

I don't think that I have lived through more confusing times than what the world is experiencing today. Experts and world leaders are all trying to figure out what is happening... and what the proper response needs to be. And then we have plenty who have a political agenda... so they irresponsibly throw confusion into the mainstream of information. ... People are losing their jobs and businesses... quite a few are trying to figure out how to work from home... many are being forced to stay at home and going absolutely crazy. Meanwhile... our national leaders are trying to figure out – which is worse – a fast-spreading virus... or a failed economy. Both will cost lives.

What a time for us to celebrate Easter, huh? ... But on second thought... The original Easter was filled with its own kind of mass confusion. So this year... we might have a unique identity with it...

Today... I want to take you to a passage of Scripture that marks for us... some of the upheaval that surrounded the resurrection of Jesus. I want to talk to you about some events... at the time of that first Easter.

Luke Chapter 24 deals with the immediate aftermaths of Easter... and I think there's an incredible lesson for us here about living through confusing times. The best thing we can have for times like this... is exactly what Jesus saw His 1st Century confused disciples needed. (Do you know what that was...?) ... They were in need of - a burning... and blazingly passionate love for Jesus Christ. ... Folks it is more than time... for us all to move on from merely being people who know the Truth about Jesus (our simple agreement of belief... that He did indeed raise from the dead.) ...

We must be more than people who may be able to cross every theological "T"... dot every "I"... but can't spell victory.

Author Frederica Mathewes-Green... lays out a picture for us of people who hunger for God's presence... in a proper (and more) dramatic way... than what we are accustomed to seeing. She writes:

Picture yourself walking around a shopping mall, looking at people and the window displays. Suddenly, you get a whiff of cinnamon. You weren't even hungry, but now you really crave a cinnamon roll. This craving isn't something you made up. There you were, minding your own business, when some drifting molecules of sugar, butter, and spice collided with a susceptible patch inside your nose. You had a real encounter with cinnamon—not a mental delusion, not an emotional projection, but the real thing.

And what was the effect? Thoughts change. Your desires change. Your schedule changes. Your priorities change. You want more, *now*.

This is what I hope to be used by God today to accomplish. That we would all hunger to know the presence of God... having already begun to smell God's compelling delight. If there is a title for this message it would be: "*We don't need more light – we need heat.*"

As we look to Luke chapter 24... let me give you the background. The icy fingers of death tightened about the hearts of Jesus' followers... in chilling... numbing grief. ... Pessimistic hands prepared his cold body for burial... and laid it in the tomb. ... So deep was their despair... that no one possessed even the slightest thought of resurrection. ... When at dawn on the third day... the women found the tomb empty... but even still no one suspected resurrection. (It appears that they did not believe even after the angels announced he had risen.) ... And when Peter inspected the empty tomb... instead of believing... he went away wondering. ... Two of Jesus'

hapless followers had solemnly taken to a journey back to their home... to a place called Emmaus.

This was a sleepy little village about 7 1/2 miles from the city of Jerusalem. They were trudging along... two forlorn disciples... discouraged and burdened. ... Let's begin in verse 13...

Luke 24:13-16

Now God did that on purpose. I'm going to suggest a reason why to you in just a moment.

Luke 24:17-26

Now... here they are—two of Jesus' followers. Only one is specifically named in our passage. He is Cleopas. But we can easily guess the other. (You see)... Cleopas was the husband... of one of the women (named Mary)... who stood at the cross while Jesus was crucified. So more than likely these two disciples were Cleopas and Mary... on their way home. And they represent what was happening with all of Jesus' close friends. They were all experiencing the discouragement of a confused heart.

These two... discouraged... and confused...trudged along... half-believing... half-doubting. ...They've heard the unbelievable reports about Jesus' resurrection. But that's just it. The reports were so unbelievable(!)... so they were let down in body and in spirit.

Jesus could tell by their countenance that they were discouraged. ... Why were they discouraged? ... Because they misunderstood something. What? ... Well... they had been looking for a political Messiah. They were

hoping that Jesus would come and redeem Israel - and it not happened.
Look again with me at verse 21...

