

# The Transforming Message

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     for you if you would. And to take a text this morning, it would be verse 32. The words that these men spoke to one another after I noticed Jesus had vanished from their sight.
- 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? Well, this little story Luke gives to us comes in three acts.
- So let's look at Act 1 first of all. You'll see it there in verses 13 to 24. And in it Luke paints for us a scene of terrible misery. Terrible misery.
- Here are two very miserable men, two very depressed disciples on that first Easter Sunday. They're dejected. They're downcast. Their faces are sad, says verse 17.
- They looked sad because they were sad, because their hearts were sad. They'd lost all living hope, hadn't they? They'd had great hopes about Jesus.
- [ 1 : 08 ]     Look at verse 21. We had hoped that he was the one, but now that hope was gone. That hope was dead. And so when this stranger stops them on the road, he finds a scene of terrible misery.
- Two Christians pondering a tragic death. It's heavy with irony, isn't it? Here's two disciples on Easter Day in the presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.
- And yet they are utterly miserable. Well, maybe it's not so unbelievable, because there will be plenty of people in churches this morning on Easter Day.
- And yet instead of rejoicing with great joy, in fact, they will be rather like these men. They might hide it in their faces, although they might not. But their hopes for Jesus, their hopes for what he would do for them personally, well, they've been disappointed.
- They're saying in their hearts, we had hoped that he would be the one to redeem. But no. And there'll be lots of people like that in churches all across this nation, all across the world today.
- [ 2 : 24 ]     But, you know, people like that will never be missionary Christians, will they? When the stranger stops these men, it's not to say to them, tell me, what is the reason for the hope that's within you?
- He's not saying, I can see in your faces that you have got a message of joy, will you share it to me? Now, he was going to stop and say to them, why are you guys so miserable? Why are your faces so sad?
- They are miserable Christians. They're not missionary Christians. And do you see what they're doing? Well, they're doing what Christians like that always do. They're taken up for themselves, they're taken up with their problems.
- Look at verse 15. While they were going along, they were talking and discussing. Jesus drew near. Actually, that word discussing really means disputing.
- It means arguing. That's how it's almost always translated in the Gospels in Acts. Acts 6, verse 9. The opponents disputed with Stephen when he was preaching the Gospel to them and took up stones to throw at him.

[ 3 : 30 ] They're disputing and arguing and being miserable. Well, that too is a very common thing, isn't it? Sadly, when the risen Lord draws near his church, he finds often not missionary Christians telling forth the glories of his name, but miserable Christians arguing among themselves.

And that's why so often the churches are places of misery and not places of mission. Full of Christians taking up time talking and discussing and disputing and arguing because they're focusing on their problems.

They're focusing on their unfulfilled desires. And so they dispute with one another about theology, about, well, all sorts of church matters, about money, about themselves.

It's the same in our denominations. Endless discussions about decline, about reorganization, about presbytery plans that reduce churches and so on. Endless talking, endless disputing, arguing.

And I can tell you at these meetings, plenty of sad faces, plenty of low spirits, plenty of despair. Far from triumphant mission, so often these situations are just terrible misery.

[ 4 : 52 ] Well, why is that? Well, verses 18 to 24 tell us why these men were like that. Here are two men who have all the story of Easter in every single detail.

Do you see? They know all about Jesus' life. They know about Jesus' death. They even have heard on account of Jesus' resurrection. But they haven't begun to grasp the implications of it.

There's no message. They've got no gospel. They just don't understand what the death of Jesus Christ was really all about at all.

At best to them, it seemed to be a tragic death, a waste, something to be mourned. To these men, you see, all of their hope was in Jesus' life. They wanted Jesus' life without Jesus' death.

To them, his death spoke of the wicked purposes of human beings, not of the glorious purpose of God. And that was why they were miserable. They had no message.

[ 5 : 52 ] They had no gospel. The cross to these men was still a tragedy. There was no good news in the cross, and therefore, the news of the resurrection didn't mean anything to them.

