

INTRO: My preaching professor in seminary, Dr. Chapell, would often remind us that sermons aimed at a general audience reach very few people. He told us that we should write and preach sermons with one or two people in mind. And if a sermon is focused on a few specific people, then it will reach many.

So this morning, Easter morning—going to preach to one or two of you—who are disappointed with God.

You feel as if God has let you down.

You hoped he would do something, but he didn't do it.

You prayed for something and the opposite happened.

God didn't come through as you had hoped.

It may have been the untimely death of a loved one or a miscarriage.

Maybe it was a painful divorce that took place in spite of your prayers, or a broken friendship that has not healed.

Maybe it was a financial problem that hasn't worked out.

Or plans you hoped would succeed that didn't.

It seems that God has not answered and you are disappointed.

You may not have even identified your deepest feeling as disappointment with God.

It may surface in your life as problem emotions like anger, depression or boredom. But underneath, it's disappointment with God himself.

That may seem a strange audience to preach to on Easter.

But that's exactly where these two disciples were as they walked the seven miles to village of Emmaus on first Easter Sunday afternoon.

Deeply disappointed, deeply discouraged, their faces downcast.

But something happened to these two disappointed souls.

They looked at each other in amazement and asked:

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?”

In their lowest moment, their disappointment was replaced with hope.

The burning heart was hope again in God's good plan.

This great disappointment, the death of Jesus was not the end.

God was at work even in what seemed to be the end of their hope.

God was at work doing something bigger and better than they imagined.

And what restored their hope?

Was it a psychological technique? Was it positive self talk?

It was a person.

The risen and living Lord Jesus Christ met them on the Emmaus Road.

Who initiated that encounter? Jesus did.

He came to them in their lowest moment and restored their hope.

The only way that your hope is going to be restored is when Jesus Christ himself, alive, risen from the dead, comes to you, meets you where you are in your disappointment, and gives you hope again.

How does it happen? This story shows us.

So let's look at this marvelous Easter story.

For those of you who like to take notes—two headings:

The causes of and the cure for disappointment with God.

MP#1 The causes of disappointment with God

There are three that we can see in the experience of these disciples

1. You may be disappointed with God because your expectations do not match his sovereign purpose.

What were their expectations?

“We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

Were their expectations met? Did Jesus redeem Israel?

At that moment they would have said No.

Because for them redemption was one-dimensional. It was political. Freedom from Rome’s oppression. An independent Jewish nation.

But the fact is that Jesus had redeemed Israel beyond their wildest dreams.

He redeemed his chosen people from the oppression of guilt, death, and sin.

He expanded Israel to include people of every tribe and nation who trust him.

But he did all of this in a way disciples could not understand at first—the cross.

That was God’s plan, and it had to happen that way.

Jesus said on Emmaus road, “Did not the Christ HAVE TO suffer these things.”

Jesus meant that this had to happen in the ultimate sense.

God has his sovereign ways of doing things and accomplishing his purposes.

We think God can only bless us one way. The way mapped out in our plans.

A pastor once told me about a woman in his church who was deeply disappointed with God that she had never gotten married. He was talking to her about Christ and she said, “I don’t want Jesus, want a husband.”

We’ve all said the very same thing.

We have our expectations for what God’s blessing should look like in our lives.

But God has a sovereign plan that must happen.

There are things in that plan that are definitely not on our agenda, hard things.

But his plan will bring about blessings beyond anything we can ask or imagine.

The sovereignty of God raises lots of hard questions.

Depending on your personality, you may get tied in philosophical knots over it. Remind yourself that the crucifixion of the Son of God was the worst thing that ever happened and at the same time, it was God’s plan for saving us.

So that means every trouble, loss, or pain you suffer is also part of God’s plan for your blessing.

God is working out everything in accordance with the counsel of his will.

2. You may be disappointed with God because you've been kept you from seeing spiritual truth for a time.

Right at the beginning of this story there is a strange remark:

Jesus himself came up and walked along with them but they were kept from recognizing him. It doesn't say why they were kept from recognizing Jesus.

Maybe they failed to recognize him because they never expected to see him again.

Maybe they were grieving so much they didn't get a good look at him.

But what is implied is some sort of divine hindrance.

That God himself kept them from recognizing Jesus, or that Jesus somehow disguised himself from them. Which is strange.

The picture becomes a little clearer when we read another place in the Gospels where Jesus' disciples were kept from seeing and understanding spiritual truth.

