

March 31, 2024 by Steve Brandon



The Best Story

Luke 24

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There are many, many great stories in the Bible. There's the story of Joseph, who was sold by his brothers to Egypt, yet he became the means of their salvation from the famine as he had risen to second in command in Egypt. There's the story of the exodus of the Jews, who were delivered from their slavery through the 10 plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians. There's the story of Joshua defeating Jericho, when the wall fell down after walking around the city for seven days. There's the story of David and Goliath, where a young shepherd boy defeats the mighty warrior of the Philistines. There's the story of the Queen of Sheba, who came to Solomon and was blown away by his wealth and wisdom. There's the story of Elijah, who defeated the hundreds of prophets of Baal, when God showed that he was the true God by consuming the ox on the altar with fire from heaven. There's the story of Jonah, the rebellious prophet, who God turned around using a big fish who swallowed him. There's the story of Daniel in the lion's den, Daniel was there because he prayed to God against the laws of the stated.

There are lots of great stories in the Bible. But this morning, we are going to look at "The Best Story," the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The title of my message this morning is "The Best Story," and we are going to read about it in Luke, chapter 24.

Now, I know that "best" is a subjective label to put on the stories in the Bible, but I do really believe that the story of the resurrection is the best story in all of the Bible. Because our faith is founded upon the resurrection. Paul wrote that if the resurrection of Jesus wasn't true, then "we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). To put it in perspective, if Joshua didn't defeat Jericho, it would be damaging, but not be devastating to our faith. If David didn't defeat Goliath, it would be damaging, but not be devastating to our faith. If Daniel died in the lion's den, it would be damaging, but not be devastating to our faith.

But if Jesus wasn't risen from the dead, it would be devastating to our faith. It would mean that everything that we do at Rock Valley Bible Church is in vain. Paul wrote this, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The story of the resurrection is the best story in the Bible.

Particularly, Luke's telling of the story of the resurrection is the best of all of the gospel accounts. Because he takes us through the emotions of what the disciples went through as they were so discouraged and confused when Jesus was crucified. And then, it brings us through the process of how they came to believe that the resurrection was really true. The drama makes for a great story.

It's also the process through which many come to believe in the reality of the resurrection. There's the empty tomb, but it doesn't quite make sense. Then, there are the words of Jesus, who told of his resurrection beforehand. Then, there are the Scriptures that prophesied of the resurrection. Then, it's the reality of the disciples, those who were eye-witnesses of the account, who came to believe in the resurrection. And it all comes together for us to believe in the resurrection, and have hope beyond the grave.

All of the other great stories of the Bible then, fall into place, increasing our confidence that the resurrection is indeed true. So, I trust that by the end of my message today, you will agree with me that Luke's account of the resurrection is "The Best Story" of the Bible. If you follow along in your Bible, my message will make more sense.

Now, before I begin reading Luke 24, I want to set the context. Early in the gospel of Luke, we read about the birth of Jesus. He was a miracle baby, born of the virgin Mary. We celebrate this every Christmas.

Much of the gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus, his miracles and his teaching and his conflicts with the Pharisees. He healed lepers (Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19) and paralytics (Luke 5:17-26). He cast out demons (Luke 4:31-37; 8:26-39) and gave sight to the blind (Luke 18:35-43). He calmed the storm (Luke 8:22-25), and fed the five thousand (Luke 9:10-17). He taught his disciples to pray by precept (Luke 11:1-13), and by example as he would often slip away and find desolated places where he could pray (Luke 5:16; 6:12).

Though Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38), he had tremendous conflicts with the Pharisees. Because, he confronted their religious abuse upon the multitudes. The Pharisees liked "to walk around in long robes, and [loved] greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts" (Luke 20:46). They "devour[ed] widows' houses and for a pretense [made] long prayers" (Luke 20:47). Jesus came challenging their religious system they had developed and the power they had enjoyed.

When the Pharisees challenged Jesus to answer questions intended to trip him up in his words, Jesus stood up to them and answered them all and the religious leaders "became silent" (Luke 20:26). These religious leaders saw that their power was being threatened, and so, they

bribed one of Jesus' disciples, who betrayed him and handed him over for a mock trial before these same religious leaders. With all of their political clout, they intimidated Pontus Pilate to deliver Jesus over to be crucified, even though Pilate found no guilt in him (Luke 23:4). neither did Herod (Luke 23:15).

