

## Come Alongside to Puzzle Out Jesus

### Luke 24:13-35 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" <sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup> The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup> but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup> In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup> but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup> Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." <sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. <sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" <sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

In the world of education, you have people categorized based on their learning styles: visual, auditory, & kinesthetic. Visual people have to see it with charts, graphs, pictures, etc. Auditory people learn better by hearing and talking things out. Kinesthetic learners learn best when the information is tactile, that they are doing something with their hands. I'm an auditory learner, which is probably one of the reasons why I can talk a lot. Sorry.

I think the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus may very well be auditory learners as well. It's the third day since Jesus was crucified, and now these two men "were talking with each other about everything that had happened." (verse 14) This is probably more than a speculative conversation as one of the verbs in the next verse translated as "discussed" can carry with it the idea to argue or dispute.

Then you hear Cleopas' answer to the question, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (verse 17), and you get the impression that they are trying to put all the pieces together to puzzle out the meaning of the last couple of days. Well, there was this Jesus of Nazareth guy. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. He was handed over and sentenced to death by our chief priests and religious rulers. We had hoped that he would redeem Israel, free us from the Roman rule. And then, get this, it's been three days since he died, but some of our women told us that they went to his tomb and didn't find his body; instead, they had a vision of an angel telling them that Jesus was alive! Some other of our companions also went and found the tomb empty but didn't see angels nor did they see Jesus. What picture do all these pieces make?

Do you remember the last puzzle you put together? It's been a while for me, but I remember some of the best practices. You start by separating out all the edge pieces and then put them together to form the border, to frame the puzzle. As you're searching for those, you also start putting similarly colored pieces together as they probably go to the same section. And, maybe the best practice in putting a puzzle together, you put the box art up to see the whole picture to figure out how all these pieces fit together. If not, if we just focus on the individual pieces without the whole picture, it's going to take a long time to put that puzzle together, isn't it?

Do we try to make sense of the Bible, of God's Word, by looking at the individual pieces instead of holding up the whole picture? Do we take individual passages by themselves and then try to make them fit with other passages, and yet something feels off? Do we ignore the surrounding context - the verses before and after? Do we not even think about the original setting of where it was written, who the author is, to whom he is writing? To put the pieces of the Bible together this way is like the person who decides that they will open the Bible up to a random page, point without looking, read the passage, and thinks that God will tell them what to do there. In the joke version of this, the reader opened to the passage of Judas hanging himself. He figured that wasn't right. He closed the Bible and opened it again. This time the random passage read, "Go and do likewise." That picture isn't coming together.

Although you may not do the random passage thing, maybe you do something similar when someone asks you what you believe. What do you say? Does your brain go through a rolodex of Bible things you've learned trying to decide what to say? Do you pick something that encompasses the beating heart of your faith or one nuanced teaching? When someone asks you what your church teaches, do you say, "We believe the Bible is inerrant." "We believe in a triune God." "We practice close communion." "We are pretty strict about what women can and can't do."? Do we focus on one teaching or the whole picture?

Now, there is good reason to outline and spell out individual teachings and topics from God's Word. We call that practice Dogmatics or systematic theology, which is putting our beliefs in an organized, categorical system, for ease of reference. But can we be so focused on those details, those individual teachings, that we lose the bigger picture?

It seems that the disciples on the road to Emmaus had lost sight of the bigger picture of the Bible as they were trying to smash the puzzle pieces together of all that happened over the last few days. It's not until Jesus comes alongside them and says, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (verses 25-27)

Jesus holds up for these auditory learners the big picture of what they were trying to puzzle out. God's Word, from beginning to end, is all about Jesus Christ and him crucified, what God has done and is doing to save all of humanity from their sins, their wrongs. All the pieces were already there in front of them. Throughout Jesus' crucifixion account, you find prophecies about the Messiah, the Christ, from Isaiah, the Psalms, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Exodus, Numbers and even more. Yes, he had to ride in on a donkey and cleanse the temple. Yes, he had to be betrayed and handed over to the Jewish religious leaders for 30 silver pieces. Yes, he had to be pierced for our transgressions. Yes, even being pierced, he couldn't have any of his bones broken. Yes, the soldiers did have to gamble for his clothes. Yes, he was going to die, and then, yes, he was going to come back to life!

Jesus fulfilled more than 324 prophecies in the Old Testament related to the Messiah! This was always how God planned it to be in order to make us right with him, to rescue us from this world and this life broken by sin. The Messiah would suffer all these things to pay the price for our sins, to take our sins on himself to redeem, buy us all back from our sins and from the devil. He would substitute his perfectly lived life for ours because none of us live perfection. He would be raised from the dead, proving that God accepted his payment on our behalf and so we have been made holy, perfect, and right with God. This is what the entire Bible was leading us to. The whole picture has always been all about Jesus and what he did that has made us right with God right now.

You know that there is so much more to say on this, so many more prophecies fulfilled, so many more teachings to explain – and in due time. Jesus probably had 30-60 minutes to have this conversation with these two auditory learners on the road to Emmaus. With the time he had, Jesus held up the picture to put the pieces of the last 3 days together, to see how these pieces of suffering and death and resurrection made the whole picture of how we are right and perfect with God now.

There are people in your lives that you're already coming alongside. And God will keep putting people in your life that you can come alongside with. How will you hold up to them the complete picture that God came into this world to be our perfect substitute, that he did everything perfectly for us, that he died to pay for and take away all the things we do wrong, that he was raised from the dead to make it certain to us that this is already accomplished and done? Will you take the Bible passages, the events in life, that people are wrestling with and struggling to piece together and show them whole picture of what Jesus did for us? When we talk about our church, why we go, what we struggle with, can we hold up the whole picture to show the living hope that he have, what Jesus did that gets us through each and every day?

Much like a puzzle, some pieces of God's Word are going to be easier to fit together to show the whole picture of Jesus and what he did for us rather than others. We can't unload a firehose of Bible passages on people – even though I'm prone to do so. Recognize that you are not going to put all the pieces of the whole puzzle together even a 60 minute timeframe, let alone the 20 minutes for this sermon. That's why you take breaks when putting the puzzle together. You come back to it. You size up more pieces. You read more Bible passages. You piece them together always holding up the complete picture of what God has already done for us all.

Jesus came alongside these two disciples on the road to Emmaus to hold up before them the whole picture from the pieces of the last few days, to see that Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection was always God's plan to completely pay for and remove our sins from us and then also cover us with Jesus' perfection making us whole and complete before God right now. With whom will you come alongside to help them put the pieces together to show that whole picture of how Jesus is our completeness? God be with you and bless you as you do so. Amen.