You see, it's possible, isn't it, to have all the story of Jesus, all the story of Easter, even to be in Christian ministry with all of these things, and yet have no message, and therefore have no mission.

And that's why churches so often, alas, are places of terrible misery, full of miserable religious people with a pall of death over them, not full of missionary, liberated people, full of the joy of the life that is in Jesus.

The front page of my minister's mailing that comes every month for Easter, this front page had an article entitled, Did Christ Have to Die? And the answer given in the article was no.

It was a tragedy. He likened it really to a martyr's death like Martin Luther King or people like that. Well, that man has all the story of Easter, but he has no message. He has no gospel.

[ 6 : 59 ] None at all. You'll have heard it on the radio and the television these last few days. You'll have read it in the paper. People like Geoffrey John speaking about how the cross is so repulsive. If you listen to the Sunday morning program on Radio 4 this morning, so utterly predictable on Easter day, you'll have a whole bunch of clerics on speaking about how revolting and awful the orthodox understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ really is.

Well, friends, that kind of confusion produces misery but not mission because there's a story but there's no message. There's no gospel. Or rather, there is the wrong message altogether.

It seems that Jesus' death really is just a tragedy. Well, that's these two men. That's Acts 1 of the story. It's a terrible misery. And no wonder that is inevitable when people don't grasp the gospel.

It was inevitable then and it's just as inevitable today. But let's look forward to Act 3 of the story in verses 32 to 35.

And here is something quite, quite different. Luke paints for us here not a story of terrible misery but it's one of triumphant mission, isn't it? Here are two men who have gone from pondering a tragic death to proclaiming a triumphant death.

[ 8 : 23 ] Their sad faces are gone. Their sad hearts are gone. Verse 32 says their hearts are now burning within them. They're on fire. They've got burning hearts. And so they've got bursting lips.

They simply have to tell others. Like Peter and John later on in the Acts of the Apostles. They cannot help telling what they've seen and heard. Now, these are men with a vibrant hope within them.

They don't have to be asked the reason for their hope. They're bursting. They can't keep it in. These are missionary Christians. It's late, we're told.

It's dark. The day is far spent. And I'm sure the roads in rural Palestine in those days were just as dangerous as no doubt they are today. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan, the man who was set upon by robbers out on the road.

Well, here's these men now going out on the road in the middle of the night in the dark. It's utter madness. Immediately, that same hour, verse 32, they headed back to Jerusalem.

[ 9 : 24 ] Well, it's just madness, isn't it? I'm sure that's what their friends and relations would have said to them. It's fanaticism. Calm down. No need to get so overboard with zeal.

Don't be a fundamentalist. Keep it decent. There's a place for religion but not for fanaticism. Nothing changes, you see, does it? Plenty of good church-going folks say exactly the same thing today to their son or their daughter who wants to go to some dangerous country, some dangerous place in the world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

Parents often say exactly the same thing to their children when they give up the possibility of a perfectly good income and a career so that they want to go full-time into telling about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's crazy. It's fanatical.

Like going out into the roads in the middle of the night and traveling back to Jerusalem. It's madness to the world. But no, it's not. It's triumphant mission.

What a total transformation has taken place in these two men. They are utterly different. No longer are they taken up with themselves at all. Not even their own safety. No longer are they miserable, complaining Christians taken up with disputes.

[ 10 : 38 ] No, now only one thing matters. Telling the good news. Sharing the glorious truth of the risen Savior. And the truth is that that message has transformed them from miserable self-interest into real missionary zeal.

That's Act 3. We've moved from terrible misery to triumphant mission. What is the explanation? It is extraordinary, isn't it?

In fact, it is miraculous. Well, says Luke, that is exactly what I want you to see. That's why I'm writing this chapter this way. You must see and understand what makes that transformation.

And it's all there in Act 2, isn't it? Verses 25 to 31. You can see. Terrible misery is transformed into triumphant mission by the transforming message, the word of power from the risen Christ himself.

Now, don't make a mistake here. Don't say to yourself, oh, well, yes, these two men had an extraordinary mystical experience of Jesus' presence. He actually appeared to them.