Pilate said, "I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4). Pilate said, "Nothing deserving death has been done by him" (Luke 23:15). When the Pharisees stirred up the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified, Pilate said, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death" (Luke 23:22). Yet, because of the demand of the crowds, Pilate delivered Jesus over to be crucified (Luke 23:24-25).

But this wasn't some political coup gone wrong. This was totally in God's plan. and Jesus knew it was coming. Jesus knew that he was to be crucified. On several occasions, Jesus had told his disciples what would take place in Jerusalem. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). But the disciples did not understand the plan. "It was concealed from them" (Luke 9:45).

But Jesus knew what would take place. On the night that he was to be crucified, Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). So great was the stress upon his soul, that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Things went according to plan. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried.

Now, in Luke 24 we pick up the story, with the women "who had come with [Jesus] from Galilee" who "saw the tomb" where the body of Jesus was laid.

What I want to do this morning is read through Luke 24, with some running commentary along the way. I want to let Luke tell the story for us.

Luke 24:1-3

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

This is what we find in the first 12 verses. We find,

1. The Empty Tomb (verses 1-12)

Actually, it's what the women found. They didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus, because his body wasn't there. Naturally, they were confused about this. they went to the tomb to anoint the body with spices, but it wasn't there.

Luke 24:4

While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.

This would further disorient these women, as the tombs are normally empty in the morning. Instead, they encounter these men, "in dazzling apparel." As we will see in verse 23, these women believed these men to be angels. It was only right for them to be frightened.

Luke 24:5

And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

This question is essentially a declaration. Jesus is no longer dead. He is alive! Then these two men (or angels), continue on.

Luke 24:6-7

He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

Jesus was clear about these things. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). Now, with the angelic reminder, these women remembered the words of Jesus.

Luke 24:8-10

And they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles.

It's easy to think about what these women told the disciples. "We went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. But when we went into the tomb, his body wasn't there! There were two men there, who looked like angels. They told us, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.' Then they reminded us of the words of Jesus, how he told us that he would be crucified. but would rise on the third day! Do you remember when he told us that? It's true! Jesus has risen from the dead! just as he said he would!"

But the disciples had to see it for themselves:

Luke 24:11-12

but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

The first response of the disciples wasn't faith. It was unbelief (verse 11). They merely "marveled" at the story of the empty tomb. To them, it seemed to be "an idle tale." Many English translations translate this as "nonsense." It seemed to the disciples that these women were talking "nonsense." I don't blame these disciples at all. The resurrection wasn't an easy thing to understand, especially in the moment, it was a

difficult thing to believe.

Then beginning in verse 13, we see some disciples walking along the road, trying to figure it all out. By way of outline, I'm calling this,

2. The Mysterious Man (verses 13-27)

Luke 24:13-14

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

With any major event that takes place in your world, you talk about it. How many of you have talked about the bridge that fell in Baltimore? How many of you have talked about the stabbings in Rockford? That's what these men were doing along the road to Emmaus. They were trying to figure it out. What did the women say? What did Peter see in the tomb? What did Jesus say?

Then, low and behold, Jesus joined them in the walk.

Luke 24:15-16

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Jesus joined these two disciples, but they didn't know that it was Jesus.

Luke 24:17

And [Jesus] said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Picture the scene. They were walking along the way. Another man joined them for the walk. He noticed that they had been talking about something. And Jesus plays ignorant. He said, "What were you talking about?" They stopped walking, as if to make a point.

Luke 24:18-24

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?" 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, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, 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. 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."

There's the story that these men were working through together, about Jesus (verse 19). about his death (verse 20). about their hopes that were dashed (verse 21). about the women finding the empty tomb (verse 22). about how these women had seen angels told them that Jesus was alive (verse 23). about how the disciples had seen the empty tomb as well (verse 24). But they couldn't quite grasp what happened. Then Jesus rebuked them.

Luke 24:25-26

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

And then, Jesus gave a brief Bible study right there along the road.

