

“Close Encounter of the God Kind” (Luke 24:13-35)

Good morning, brothers and sisters. My name is Cleopas.¹ I am a Jewish man² who lived during the time of Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible doesn't share anything about me, but that's okay with me. My personal background is not important; what is important is my personal experience.³ I want to share with you an experience I had that has affected my entire perspective in this life and the life to come.

Scene 1: The Meeting (24:13-16).⁴ One day, my neighbor and I traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. Passover is a week long religious festival that celebrates the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians.⁵ While we were there, remembering God's goodness to our people, we learned that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified. After the death and burial of Jesus,⁶ I was traveling home with my neighbor⁷ to my hometown of Emmaus.⁸ Over the course of the seven mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus,⁹ we were sadly rehearsing the death and burial of Jesus. At points the conversation actually became rather heated.¹⁰ I was tired, frustrated, and emotionally spent. This was one of the most discouraging conversations of my life. I was incredibly disappointed with the events that had transpired. I had so much confidence in Jesus of Nazareth. I genuinely believed that He was God's Messiah who would bring peace to the world. I was confident that He would set the Jewish people free from Roman oppression.¹¹ I assumed I was living in the age in which God breaks into history. Needless to say, when I learned about Jesus' death and burial, my hopes were dashed!

As my neighbor and I continued to debate and commiserate, a man appeared and began walking with us. The man seemed to appear out of nowhere, but we didn't think much of it. We were caught up in our own discussion. We assumed that he caught up with us as he too traveled back from Jerusalem. What was a bit odd was the stranger never introduced himself, yet he chose to walk alongside us on the road to Emmaus.

Scene 2: The Conversation (24:17-27).¹² As we were walking along, the stranger abruptly joined our conversation. He asked us, “What are these things that you are talking about?” My neighbor and I stopped in our tracks. I turned to him with sadness on my face and tears in my eyes and replied, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem that is unaware of what happened?” I was shocked! How could this man be so oblivious? Was he so caught up in his own affairs that he didn't concern himself with the events of the day? I eyeballed this stranger with a look of irritation and disgust. He then had the audacity to ask us once again, “What things are you talking about?” I couldn't believe he hadn't heard the news. I confess, I wanted to say, “If you're that ignorant, why don't you just go on your merry way and mind your own business?” But being the gracious man that I am, instead I replied, “We are talking about **‘Jesus the Nazarene,¹³ who was a prophet¹⁴ mighty in deed and word¹⁵ in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered¹⁶ him to the sentence of death, and crucified him’**” (24:19-20). I was hoping that this would jog the stranger's memory, but he seemed to look at me with a blank expression, so I kept talking.

I explained to this stranger that my neighbor and I were confident that Jesus was going to redeem Israel. We expected Him to abolish Roman rule and set free captive Israel. After all, the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be a powerful ruler. We were counting on this! We were fed up with how Rome was treating God's chosen people. We were anxious for Jesus to completely obliterate Rome—to wipe them out of existence! But of course when we found out that Jesus had been crucified like a common criminal, we realized that we should be expecting another messiah that was yet to come. Talk about discouraging. This type of news doesn't just ruin your day or your week; this type of news can ruin your entire life.

Interestingly, some of the women who believed in Jesus were at His tomb early on Sunday morning. But they did not find His body. They returned saying that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive. Some of the disciples who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women had said, but Jesus was no where to be found. I confess, I did not believe the account that the women shared.¹⁷ For the record, I was not impressed by their report, only astonished by it.¹⁸ I wanted to see the resurrected Jesus.¹⁹ Since I wasn't able to see the resurrected Jesus, I assumed that these women hallucinated. Don't get me wrong, they meant well. They loved Jesus and wanted to believe that He was alive; but they were gullible and tragically mistaken.