[ 11 : 50 ] Give me a marvelous experience like that and I'd be transformed too. No, that is not what Luke is telling us. Look carefully at verse 32. See what it is that Luke actually records for us from all of their conversation, from all of the words that they must have said in that moment of discovery.

The key thing that made their hearts burn within them was not the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the very moment they did see him, verse 31 tells us absolutely plainly, the moment they saw him, he vanished.

Now, what was the transforming thing was his words. Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?

Before they even recognized him. And what was this talk from a complete stranger that so utterly transformed the hearts of these two miserable men?

Well, look again at verse 32. While he talked to us, while he opened to us the scriptures. The word of transforming power, the life-giving word of the risen Christ, is the message of the Bible.

[ 13 : 08 ] Here it's the Old Testament. But the message of the Bible opened up and made plain to explain the true meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection as the plan and the purpose of God for the salvation of his people and for the glory of his name.

Isn't that staggering? Wouldn't you think that Jesus would rather just appear in front of them and say, look, it's me. Let me explain everything to you. But that's not what he does do.

In every one of the episodes, in fact, they're kept from seeing him at first. Instead, they're pointed to the scriptures because it's there that lies the key to being transformed.

In verse 7, the angels say, remember Jesus' own words all through his ministry in Galilee. he taught you from the scriptures about what must happen. There in verses 44 and 45, Jesus says the same thing.

This is what I've been saying all along, he says. This is what the whole Bible's about. And so here in verses 25 to 27, it's just the same. The transforming word of power comes as the Bible is opened and taught clearly with the authoritative interpretation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself.

[ 14 : 24 ] That is what transforms people from misery into mission. And that's exactly what transforms people today, too.

From unbelieving skeptics into believing joy, and from miserable argumentative Christianity into missionary zeal and service. Hearing the word of power, the word that created the world, the word that recreated the world in Christ, and being transformed by it.

As the scriptures, as all the scriptures notice, are opened and understood. Look closely at Jesus' words here. It's a two-fold message, isn't it?

You see verse 25, first of all, it's rebuke. Oh foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. You see, that's the basic problem that we have.

We're miserable because we're foolish, because our hearts are slow and sluggish, because we're disbelieving of God's word. That's a theme that runs all the way through Luke's gospel.

[ 15 : 31 ] Remember right at the very, very beginning, the story of Zechariah? He's a good man, we're told. He's a believing man. He's a righteous man. He's a better man, no doubt, than most of us here this morning.

He's blameless, Luke says, in the eyes of the law. But remember, the angel struck him dumb. Why? Because you did not believe my words.

His words about what God was really doing in his great salvation in Christ. We believe some of God's words, you see, but not all of them. And not the most important ones often.

You see, Zechariah just didn't see that the whole of Scripture was really all about the climax that was coming in the Lord Jesus Christ and his person and work. And that was these men on the road too.

You see, that was all the disciples. They were miserable because they were wrong. Because they were wrong about Jesus. Because they were wrong about the Bible. They wanted, you see, to fit the story of Jesus into their own expectations.

[ 16 : 39 ] Christians. We had hoped that he would be the Redeemer that we imagined. That was what they were saying. But no, he wasn't. And therefore, it was disappointing. It was despairing for them.

But they totally misunderstood Jesus' death. They believed plenty of the Bible, but they didn't believe the actual message of the whole Bible. And that's a very different thing.

They didn't believe, really, the gospel of the Christ who must suffer and only then enter his glory. And if they'd really believed that, then they would have rejoiced in his death.

But instead, they were miserable. And friends, that is the explanation as to why there is far more misery and disputing and arguing and self-absorption in the church very often than there is missionary zeal, joyous telling about the Savior's name.

It's because people are slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. We don't grasp the greatness of the gospel of God.

[ 17 : 43 ] We have no idea just how big and how glorious and how all-embracing and how cosmic the gospel of Jesus Christ really is. Isn't it true that very often we're just like these men.