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Can you image that conversation? Perhaps Jesus begin in Genesis 3:15, that great promise that God gave in the garden, that one day, God would raise up an offspring from the woman, whom Satan would bruise on the heel, but who would in turn, bruise Satan on his head, providing the death blow to him. This is exactly what happened at the cross. The Messiah suffered! The Messiah was bruised on the heel, but he rose from the dead to deliver the death blow to Satan, who was bruised on the head.

Perhaps Jesus continued on to speak about the promise of Deuteronomy 18:18, in which the LORD said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers." The Messiah would be like Moses, who suffered more than Moses as a leader of God? The people of Israel were constantly grumbling and griping and speaking against him. Yet, Moses provided a great deliverance for the people, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt.

This is a bit like Jesus, who was not received well by his people. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11).

Perhaps Jesus continued on to Psalm 2, which speaks of the hatred that the Messiah would face by the rulers of the day. "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us'" (Psalm 2:1-3).

That's what happened to the Messiah. They rejected him. They wanted nothing to do with him. They crucified him. But later in the Psalm, we see the Messiah alive and well: "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Psalm 2:6). That is, though the Messiah was hated and

rejected and killed, he is alive and well, set on Mount Zion, the holy hill.

Perhaps Jesus continued on to Psalm 16, which speaks of the resurrection of the Messiah: "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption" (Psalm 16:10). The implication here is that the holy one would go to Sheol, the place of the dead. But he would not see corruption in that place. He would be raised from the dead before his body decayed in the tomb. This is exactly what happened to Jesus. His body was placed in the grave, but he was risen, never to see corruption.

Perhaps Jesus spoke to these disciples about Psalm 22, which prophesied of the sufferings of the Messiah. "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 'He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'" (Psalm 22:7-8). This happened to Jesus as he was on the cross. He was mocked. Further, David writes about himself (and the Messiah), "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; you lay me in the dust of death" (Psalm 22:14-15). Though Jesus was nailed to the cross, none of his bones were broken. Further, Psalm 22 says, "For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." This describes the scene at the foot of the cross exactly. Worst of all, God would abandon the Messiah upon the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). Perhaps these words would have rung in the ears of the disciples, as one of the last words that Jesus spoke upon the cross. The Messiah suffered these things before entering into his glory.

Perhaps Jesus referred to Isaiah 53 on that road to Emmaus. That great passage that talks about the suffering servant of Israel, who came to save them.

Isaiah 53:4-9

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.
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.
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.
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?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

These words could hardly have been more accurate as to what exactly happened to Jesus. He was despised and rejected. He was pierced and crushed. And it was all for us, as the LORD laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

We find out later that the hearts of these disciples were "burning" within them as this mysterious man spoke with them. Perhaps it was about this time that they reached their home. We read about this in verse 28.

Luke 24:28-29

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 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.

This leads us to our third point this morning. I'm calling it,

3. The House Visit (verses 28-35)

It's when Jesus incognito, visited the home of these men. In verse 30, we read,

Luke 24:30-31

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

This visit of Jesus into the home was brief. It seems as if no sooner did he get there, that he left, or rather, "vanished." But during his brief home visit, Jesus ate with them. And during the meal, Jesus took the bread, and blessed it, and gave it to them (verse 30). Perhaps Jesus said, "This is my body, broken for you," bringing back remembrances to only a few days before, when Jesus broke bread with them at the

Passover. And upon giving the bread to them,

Luke 24:31

their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

It was all coming together. The empty tomb. The testimony of the Scripture. The breaking of the bread. "This is Jesus! He's alive! He is risen from the dead!" No sooner were their eyes opened to recognized Jesus, that he vanished from their sight. It all adds to the mystery and intrigue of this great story of the resurrection.

In verses 32-35, we see the disciples beginning to put the pieces together.

Luke 24:32

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?"

Here they are reflecting upon their walk on the road to Emmaus, and how Jesus interpreted the Scripture about himself. Their hearts were burning, because they were coming to see that it was all coming together. that the Scriptures were fulfilled, right then and there in Jerusalem.

Perhaps, as I tell this story, your hearts are burning as well. As you see the reality of the resurrection! As you share in the discovery and the realization of these disciples. This ought to give a genuine joy. This ought to give us a hear to tell others.

This is what happened to the disciple in this home. And they couldn't stay there! They had to go and tell the disciples in Jerusalem. And though it was late and dangerous to be out,

Luke 24:33-35

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.