Luke 18 says:

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

There is no doubt what Jesus is saying. It's plain as day.

But the very next verse says:

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

If it was God who hid the meaning from them for a time, why would he do that?

And why might he do that to you in disappointing seasons of your life?

In this Luke 18 situation, the disciples weren't ready for the truth of Christ's death.

They preferred to keep the fantasy alive that Jesus was a political savior and that they were going to get the glory for being his followers.

So God hid the truth from them until that false view had crashed and burned.

Then they were ready to see Jesus for who he really was.

The Lord still works that way with us sometimes. He hides the truth in the sense that he lets us live for a time with our self-pity and self-justification.

He closes our minds to plain teaching of Bible for a time so that we will learn hard lessons we could learn no other way.

Right now some of you have Christian friends who have been telling you things.

You went to them with your problems and complaints and they have been telling you the same things for weeks, months, maybe even years.

They are telling you things like, "Wait on the Lord." "Trust the Lord, your life is in his hands." "Be patient, be content, humble yourself under God's hand."

And you think to yourself, They just don't get it.

They don't understand what I've had to deal with. They don't know my pain. But no, like Cleopas, you don't get it.

God is doing something deeper in you, so that when the right time comes, and when you are ready, and have worn yourself out, you will see Jesus anew.

3. You may be disappointed with God because you have focused on part of the truth but not the whole.

These two disciples were Jews, they knew the Bible, they knew the prophecies.

But it seems that they had focused entirely on those prophecies and promises that spoke of the glory and victory of the Messiah.

But what part of the Bible did they completely overlook?

All of those prophecies that spoke of the suffering that the Messiah had to face before he was glorified. Isaiah 53 passages. Suffering servant.

Missing that was huge, because they failed to see the central thing—the death of Christ as sacrifice for sins of his people.

Missed that Jesus would redeem Israel by offering himself as the Lamb of God.

Did you notice the emphasis on the word “all” in Jesus' words to them?

How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken.

And beginning with Moses and ALL the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in ALL the Scriptures concerning himself.

One reason they were so disappointed was because they had focused on parts of the Bible they liked, and ignored the parts they didn't like, so ended up having a completely unrealistic view of the work of Jesus Christ.

Don't we do the same thing? We have favorite promises—nothing wrong with that. But when is the last time you thought about these promises:

“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

“The Lord disciplines those he love and punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

And that is just a taste. You see, it is the pattern that Christ himself has forged.

The crucifixion before the empty tomb, the cross before the crown.

Weeping before dancing.

If we ignore the pattern that Christ himself has set, then of course we're going to be disappointed in trials, hardships, and weeping, because we won't have a context, we won't have a hope.

We won't be able to say: This is terribly hard and I want it to be over, but I know Christ suffered and died before he rose again.

I've mentioned three causes for disappointment with God and some ways for thinking about those things.

Reasoning with ourselves is helpful, but it's not the ultimate cure.

MP#2 Let's consider now: The cure for disappointment with God

The cure is Jesus.

Jesus met them on the Emmaus Road and opened their eyes to see God's plan for their salvation through the death of the Messiah.

The cure for your disappointment with God is when Jesus meets you on your own Emmaus Road and shows you again the big things God has done for you through him.

Jesus has to come to you. He came up and walked with them.

All you can do is go to the places where he often walks with his people. This passage shows us two of those places.

1. Jesus meets you in the Word.

What did he talk about on the road?

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

“Moses and all the Prophets” was a Jewish way of saying the whole Old Testament. He went from Genesis through Malachi showing them that God had to send a Savior who would die as a substitute for the sins of his people so that they could be forgiven and live forever.

Jesus was teaching these two disciples something, recorded here for all Christians.

The resurrected Jesus meets his people in the word.

This is one of the places he comes to you and gives you hope.

Dr. Robert Rayburn tells the story of a Vietnamese man named Hien Pham.

He was a Christian, served as an American military as a translator during the war. When South Vietnam fell he was arrested, subjected to communist indoctrination.

For months he was inundated with propaganda, and it began to take its toll.

He began to doubt the existence of God. He began to doubt reality of Christ.

Finally, he decided to abandon his faith. He decided to quit praying.

His work in the prison was to clean the latrines.

That day as he was emptying cans full of used toilet paper, saw crumpled sheet with English words. He quickly stuck it in his pocket.

Of course, he would have been severely punished if he was seen, being fluent in English, he couldn't contain his curiosity.