We're guilty of trying to fit the story of Jesus into our expectations of life. You see, these men wanted a temporal redeemer. Someone to change this world for them, to make this world a better place, to kick out the Romans, to promote again their religion, their culture.

But he let them down. But you see, it's just the same today, isn't it? People have all the wrong expectations of Jesus because they haven't believed the whole truth of the gospel in the scriptures.

We believe the parts that we want to believe, but we leave aside the rest. So the approach of liberal theology that has blighted the church in the West in this last century is just exactly that.

It wants a temporal redeemer. It wants a social redeemer to make this world a better place. So it'll be very, very happy with some parts of the scriptures, especially parts about justice and about the poor.

[ 18 : 56 ] But it doesn't want anything to do with the miraculous. It doesn't want a story of a true savior who's died for sins and risen. It doesn't want anything to do with an atonement. It doesn't want anything to do with judgment to come and the world to come.

And what do we get when we have a gospel like that? Well, we get disillusion, despair, misery, empty churches. That'll be the story today across many parts of this land.

Alas, churches largely empty, a few miserable Christians trying to be joyful. But no mission, no life. Or, the other extreme you get, those who might call themselves evangelical people but actually are really just looking for the same prosperity gospel.

Jesus is the redeemer for me and for my life in this world to bring me the health that I long for, to bring me the wealth that I long for, the prosperity, the progress, the self-fulfillment, the feeling good about myself in life.

Well, how often that is a gospel that has led to disillusion, disappointment, and despair. When you haven't got the health that you longed for, when the loved one that you wanted to be saved from their cancer wasn't saved from their cancer and died.

[ 20 : 15 ] Do you see, Jesus says, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. There must be the cross for the Christ, the Son of God.

And there will be also the cross life for the disciples. Jesus says, My kingdom is not of this world. It's the whole new creation that I have come to usher in and to begin.

That's what my death and resurrection has brought to pass. So he has to rebuke us, who slow of heart, to believe all of the gospel of the scriptures.

But then from rebuke he turns, doesn't he, to revelation. Look at verse 27. Beginning, notice, it's not new revelation, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

That is, he taught them that it isn't at all about us fitting the story of Jesus into our expectations. It's about fitting all our expectations into the true story of Jesus Christ in all the scriptures.

[ 21 : 26 ] The whole Bible is about him, it's not about us. The whole of history is about him. The whole of time, the whole of eternity is about Jesus Christ.

And the only thing that matters in life is the story of the Lord Jesus Christ and how we can be related to that story. He is the beginning, he's the end.

He is the key to time and to eternity, to everything. And the climax of his story, the center of everything, is his death and his resurrection and his ascension to the glory of his Father's side.

It proclaims him to be the Son of God with power. And because of that, and only because of that, can we be caught up into his story.

That's the biblical gospel. Look at verse 46. Do you see? It's because of his death, says Jesus, according to scripture, where he died, remember as Bob was speaking to us last Sunday night from 1 Corinthians 15, where he died for our sins, according to the scripture.

[ 22 : 34 ] It's because of that, says Jesus, verse 46, that repentance and forgiveness of sins can be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

It's because at last his death has accomplished all that he promised to do. And you see, grasping that is to be gripped by a transforming message.

Grasping that and what it really means, about how vast and how wonderful the gospel really is. Grasping that is what turns miserable, complaining, disputing, defeated people into triumphant missionary ambassadors for the gospel of Jesus Christ, into people whose hearts are on fire, whose lips are on fire for Jesus.

It's only understanding the reality of the gospel as it is in scripture that will bring you to be a person that tells out with all your soul the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's what happened to these men. They came to understand the message of the cross of Jesus. Excuse me. And that is that they heard the transforming voice of the Son of God calling them out of darkness and into light.

[ 23 : 58 ] Just as Jesus had promised, the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. These miserable disciples, these defeated disciples of Jesus were transformed into flaming heralds for the gospel.

And it all happened, says Luke, as he opened to them the scriptures. Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked, as he opened unto us the scriptures?