Luke 24:21

They were looking for a **political** Messiah... a Messiah who would serve as their King. Hmmmmpf! Some king. Jesus ended up with a cross for a throne! ... His kingdom now only had the wide expanse of the inside of a dark tomb. ... What had happened to the Kingdom? ... The prophets had prophesied a kingdom. ... The poets had pictured a Kingdom. ... The angels had pronounced and announced a kingdom. ... And Jesus had preached the Kingdom.

But... it had not happened. ... What had happened to these people is that they did not know (as Paul Harvey would have said)... "*the rest of the story...*" ... They had only seen part of the story ... They did not understand that Jesus was turning "Calvary" to "Easter" and soon... into "Pentecost." ... Just like sometimes we don't understand when we're going through our own Gethsemane and Calvary... that He's going to turn our hurts to a hallelujah... and our Calvary to Easter... We only see a part of the story.

I am convinced more than ever that God is using our current situation of the COVID – 19 Corona Virus for His Own purposes... and one day we will know "*the rest of the story.*" God's Word is going out to a greater degree... as church after church is making their sermons available online. ... And there seems to be a great hunger for it... more than I've seen for quite a while.

I have received multiple messages from the folks who broadcast our sermons on Sermon Audio... that listener traffic on their main website has exploded. And I can see that the number of people from around the world who are listening to messages from our church has greatly increased. (The SermonAudio people give me a count.) This may be part of “the rest of the story” of what God is doing... Folks. But I must admit that there have been many times that I have been discouraged and complaintive about our mandated social isolation.

(You see)... these disciples were very much like that... they did not know the full story... and they were sad because of their misunderstanding and unbelief. And get this!... Jesus actually called them “**fools**”...

Luke 24:25

(Did you catch that?) They believed **part** of what the prophets had spoken... but they did not believe it **all**. ... What see here is **the discouragement of a confused heart**. ...So... Jesus met them and He challenged them with the Word of God. ...Take a look now at how He did it.

First of all... Jesus sought **them** out. (Verse 15)...

Luke 24:15

Just as He's done so many times to me... and I'll bet **you** can say that He's done it so many times to you... Jesus caught up with them. ... He did not seek them out to condemn them... or even to excuse them. ...But He did seek them to **claim** them... and to **comfort** them... and He does this for you and I... when we wander. ... (You know... if Jesus would seek us when we

were unsaved sinners... surely He will seek us when we're saved... and wandering away from Him.)

But not only did Jesus seek them... but He caught them. He sought them and He caught them. He drew near to them.

I'm here to tell you this folks... that Jesus has never **ever** lost one of His sheep. Never! ... And it's not because we hold onto Him... He holds onto us.

John 10:25-29 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me,²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

So what He did... He sought them... He caught them... and then He taught them.

Luke 24:27-32

We see in verse 32 that Jesus opened the Scriptures. ... Take careful notice of that - it's so important! ... "*Our hearts burned when He talked...*" but what was it that He talked about...? - the Scriptures!

But it was not enough for Him to open the Scriptures. Go back up to verse 31, "*And their eyes were open and they recognized Him.*"

So here now... are the two things... that the Lord has to open to us... when we're confused and discouraged. (And I am going to borrow from Adrian Roger's insights here...)

First of all... He has to open the **Scriptures**. ... And secondly... He has to open our **eyes**. ... Both are absolutely necessary. ... **Light** without **sight** is no good... and **sight** without **light** is no good. ... It takes absolutely **both**.

Do you remember when we first started with this passage... (just after I read verse 16)... I told you that I was going to propose a reason for why they did not recognize Christ...? ... Well here it is.

The fact that they their eyes were kept from recognizing Him... doesn't necessarily mean that His form was changed... but something happened to **them**. (God doesn't **let** them recognize Him.) ... God... in some way... distorts their vision. ... He does not give them cognition.

