

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

DISAPPOINTMENT AND HOPE

Luke 24:13-35

By

Steven J. Cole

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Luke Lesson 114

Disappointment and Hope Luke 24:13-35

A five-year-old boy from Texas was told that the family would visit the Grand Canyon. They described it as much bigger than downtown Dallas. He could hardly wait to see it. When they finally got there, they asked him how it measured up to his expectations. With a little frown, he said, "I thought you said that it was a big *cannon*." He was probably hoping to see them shoot it! When you're hoping for the Grand Cannon, you can be let down even by something as spectacular as the Grand Canyon! (Told by Robert Pyne, *Kindred Spirit*, Winter, 1997).

If your expectations are wrong, you can even be disappointed by God. It's not that God was somehow lacking. He is far more glorious and perfect than we could ever conceive. But often, because of our limited perspective, we feel as if He let us down. We thought that He would do something, but He didn't do it. We thought that we were trusting in the promises of His Word, but they didn't come true. We thought that we were praying in line with His will, but He didn't answer. God didn't come through as we had hoped.

That's where two weary travelers were at as they walked the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus one Sunday. They had been hoping that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would redeem Israel (24:21). But their hopes had been dashed when the Jewish religious leaders suddenly succeeded in crucifying Jesus. They were going home, dejected and disappointed. They were still in shock. They didn't understand why God had let them down.

They were talking about these things as they walked when a stranger caught up to them. He was really not a stranger; He was the risen Lord Jesus Christ. But "their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him" (24:16). The passive voice of the verb suggests that God had closed their eyes from recognizing Jesus. Why would God do that? As we'll see, He had some important lessons to teach them (and us) about trusting in His written Word before He allowed them to see the living Word who was there with them.

The story begins with these two men (or, it could have been a man, Cleopas, and his wife) dejected and sad. It ends with them rejoicing in hope. The overall lesson is that ...

God will turn our disappointment to hope if with His people we will seek the risen Savior through faith in His Word.

The first thing we must acknowledge, although we may not want to admit it, is that, like these men, ...

1. We all face times when we are disappointed with God.

Every good doctor first diagnoses the problem before he treats it. The Lord asks some questions to draw out the source of their spiritual disappointment. There are probably more sources, but we all probably struggle with these:

1) We may be disappointed with God because our expectations do not match His sovereign purpose.

Twice in our chapter it is emphasized that God decreed the death of Jesus Christ. The risen Savior tells these two men that it was *necessary* for the Christ to suffer these things (24:26). Earlier (24:7), the angel reminds the women at the tomb of Jesus' earlier prediction, "that the Son of Man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified." The Greek word translated *must* and *necessary* is a favorite term for Luke (18 times in his Gospel) that points to God's sovereign purpose. Luke wants us to know that God is in charge of history, moving it along according to His sovereign purpose. This is especially true of the greatest tragedy in history, the crucifixion of the sinless Savior. Although it was the worst crime that could ever be committed, and the men who did it were responsible for their wicked deed, God sovereignly ordained it (24:7; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). It did not thwart His plan; it fulfilled it.

The Bible makes it clear that sin is part of God's sovereign plan or decree, but at the same time, God is apart from all sin and not responsible for it. To delve any deeper into this subject is beyond my intellectual ability. If you wish to do so, I refer you to Jonathan Edwards' treatise, "Concerning the Divine Decrees" (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], 2:525-543). But here is how this works out practically: If the worst sin ever, the death of Christ, was a part of God's sovereign plan, then no sin can thwart

His sovereign purpose. And this truth brings great comfort in a time of tragedy if we will cling to it.

I have heard pastors try to comfort grieving people by saying that some terrible tragedy, such as the Columbine High School murders, was *not* God's plan. While they mean well, those who say such things actually rob God's people of comfort. If *anything* can happen outside of God's plan, then He is not absolutely sovereign. If He is not absolutely sovereign, then Satan is in some sense sovereign, at least sometimes, which is a most scary thought! If this were so, we would have no guarantee that God's ultimate purpose will triumph! I find it much more comforting to affirm what the Bible teaches, that God works *all things* after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Even the blasphemies of the wicked antichrist fit in to God's sovereign purpose!

But still, it is hard when we have prayed and hoped for something that we thought was God's will, but then it does not happen. These men had prayed and hoped that Jesus was God's Messiah who would redeem Israel. No doubt they were thinking about political redemption from Israel's enemies. But that was not God's will for His Son at that time. When our expectations do not match God's sovereign purpose, we will have to wrestle with disappointment with God.

- 2) We may be disappointed with God because He has closed our eyes from seeing the truth about Jesus.

Again, this seems unlike God! Isn't it His kind will that His people have assurance, comfort and hope? Why then would He shut their eyes from seeing the risen Savior? The answer is, because He had a better reason and a better time. God also closed the disciples' minds so that they could not understand Jesus' frequent references to the cross (9:45; 18:34). God knew that it was best for them to go through the despair and confusion of the cross before they came out into the full light of the resurrection, and so He closed their minds from grasping the plain statements about Jesus' death.

