting to note here is the significance of food in this moment. Not unlike our little anniversary surprise, food plays a central role in this story. And in fact, food plays a central role in the entire story of God and his people. Food represents life and sometimes death. It represents, at times, the gift or provision of God. It represents, in more ancient times, the only currency often available to the people. It also represents sin.

In the opening chapters of the bible - both our modern version, and the ancient Hebrew version - there’s a story of another couple partaking in some important food. In the first book of the bible, Genesis, we’re told of Adam and Eve being tempted to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

They do so, and what does the biblical writer say? Genesis 3:7:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked
Genesis 3:7

Do you see the parallel here? Just after the original creation, Adam and Eve took this food and their eyes were opened. They were opened in a way that took away their innocence - that made them feel guilty and ashamed. (It should be noted that there was nothing wrong with their nakedness, and yet they felt ashamed of it anyway. Sin has a way of doing that to us. Not only are we ashamed of the wrong we've done, but we become, at some level, self-loathing - ashamed of who we *are*.)

Now, we jump back to the story of Cleopas and Mary. Like Adam and Eve, they take this food and their eyes are opened - but this time, it's not shame and guilt that come with the eye opening. It's the opposite of that! Rather than eating food that caused them to feel the weight of sin and death, Cleopas and Mary ate food that opened their eyes to the truth of Jesus - the one who *defeated* sin and death.

Have you ever had your eyes opened like that? Have you ever had that kind of revelation - the kind that changes *everything*?

I had one of those moments the first time I came to Kenya. I was here because our church back in the U.S. was partnering with Trena Ivy and her Baby House here in Nakuru. I really didn't know anything about Kenya, but another pastor friend of mine was coming, and he asked if I wanted to tag along.

I landed in Nairobi at night, and took a van from the airport to the home of some friends who live just outside of town. Because it was dark, I didn't really get to see what things looked like that night. But the next morning, I woke up in what seemed more like a tropical forest than the bleak, barren plane I expected.

Everywhere I looked was green. There were exotic birds and monkeys perched in the trees, beautiful flowers blooming everywhere. The morning air was cool. My assumption had been that when you go to Africa, it's hot, dry, and brown. What I got was none of those things. My eyes were opened to the fact that Kenya was not what I thought it was.

That's what happened to Cleopas and Mary when their eyes were opened to Jesus. He wasn't who they thought he was. Originally, they thought he was a revolutionary leader who would overthrow the Romans. Then, once he was killed, they thought maybe he was just a good guy - a prophet perhaps, but not The One.

Now, their eyes are opened and they see that Jesus was neither of those things - he was something completely unexpected - a surprise Savior.

What do you do with that kind of revelation. Well, here's what these two did. Luke 24, verse 33:

They didn't waste a minute. They were up and on their way back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and their friends gathered together, talking away: "It's really happened! The Master has been raised up—Simon saw him!"

Then the two went over everything that happened on the road and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.

They were so jostled by this new revelation that they left the dinner table and ran back to Jerusalem...in the dark. Remember, Jesus stopped and had dinner with them because it was nearly evening. So by now, it must be evening, and they head back to Jerusalem...they might have run the full 11km!

They go back to tell "the eleven" (the remaining members of Jesus' inner circle), and they don't even get a chance to say anything before they're bombarded by the news that Jesus really is alive and that Simon, also known as Peter, has seen him.

Can you imagine how frantic that scene must have been. These followers and friends of Jesus went from down and defeated to...whatever state you get to when your friend and leader comes back from the dead!

Imagine the energy in that room as Cleopas and Mary tell their story. Peter has seen Jesus, they have seen Jesus...and they've seen him disappear!

Then, this happens...verse 36:

While they were saying all this, Jesus appeared to them and said, "Peace be with you." They thought they were seeing a ghost and were scared half to death. He continued with them, "Don't be upset, and don't let all these doubting questions take over. Look at my hands; look at my feet—it's really me. Touch me. Look me over from head to toe. A ghost doesn't have muscle and bone like this." As he said this, he showed them his hands and feet. They still couldn't believe what they were seeing. It was too much; it seemed too good to be true.

This is what happens when you discover Jesus - when you truly have a personal encounter with him. It all just seems too good to be true.

Author Brian Zahnd says that it's hard to believe in Jesus - that when we're faced with all that Jesus is, all that he represents, all that he teaches and stands for, it's just hard to believe all that!

We give mental ascent to certain aspects of Jesus, just as his disciples did. He's a prophet. He's a teacher. We may even not have a hard time thinking of him in ways that first century Jews would have struggled with - as a divine part of God, as the Messiah.