Apparently, after Jesus vanished from the disciples in that home, Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter as well. So, when they told them of their experiences with Jesus on the road, the eleven disciples were certainly more receptive. You can only imagine the sorts of discussions that they had, as they compared notes, of the things Jesus said. of the Scriptures that were fulfilled.

Luke 24:36

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"

He had vanished earlier. Now he appeared again to the eleven disciples, and to those who had returned from Emmaus. It's really, further proof of the resurrection, as Jesus appeared to them again! This is my fourth point:

4. The Further Proof (verses 36-43)

Their reaction is justified.

Luke 24:37

But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

If someone merely appeared to you in your house, you would be frightened, especially if it was someone that you had just seen die. A few weeks ago at Rock Valley Bible Church, our dear friend, Andy passed away. If he would appear us, I'm sure that we would be startled, thinking we saw a ghost.

Jesus comforted them with these words:

Luke 24:38-42

And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Notice all of the ways that Jesus proved himself risen from the dead. He speaks with them, understanding the difficulty it would be to believe. He shows them his wounds. He gives them opportunity to touch him. He eats with them. Jesus was no ghost. He raised in his physical body. All of his physical functions were returned. He was able to eat with them. That was further proof of his resurrection.

But still then, they weren't convinced. Jesus asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" (verse 41). It takes more than a risen body to believe in the resurrection. It takes the Lord opening minds. That's exactly what we see, beginning in verse 44.

5. The Opened Minds (verses 44-53)

Luke 24:44

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

This was the lesson that those on the road to Emmaus heard in detail. Don't miss the key sentence to the paragraph.

Luke 24:45

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

This is what it takes to believe the Scripture. It takes God opening your mind to grasp the truth. If God doesn't do this, then you will look upon all that we are doing here at Rock Valley Bible Church as worthless. If you don't believe in the resurrection, you will think that everything we do is vain and empty. But if God opens your mind to see the resurrection, then everything we do as a church makes sense, because the resurrection is true.

They didn't understand before when Jesus told them of how he "must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22). Why could they not understand? "It was concealed from them" (Luke 9:45). The truth was hidden from them. If they had known, events of history may have turned out differently. But they didn't know because it was in God's foreordained plan.

The story continues.

Luke 24:46-49

[Jesus] said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

These are our marching orders! If you believe in the resurrection, you need to go forth and proclaim "forgiveness of sins." Luke continues this theme in the book of Acts (which he also wrote). According to Acts 1:8, this call was to begin in Jerusalem, proceed to Judea and Samaria, and continue on to the ends of the earth. A few years ago we went through the book of Acts, where the main application of the book is Jesus saying, "Be my witnesses!" This is what Jesus calls us to be and do.

Everything that we have seen and heard, we are to proclaim to others. We need to proclaim that there is forgiveness of sins in Jesus. This is the gospel. Jesus is risen from the dead. Everything that he said is true. As he died on the cross, he died for our sins. If we but believe, our sins will be gone and all sufficient merit is all ours in Christ Jesus, not because of what we have done, but because of what he has done.

Jesus promised to send the Spirit who would accomplish all of these things. Before receiving the Spirit, the original disciples were to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). During their forty days in Jerusalem, Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God. Only after the ascension of Jesus did the Spirit come upon them.

Then, Luke finishes with the ascension of Jesus.

Luke 24:50-53

And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

We live in verses 50-53. We didn't see Jesus raised from the earth into heaven like the apostles were able to witness. But Jesus is gone from these disciples. They "returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Even without Jesus, they had joy.

Do you have "great joy" this morning? But resurrection brings joy! This is my aim in preaching this message this morning: to give you a "great joy." I'm not talking about a false joy or fake in any way. But I'm talking about a genuine joy that is wrapped in the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection requires Jesus to be really dead. His pulse stopped. He was cold and in the tomb. But God raised him from the dead. And his resurrection is our hope. And it is our joy!

It is my hope and prayer that you go away from this place this Easter morning with great joy in your heart, having a resting confidence that Christ is risen from the dead. By faith I am with him. I know that someday too, I will be raised from the dead with him because I am trusting in him.

Is this the best story in the Bible?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 31, 2024 by Steve Brandon.
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