Even so, God knows what is best for us, and so He sometimes closes our minds to the plain teaching of Scripture for a time, so that we will learn lessons that we never would have learned if we

had understood and embraced it from the start. Spurgeon pointed out that we all are born by nature as Arminians and that God must open our eyes to the glorious truth of His sovereign grace. He tells of his own experience, as a young believer, of sitting in church and not paying much attention to the sermon. Suddenly the thought struck him, How did you come to be a Christian? He said, "I sought the Lord." But how did you come to seek the Lord? The truth flashed across his mind, "I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to *make me* seek Him." He realized in a moment that God was at the bottom of it all, that He was the Author of his faith. From that day Spurgeon ascribed his conversion wholly to God (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:164-165; italics his).

I have believed and taught wrong things, such as using psychology along with the Bible. At the time, I defended myself, saying that I only used that which was in line with biblical truth. When God opened my eyes, He used it to help me grow in repentance, humility, and grace toward others who are in error. But sometimes we can experience disappointment with God because He has closed our eyes to the truth because He has a deeper lesson to teach us later.

- 3) We may be disappointed with God because we have foolishly focused on part of His Word, but not the whole.

The disciples were all quick to focus on the glories of Christ's kingdom, but they were slow to grasp the sufferings that had to precede that glory (24:26). They often thought, "Won't it be great when we're all there, reigning in glory with Jesus!" But somehow they overlooked the Scriptures that predicted the suffering and death of Messiah as the sacrifice for the sins of His people. They thought rightly that Jesus would redeem Israel, but they didn't understand that redemption required the offering of Himself as the Lamb of God!

Notice the emphasis on "all" in 24:25, 27: They were foolish not "to believe in *all* that the prophets have spoken." "Beginning with Moses and *all* the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in *all* the Scriptures." Their fault was in focusing on parts of God's Word, but ignoring other parts.

We often are disappointed with God for the same reason. We like all the promises about the good stuff that God will do for His children! But what about the promise of 2 Timothy 3:12: "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"? Do you have that one in your "Promise Box"? What about Hebrews 12, which promises discipline for all of God's true children? What about the many references to the struggle and warfare of the Christian's walk? If we only focus on part of God's Word, we will be disappointed when trials hit, as surely they will.

- 4) We may be disappointed with God because we are slow of heart to believe His Word.

It is with the heart that we believe in Christ unto salvation (Rom. 10:9, 10). I think that these men had believed in Christ unto salvation. They are described as "two of them" (13:13), that is, two followers of Christ. But Jesus rebukes them for being "slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken" (13:25). Believers may be slow of heart to believe all of God's Word, especially the difficult doctrines, such as the doctrine of election, which confronts our pride. But we will be prone to disappointment with God if we do not believe *all* that is written in His Word.

If these, then, are some of the causes of disappointment with God, what is the cure? Our text shows us that ...

2. When we are disappointed with God, we need to join with His people in seeking the risen Savior through faith in His Word.

There are at least seven parts to this cure:

- 1) Join with the Lord's people.

These two men were not walking to Emmaus alone, but together, talking about the things that had transpired. As soon as they realized that their unidentified guest was the Lord, even though it was late and a two hour walk in the dark back to Jerusalem, they went immediately to share what had happened with the disciples there (24:33). And, to their great delight and astonishment, the Lord appeared again, to the whole group, and they were privileged to witness it! Thomas was not there that first night, and he missed out until the next Sunday when he was there and Jesus graciously appeared again (John 20:19-29). The point is, it was

when they were together, talking about the things of the Lord, that the Lord Himself appeared to them. While the Lord appeared to Peter when he was alone (24:34), to restore him, He did not appear to Thomas when he was alone, but only when he joined with the other disciples.

As American Christians, we are far too individualistic. We come to church for years and sit next to people that we don't even know. We like our anonymity! We make major life decisions, such as changing churches or moving to another part of the country, but we never think to submit our decision to other believers for their counsel or prayer. I have met many Christians who have been hurt by other believers, and so they drop out of church altogether, but insist that they are still following the Lord.

But you cannot follow the Lord as He intended unless you do it in fellowship with other believers. The church is His body, and body parts can only function in close connection with other body parts. If your hand gets hurt and decides that it's because your stupid arm thrust the hand in front of the saw, it would be rather foolish to say, "I'm just going to cut myself off completely from that arm!" And yet, that's exactly what many hurt Christians do! When you're disappointed with God or with His people, don't yield to the temptation to isolate yourself from other Christians! Get with them and talk about what's troubling you.

2) Seek the risen Savior.

While these men and the other disciples were at fault for not believing the report of the women concerning the resurrection, at least they were right in not being satisfied only with the empty tomb. They say, with disappointment, "Him they did not see" (24:24). (*Him* is emphatic in the Greek here.) They wanted to see the risen Savior. It was seeing Him that turned these disciples' disappointment into great joy and hope.