But in our gut, it's all just too much! A full-on encounter with Jesus leaves us spinning - grasping to understand *who* this guy is, but knowing that *something* is very different about him, *and* that something is very different about us, having encountered him.

I've had those kinds of encounters with Jesus - those experiences that make you say, "I don't even know if I believe that can happen!" You know, like, "Jesus, you just did something that my theology, my life philosophy, my better judgement says shouldn't be possible." I've had those moments in my life, and I've seen other people have those moments.

And when that happens, people react. But I love what Jesus does here, and I use this as a model in my own life and leadership. At the height of the hysteria, as the frenzy reaches its peak, Jesus asks a question - a burning question...verse 41:

He asked, "Do you have any food here?"

Luke 24:41

Ha! Don't you love that? Jesus was tortured and killed, then came back to life. He appeared on a road and walked 11km, ate some bread and disappeared, then reappeared in front of his disciples. They're all going nuts, probably some mix of disbelief, excitement, and joy. Things are just crazy. And Jesus is all, "Hey, you got something to eat?"

One of the key guys in this group of churches called Vineyard was a guy named John Wimber. And John Wimber was a unique guy, but part of what was so unusual about his style of pastoring people was that he would do this kind of stuff.

In the midst of praying for somebody, just when things seemed like they were about to get crazy, John Wimber might go get a sandwich. Why? Well, he said, if God's doing the work, he can keep doing the work. If it's not about hyping people up, but it's really about what God wants to do here, he'll do it without the hype, and he'll do it without me. It's not about me anyway.

For Jesus, I get the sense that he's just ready for them to calm down and realize that he's not a ghost, he's not a figment of their imagination. He's a guy - a hungry guy. Torture, death,

and resurrection can really leave you famished - not to mention the whole appearing and disappearing thing.

So they give Jesus some leftover fish - remember this was probably a couple of hours after dinner. And he eats this fish, just another proof that he was really there with them - once again, food playing a major role in the story.

Then, not unlike the supposedly Last Supper he had eaten with them a few days earlier, he finishes the meal and gives them some instructions. Verse 44:

Then he said, "Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled." He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, "You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from Jerusalem! You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high."

He then led them out of the city over to Bethany. Raising his hands he blessed them, and while blessing them, took his leave, being carried up to heaven.

And they were on their knees, worshiping him. They returned to Jerusalem bursting with joy. They spent all their time in the Temple praising God. Yes.

Luke 24:44-53

Thus concludes the book of Luke. Next week, we'll pick up the action in Luke's second book, called Acts. But I want you to think for a moment about this series of events.

Last week, we read that a group of women went to Jesus' tomb and found it empty. Then some of the men, including Peter, ran to the tomb and also found it empty. Then, at some point, the risen Jesus appeared to Peter. Then he appeared to Cleopas and Mary. Then he appeared to the eleven - this group of his closest followers.

And he gave them some instructions. He showed them a new way to read scripture - a way of seeing all those ancient texts with new eyes. He told them to wait for God to equip them with power from on high, and to proclaim his name to all nations.

My question to you is this. What are his instructions to us?

Those of us who know Jesus, who have seen him work in our lives, who have had this kind of eye-opening experience where, though we have trouble taking it all in, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is who he says he is, and that he is the best thing to ever happen to the world. What are we to do with that?

Look again at verse 47:

*“...a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations”
Luke 24:47*

Those of us who have experienced that life change offered by Jesus - we are witnesses of his truth, and we are the vehicle through which he wants the world to know *about* him and to *know* him. And what he wants us to tell the world - what he wants them to understand more than anything else is this: *God loves you. Whatever you may have done, he forgives you. And he has a life for you to live that's greater than the one you're living now - beyond your wildest dreams.*

That is a message worth sharing.

If you've never had that kind of encounter with Jesus, or if you've never said, “You know, I want to commit my life to following Jesus,” I want to invite you to do that. There's something really special about saying, “Yes, I want to give my life and myself to Jesus - to trust him completely.”

When you do that, you enter into an epic adventure - full of twists and turns, ups and downs - it's a true magical kingdom, one full of surprises, where our eyes are constantly being opened to new realities, and where the love and grace of God is on full display. Will you join us on that ride?

We're going to close today with a time of personal response. And there several ways to respond:

1. Singing

We're going to sing some songs together that help us reflect on some of these things.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

If you need prayer for anything at all, we have people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus as a way for us to remember the way he willingly dies for us. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We have people ready to serve you communion. Juice is on your left, wine is on your right. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition. Just break off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, and eat.

We offer communion each week for *anyone* who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. However, for those who consider this your church home, and for those who believe in what we're trying to do here, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

At the end of that time, I'll pray a prayer of blessing over you before you go.

Closing Prayer