Why did God do that? ... Why didn't He say, "*Look, here I am—Now believe... You... who are slow to believe!*"

Because... (Now make sure that you get this...) Jesus is getting ready to go to heaven... and He is doing something very **necessary** for them... that is also something that **you and I** also need. (You see)... We don't have Jesus before us in **physical** form. ... We have the Word of God. ... And what He is doing **now** is putting their dependence (not) upon His **physical** presence with them... but upon the **Word of God**.

(Do you see this...?) ... He's opening to them the Word... He's opening them to the Bible. ... He's opening to them the prophets... and He is

opening their eyes to see Him (from here on)... not in physical flesh and bones... but to see Him by the Holy Spirit - in the Word of God.

We are seeing a transition. He's going back to heaven... but He is leaving the Word... (the written Word)... That is what we have today... to bring Jesus Christ to us... and to make Jesus Christ real to us.

Cleopas and Mary said, "*we knew Him because He opened the Word to us.*" That's how they knew Him. They knew Him now through the Word of God. ... (and get this) "...beginning with Moses and all the prophets "

This tells us... that if you read (even the Old Testament) and you don't find Jesus... you missed it. Go back! ... Standing somewhere in the shadows you will find Jesus ... He is in prophecy... He is in every story and precept... He is in poetry... and all throughout the wisdom literature. Jesus said:

John 5:39 (ESV)

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

All of the Scripture is about the Lord Jesus Christ. But one of the clearest places to see Him... is in prophecy.

Fulfilled prophecy is such a wonderful thing. ... Did you know that there over 333 precise details prophesying Jesus in the Old Testament?

Now... I would like for you to try to picture something in your mind's eye for a moment. Try to imagine a painting of a person (a detailed portrait) of someone... that the artist has never seen... or had any kind of prior description... before painting it. ... Long before the person... (whose image

they are painting) has even been born... they paint his portrait in striking and unmistakable detail. ... That is incredible enough... but now imagine that there is not just ONE artist... but **twenty-five** artists... all painting the same portrait of the individual... and when the person is finally born... the portrait is an **exact** likeness. That is as amazing as the 333 prophecies about Jesus. They are His exact likeness.

Mathematicians have developed formulas over the years to figure out the odds of one person fulfilling just SOME of the detailed prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Peter Stoner is the mathematician and a statistician whose work many of you have heard about. He is the guy who said that for one person to fulfill ONLY eight of these prophecies (far less than the actual 333) has the odds of one in ten... raised to the seventeenth power. ... Peter Stoner knew that most of us don't have a clue of what that means... so he used an illustration.

You may have heard his illustration about filling the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet high... and a blind man finding a single marked coin... with only one attempt. Well that is pretty incredible... but here is another example that I think will also astound you.

Suppose that you wanted to talk to our missionary... Michael Payne... who is in Osan South Korea... but you didn't have his phone number. ... Now there are about six billion people on the face of the earth... and even in the remotest parts of the earth... they all seem to have a cell phone. (That has always amazed me on my trips to Colombia... the Philippines... Malaysia and Indonesia.) Not all of them have telephones... but a good many of them do! ... But let's say that all six billion of them **did** have a cell phone.

... And (here) you wanted to call Michael. But you don't even know the international overseas code for South Korea... So you simply start pressing numbers on your cell phone. Out of the six billion people with cell phones... what are the chances of you having Michael Payne pick up the phone and greet you... on the first try of pressing randomly selected numbers? ... Do you think that's going to happen? ... You would have the same chance as one person fulfilling just eight of the prophecies that Christ fulfilled.

But I'll tell you what... let's just dial up Christ's number through a few prophecies. ... We will start in the Book of Genesis.

Genesis 3:15 says he's going to be the seed of a woman. So right away we know that the Promised Messiah is not some angel or some other creature who is going to redeem us. (That is helpful... isn't it?) ... So we know that we can press the first number on our cell phone correct. ... And then we get to Genesis 9... when Noah and his family come out of the ark. ... Suddenly we know that Jesus is going to be a descendant of Shem, a Shemmite or a Semite. ... Here is the Messiah... He's going to be of a particular race that comes from a specific son of Noah... Not all the peoples of the world are going to bring the Messiah. (Just one particular race.) So now we have a second number to press on our cell phone.