I'm not suggesting that you seek some vision or dramatic experience with Jesus. I believe that most who claim to have had such visions are deceived. Peter commends those who loved and believed in Jesus, even though they had never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8). We who know Christ as Savior should seek to know Him personally more and more (Phil. 3:10). He has promised to dis-

close Himself to those who keep His commandments (John 14:21). Where do we seek Him?

3) Seek the risen Savior in His Word.

Jesus took these men to the Old Testament to show them Himself. "Moses and the prophets" (24:27) is a phrase that means, from all of the Old Testament. I would gladly trade my seminary education for the privilege of being there and hearing Jesus walk them through the Scriptures (by memory), bringing all of it into focus on Himself! The whole Bible centers on Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death on the cross for our sins.

I'm sure that Jesus would have taken these men to Genesis, where God shed the blood of animals so that He could clothe Adam and Eve after their sin. That pointed to Christ, whose shed blood covers our sin. He told them that He was the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). He explained how the ram caught in the thicket that God provided so that Isaac would be spared pictured Jesus' death in the place of sinners. He took them through the Passover and the sacrificial system instituted under the Law. He walked them through Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. While He spoke, their hearts were burning within them as He opened up passage after passage to them.

Many Christians neglect the Old Testament. I believe that there is great profit in reading consecutively through the whole Bible. Don't skip the hard parts and camp on your favorite sections. Read it all, over and over again. As you read, ask God to open your eyes to see Christ in all the Scriptures.

4) Seek the risen Savior in His Word through faith.

Academic learning without faith is not enough. We must believe the Word and act upon it as true. The writer of Hebrews tells about Israel under Moses. They had seen God's mighty works, but they grumbled and did not believe God, and so He did not allow them to enter into His rest. Then he warns, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). We sometimes shrug off unbelief as if it were no big deal. But God connects the words evil and unbelieving. To disbelieve God is to malign Him as

not being good. We must confess our unbelief and seek to believe God's unfailing Word of Truth.

5) Keep a teachable heart when the Lord rebukes you.

Jesus rebukes these two men, and yet they shortly invited Him into their home to hear more! That's the right way to respond to the rebukes of God's Word. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching"—what's next?—"for *reproof*, for *correction*, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). When Paul exhorted Timothy to preach the Word, he told him that the way to do it is to "*reprove, rebuke, exhort*, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). So many in our day want to have their ears tickled by teachers in accordance with their own desires. But if you want to grow closer to the Lord who is holy, you must have a teachable heart when His Word says to you, "O foolish one and slow of heart to believe!"

6) Entreat the Lord to stay with you.

After this wonderful discussion on the road, Jesus acted as if He would keep going beyond their village, but they prevailed on Him to stay there with them that night (24:28-29). Just as the Lord's earlier questions (24:17, 19) were for the purpose of drawing these men out in order to teach them, so His acting as if He would go further was to elicit this invitation from them. They invited Him in and He accepted their offer. He always comes into the heart and home where He is invited.

But notice that although He entered their home as a guest, He quickly took on the role of host and owner. Normally the owner of the home would break the bread and bless it, but Jesus took that role here. If you entreat the Lord to stay in your heart, be prepared: He isn't a polite dinner guest! He takes over!

7) When the spiritual highs end, go on in faith, in the Word, and in fellowship with other believers.

No sooner did these men recognize the Lord than He vanished from their sight. They didn't even have time to ask any questions. Jesus wanted them to know that He is alive, but also to know that they would not experience His physical presence as they formerly had. He would now go to the Father and send the Spirit to be with them permanently. As soon as Jesus vanished, these

men could have become dejected and disappointed. They could have tried to conjure up another great spiritual experience. Instead, they went to gather with other like-minded believers to share what the Lord had done. After that, they went on in faith, in the Word, and in fellowship.

Spiritual highs are wonderful, but you can't live on them. You must learn to walk by faith, to be consistent in the Word, and to gather regularly with other believers to build one another in the things of God.

Conclusion

These discouraged, disappointed men thought that Jesus was dead and gone, when in fact He was the one walking and talking with them as they trudged along that dusty road. He was near to them even though they did not recognize Him at first. When you are disappointed and discouraged, you may think that the Lord is a million miles away. But if you are one of His flock, even though you are being faithless and do not see Him, He is there with you. He has promised, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

Remember, it was to a church that had grown lukewarm that He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). He wants you to open His Word and invite Him to make its words burn in your heart. He wants you to gather with His people and share together in how He is working in your lives. He will turn your disappointment into hope if you will entreat Him to come in and stay with you.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main causes of your spiritual disappointments? How can you anticipate and minimize them?
2. How can God be totally sovereign and yet not be responsible for evil?
3. How would you counsel a person who has been deeply disappointed with God? What should they do first?
4. Where is the balance between walking alone with God and walking together with His people? How can a person who has been burned by fellow Christians recover?

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