Friends, that is Luke's Easter message to you and to me. He wants us, along with Theophilus, to have certainty, to have confidence in the transforming message of the Easter gospel, the biblical gospel, of a Christ crucified for sins according to the scriptures, crucified as a sacrifice for the sins of his people, crucified as a propitiation to turn away the wrath of God against our sins, crucified as a Passover lamb, as a ransom for many, as all of these things that Jesus himself pointed to in the Old Testament scriptures and said, all of this is about me.

He wants us to understand, does Luke, that it's this message and no other message that the resurrection of Jesus Christ vindicates and proves his death not to be a tragic death, to be explained away, but in fact a triumphant death to be rejoiced in and to be proclaimed for the world.

It's not that Jesus' resurrection is the triumph that takes away the tragedy of his death. It's that Jesus' resurrection proclaims Jesus' death was never a tragedy, but was a triumph from the moments he said on the cross, it is finished.

[ 25 : 48 ] And it's that message alone that transforms the human heart. Have you got friends and loved ones who are blind to the truth, who are skeptical?

skeptical? Perhaps knowing some of the truth, but skeptical of it, maybe even knowing a lot of the truth, but yet miserable, not really understanding.

Well, what they need to hear is the voice of the risen Christ, the transforming voice, speaking in the scriptures as the Bible is opened up to them and as they hear the word of the living God.

That's what happens all the way through the Acts of the Apostles. Read it this afternoon. Read Acts chapter 8 when the Ethiopian eunuch is driving through the desert reading the scriptures but not understanding.

And Philip is brought to him and says, do you understand what you're reading? He says, no. And beginning at that very place with the prophet Isaiah, he explained to him the good news about Jesus and the man's life was transformed.

[ 26 : 51 ] Read Acts chapter 10, the household of Cornelius, the whole lot of them there. And Peter speaks the very words that Christ commanded them to preach, proclaiming him from the Old Testament scriptures, speaking of his coming again in glory.

And we read, as Peter spoke these very words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all of those who heard the word. As he opened to them the scriptures, the voice of Christ spoke with transforming power.

And we're told that all the apostles marveled that even the Gentiles had received the word of God, the transforming word of Christ himself.

You can have certainty, says Luke. You can bring your friends to hear expositions of Moses and any scripture. Jesus spoke to them about Leviticus, about numbers.

You can bring them to hear the words of Ezekiel, of Ecclesiastes, of Daniel, of Job, as well as John's gospel and Mark's gospel. And the transforming word of Jesus Christ will be at work.

[ 27 : 58 ] His voice will be heard to bring the dead to life, to bring miserable, feeble Christians and change them into missionary people with burning hearts.

That's Luke's Easter message. Maybe he's speaking directly to you. Maybe you're a bit miserable. Maybe you're hiding it in your face, but inside you're depressed, you're dispirited.

But friend, maybe the Lord Jesus is saying to you this morning, Oh foolish one, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. You've been picking and choosing your version of the gospel.

Well, if so, that's maybe why you don't have the burning heart that you want to have. You haven't yet grasped the whole of the gospel properly. The whole gospel in all the scriptures about the all-embracing, all-encompassing Christ and his work.

That's the root cause, you know, of every single problem in spiritual life. Every single problem that Christians face, the explanation is always the same. We haven't yet understood fully the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 13 ] Christ. We need to stop trying to fit Jesus and his gospel into our expectations of life. We need to listen instead to the risen Lord speaking.

Speaking as he always spoke before his death, after his resurrection, speaking in all the scriptures as they're open to us. We need to grasp the greatness of his story in them.

We need to grasp the triumph and the glory of his death for sins and what it really accomplished. Grasp that, friends, and you also will be like these men in this story.

You also will have burning hearts and bursting lips to tell of the glory, the transforming message of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, on Easter day, if our hearts are not burning, if our hearts are not on fire with the glory of the message of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we haven't yet understood the gospel.

[ 30 : 24 ] We haven't yet understood what it's really all about. Well, may God grant every one of us indeed to know the abundant joy of the transforming message of Christ this Easter as we find it in all the scriptures.

Let's pray.