Next we see that He's going to come out of a particular nation of that race of Semites. In Genesis 12 - He's going to be a descendant of Abraham. ... But then we find out that Abraham has a number of descendants... so there has to be a tribe ...of that nation ...of that race ...of all humanity.

And Scripture eventually tells us He will come from the Tribe of Judah. ... But we haven't got all of the numbers yet... so we have to dial another number because He's going to come from a family of that ...tribe of that ...nation of that... race of all ...humanity.

Next we learn that He's got to be of the house of Jesse... of the tribe of Judah... of the nation from Abraham... of the race of Semites... ... But we're not finished yet... we've got more numbers to dial.

There has to be a particular woman. Isaiah Chapter 7 says she is a virgin. ... So you've got a virgin from that family from that tribe from that nation from that race. ... But not just any woman; she has to be a virgin and not just a virgin in any place... but she has to be a virgin in Bethlehem ... of that woman ...of that family ...of that tribe ...of that nation ...of that race.

But let's not stop yet. There's still more numbers... The woman has to give birth to a baby... but not just at any time... she has to give birth to a baby ... at a specified time that was prophesied by the prophet Daniel in Daniel Chapter 9. Daniel pinpointed the year.

And so if you just keep dialing these numbers... on the other end is Jesus... the Son of God. ... We have a very good phone number for reaching Him!

Jesus opened the Bible and began to show them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. And He is just as willing to open the Scriptures to us... and just as willing to open our eyes.

Many missed the blessing of His first coming... because they did not understand the Scriptures... and neither did they believe all of them. They were experiencing the discouragement of a confused heart.

How do you combat that...? What's the cure. ... It is found in the way Jesus worked with Cleopas and Mary. ... So look now at verses 28-29.

Luke 24:28-29

Do you know most of us have about all of God that we want? ... If we don't have any more... it's because we don't want any more. ... Let me show you how often this is taught in the Scriptures (just like it is here.)

There are many times in the Bible... where the Lord looks like He wants to get away from us. ... When Jacob was wrestling with the angel... the angel said, "*Let me go.*" But do any of us really think that Jacob could have held onto that angel (Who was the Lord)... if the Lord really wanted to get away...? I'm sorry but that was as fixed of a fight... as there ever was! The angel said, "*Let me go.*" Jacob said, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*" That's just what the angel wanted to hear.

So many times the Lord seems like He doesn't care. A Syro-phoenician woman had a demon-possessed daughter. She said, "*Master, do something for my daughter.*" Jesus said, "*I just come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I can't take children's bread and give it to dogs.*" Can you imagine him speaking that way? She said, "*Yes, Lord, but even the dogs get the crumbs.*" He said, "*Woman, great is your faith.*"

Great is your faith. There are so many times it seems as if the Lord is trying to get away... but He really wants us to do is press in – but we don't... because we have about all of God we want. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." And so in verse 29... Cleopas and Mary urged Him strongly, "... saying, Stay with us!"

He was glad they said that. ... So he went in and stayed... and they broke bread together. Suddenly their eyes were opened. ... He vanished... and they noticed that their hearts were what...? They burned. Why...? Because He opened the Word and their eyes. Jesus turned up the heat. They got excited... folks! Look at their excitement!

Luke 24:33-35

As we celebrate Easter... lets not just come to the conclusion that Jesus is risen. I hope that you believe that one hundred percent! No... what we all need... especially in these times... is the **BURNING** conviction that Christ is risen indeed Cleopas and Mary ran seven miles back to Jerusalem shouting, "*Hey, it's real! It is real. The Lord is risen indeed!*"

You know what I think most of us need? ... Like Cleopas and Mary... We need to have our hearts set aflame. We need a living faith. He is risen indeed! Amen?

This very moment Christ knows where we are. And He knows the temperature of our souls. He knows whether there is ice or fire. Whatever our state... his method is the same—to meet us on our road (where we are.) ... He delights to bring fire to cold hearts. We need heat!