As I was finishing my sentence, the stranger interrupted me and said, **“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary²⁰ for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?”** (24:25-26) A fool is a person who does not allow the Scriptures to influence his thinking or behavior.²¹ Apparently, this stranger felt like my neighbor and I failed to properly evaluate God's Word.²² I took this as a personal affront. I didn't feel like a fool. Who did this stranger think he was? How could he make such a judgment call about us? I was preparing to say, “You've got a lot of nerve, mister.” I desperately wanted to give the stranger a piece of my mind. And I was going to do just that when all of a sudden he began teaching us the Scriptures. He explained how the Messiah can be seen everywhere throughout the entire Old Testament.²³ He said, “Consider Isaiah 40 and its promise of a forerunner (Luke 3:4-6), Isaiah 61 and its proclamation and realization of deliverance (Luke 4:18-19), Psalm 118 and its call to receive one who comes in the Lord's name (Luke 13:35) and its warning that the rejected stone will be exalted (Luke 19:38), Psalm 110 and its promise of a shared rule with God and an exaltation to come (Luke 20:42-43), and Daniel 7 and its picture of the Son of Man coming on the clouds (Luke 21:27).”²⁴ He also preached a sermonette from Isaiah 52-53 and talked about the Messiah as a suffering servant that had to come and die.

As the stranger wrapped up his eloquent Bible study, my neighbor and I stopped and stood there with our mouths open. School was in session. This man had an amazing understanding of God's Word. We had never heard anyone teach with such authority.²⁵ We felt like we were in the presence of greatness. We began to wonder to ourselves if this stranger was a humble and unassuming Rabbi.

Scene 3: The Meal (24:28-32).²⁶ As the setting sun welcomed in the evening and the exciting conversation on the road came to a close, we arrived at Emmaus. The stranger bid us farewell and continued walking. I had the sense that he was hoping we would invite him in, but he didn't seem to want to force his presence on us.²⁷ However, my neighbor and I were thoroughly enjoying this stranger's uncanny insight into the Scriptures. And in my culture hospitality is assumed, especially at night. Traveling in the dark was difficult and dangerous. So I decided to invite the stranger to have dinner and spend the night with us. Besides, we were anxious to hear more.

The stranger readily accepted our invitation. So we entered my house, made some small talk, and then reclined for the meal, as was our custom. To my amazement, our guest took the place of host. This was the first sign that something was not as it should be. In a Jewish home it was always the head of the house (the father, the grandfather, or the eldest brother) that took the place of host and was responsible to pray over the food, bless the table, and break the bread. The stranger preempted this established order.²⁸

I was completely unprepared for this. As much as I respected this stranger's Bible knowledge, I felt like this was disrespectful. This man was not honoring my authority as the head of my home. The fact that he acted as the host shows that he thought he was the most important person present. Now I readily admitted that his knowledge of the Word was astounding, but this did not give him the right to usurp me in my own home. I just had to say something. After biting my tongue the entire trip home, I couldn't remain silent another moment. Every man has his limits and I had finally reached mine.

As I began to open my mouth, the stranger took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to us.²⁹ At that very second (BAM!!!) it hit me like a carpenter's 2x4—this was not a mere man...this was Jesus! My neighbor and I had been walking and talking for the last several hours with Jesus! God had opened our eyes.³⁰ We were beside ourselves. We were embarrassed...we were humbled...we were awed. God sovereignly kept us from recognizing Jesus until He wanted to reveal Him to us.³¹

Then all of a sudden: Poof! He vanished.³² Did we imagine the whole thing? Did we just imagine the stranger looked like Jesus at the end? Then it dawned on me: The women were right (24:1-12)! (Now isn't this always the case, men? Women are always right. I wish my father had taught me this when I was growing up. He could have saved me a lot of grief.) I should have known that the women who testified of the resurrection of Jesus truly did see the risen Jesus.

Unfortunately, with Jesus' disappearance there was no time to ask any questions. But my neighbor and I pinched one another to make sure that this series of events had really happened. We then quickly debriefed. We both admitted that while Jesus was teaching us our hearts were "burning within us."³³ It was as if we had a case of spiritual heartburn. Jesus Himself had lit a fire under us.³⁴ We knew we would never be the same.

Scene 4: The Report (24:33-35).³⁵ After Jesus vanished, my neighbor and I instantaneously agreed to make the trip back Jerusalem. Even though this would mean logging another seven miles, we were anxious to talk with Jesus' disciples. We were so eager that we could not keep the good news to ourselves. So we left Emmaus and made the long trek until we arrived back in Jerusalem. All the way, we talked about Jesus and the teaching that we heard from the Old Testament. Upon our arrival at Jerusalem, we discovered that Jesus had also appeared to Peter.³⁶ We then began to relate to the disciples how we met a stranger on the Emmaus Road who was eventually revealed to be Jesus Christ our Savior.³⁷ Yes, that's right, not Jesus the Nazarene, not Jesus the prophet, but Jesus Christ our Savior. I finally came to see that the suffering and death that I thought had disqualified Jesus as Messiah, in fact uniquely qualified Jesus to be the Messiah. *God opened my eyes to the real Jesus.*³⁸ While we walked on the Emmaus Road, God kept me from recognizing Him. But in God's time and in His way, He opened my eyes to see the real Jesus.