Back in his cell he quietly got it out, and the very first thing he saw written across

the top was Romans 8. It was a page from an English Bible.

He literally began to tremble as he read:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life...will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This was the day he was going to quit praying and give up believing in God and Christ, but the risen Lord Jesus met him in the Word—even in that dark time.

When you are disappointed with God, how do you read the Bible?

So often we read it looking not for Jesus, but for advice.

Perhaps you are discouraged because your marriage is troubled.

So read the Bible looking for marriage advice. 7 steps to a better marriage.

Perhaps you are struggling with finances, work—disappointed things aren't better.

So read the Bible looking for principles and advice in these areas.

The Bible is full of good advice about life.

But that's not how you meet Jesus Christ in the Bible, reading it as advice book.

Have to read it to meet Him. Have to want to see Jesus in all the parts.

As you open the Bible your prayer shouldn't be: "Lord solve my problems."

Should be: "Lord, I'm on an Emmaus Road right now. I want to meet you."

And sometimes dramatically, like the story I just told you, but usually quietly Jesus himself, alive, risen, will meet you in the word.

And you will know that he is walking with you.

And when that happens, you start to feel your heart burning again with hope.

You start to feel a little bit of the Christian snarl coming back.

"Bring it on." I'm right with God through Christ and nothing can destroy me.

Jesus meets you in the Word.

2. Jesus meets you at the Table.

When did these disciples recognize Jesus? Urged this stranger to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

God opened their eyes. The time was right. And then they recognized him.

What did they recognize in particular that made them realize it was Jesus?

This is speculation, but maybe these two disciples recognized Jesus

when they saw the nail prints in his hands as he gave them the bread.

Those wounds that had caused them to lose all hope and become disappointed

with God were transformed by the resurrection into an occasion to hope in Christ.
When Christians gather together to worship on the Lord's Day
each one brings with himself or herself wounds suffered.
Here is someone who has buried a mother.
Here is another person with a wayward child.
Here is someone who has been cut to the heart by a cruelty and abuse.

All these wounds, big and small, can cause us to become discouraged.
They can even make us disappointed with God.
So we come to the Table.

At the Table we hear these old familiar words—
On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples
saying, "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you."

And then you receive in your hands the symbols of Christ's wounds—
his broken body and his shed blood.
Think of what you are holding in your hands when you take communion.
You are holding something that is terrible and wonderful at the same time—
the wounds of Jesus Christ for you.

Then Jesus rose from the grave on Easter and what happened to his wounds?
They were transformed into glorious hope for believers.

And if you eat the bread and drink the cup with faith in Jesus Christ,
then Jesus himself, alive, risen, will meet you, and take the wounds you have
suffered, and transform them into occasions for hope in God and not despair.

This is certainly instructive for us as we take Communion.

Every time we come to the Lord's Table we ought to look for and hope for
and Emmaus Road encounter with Jesus Christ.

But this isn't just for taking communion in the worship service.

This is for all of life. Jesus broke bread with these two disciples in their home.

This is for when you are hurting at home or school or work.

This is for when you are at the bedside of aging parents, or when you've gotten
bad news from the doctor, or after a conflict with our teenage child.

You bring those wounds to Jesus, those disappointments.

If God could take the terrible wounds of Jesus and turn them into your salvation
though the resurrection, then he can certainly take your little wounds and redeem
them as well.

Do you believe that? Do you believe your worst wounds can be redeemed?

They can. The resurrection is proof. As you believe, you meet Jesus.

CONC: I know you have heard of the Trail of Tears.

Throughout the 1830s, 40s, 50s the Indians in the South, the Cherokees, the Chickasaws, the Creeks, were rounded up and marched to reservations in Okla.

One of their routes was right through North Alabama.

The Trail of Tears was a historical event. It really happened.

You can trace the route.

But it's more than history, it's a parable of Native American experience.

In a way all Indians have walked the Trail of Tears.

The Emmaus Road story in Luke is a real historical event.

You can go to Israel and see the location of Emmaus.

But it is more than history, it's a parable of the Christian life.

Even though it was just Cleopas and another disciple—

in a sense, all Christians have walked the Emmaus Road at one time or another.

Those times of discouragement, even disappointment with God,

but then Jesus Christ comes along and through his word and table,
sometimes gently, and sometimes dramatically—

he reminds you that he rose from the dead that first Easter—

That he is alive today. And that because he is alive and with you—

you have reason to hope.