I am here to tell you that *God can open your eyes to the real Jesus.* But like me, you must realize that Jesus Christ had to suffer and die. He had to suffer and die for your sins and for mine. In fact, through His death on the cross, Jesus made it possible for mankind's sin to not be counted against him. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross completely satisfied God's hatred for sin. When Jesus died, God's wrath was poured out on sin. This was all a part of God's perfect plan. Jesus then rose from the dead to demonstrate that He is God.³⁹

Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me may have eternal life." All that you must do is believe in Jesus Christ; the very thing that I failed to do. But when God opened my eyes and I met Jesus, I believed and I've never been the same. My perspective in this life has changed. More importantly, my perspective for the life to come has changed as well. I have peace, hope, and assurance that I will spend eternity with God because of the work of Jesus Christ. Today, will you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior? Will you let God open your eyes to the real Jesus?

Copyright © 2008 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044, www.timelessword.com

Scripture References

Luke 24:13-35

Proverbs 1:22-25

1 Peter 1:10-11

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Psalm 2

Psalm 16

Psalm 22

Study Questions

1. Have I encountered the resurrected Jesus in a personal way? Have I placed my faith in Him? When did I first do this? What led me to make this life-changing decision? How have I experienced Christ personally since I first believed in Him as my Savior?
2. What is my present perspective of Jesus? Is He merely my provider, my friend, and a good moral teacher and example or is He my Lord? How can I correct my view of Jesus if it is currently out of balance? Will I be honest with myself and acknowledge that I have not been walking with Jesus as my resurrected Savior and Lord?
3. In what ways have I seen Jesus in the Old Testament? Would I be able to explain to someone where the Scriptures speak about Jesus "beginning at Moses and all the prophets" (24:27)?
4. How has Jesus opened the Scriptures to me? What was my response? How have I appropriated my knowledge of God's Word? Do I have a lot of Bible knowledge and little application of my knowledge? Am I merely a hearer of God's Word or am I a hearer and a doer (James 1:22)?
5. If I have placed my faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus, how will this impact my spiritual life? What commitments is Christ asking me to make to His Word, His church, and others? How will I grow as a follower of Jesus Christ the remainder of this year? Who can help me in this process? Will I ask this person to begin to assist me in my spiritual growth?

Notes

¹ Liefeld notes “Only one of the two (Cleopas) is named (v. 18), probably because he was known to at least some of Luke’s readers. One tradition identifies him as an uncle of Jesus, brother of Joseph, and father of Simeon, who became a leader of the Jerusalem church (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11; cf. Ellis, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 894). This is not the same man as Clopas (John 19:25), though the two names are variant spellings of each other.” Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke: Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), Electronic ed.

² In Luke 24:20 Cleopas says, “...and how the chief priests and *our* rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him.”

³ Cleopas and his traveling partner are not necessarily disciples of Jesus. My friend, John Correia, suggests, “I think the key lies in seeing the women reporting to ‘all the rest’ in 24:9. Luke has been very careful to delineate audiences, and I think that his reference to ‘all the rest’ (*kai pasin tois loipos*) could easily be a reference to anyone and everyone who would listen. Luke doesn’t say ‘to the disciples,’ he says ‘to the rest.’ I think he means ‘to the rest of the population in Jerusalem.’ The reaction of the eleven is covered in 24:11 and 12, while the men on the road to Emmaus reflect the attitude of ‘the rest.’” E-mail correspondence with John Correia, March 18, 2008.

⁴ The account has a four-part structure: the meeting (24:13-16), the conversation about recent events (24:17-27), the meal with its startling revelation (24:28-32), and the return to report the event (24:33-35). See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Anchor Bible series* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 1559. Another suggestion is: The opening conversation of “the stranger” (24:13-24); the Lord’s exposition of the Scriptures (24:25-27), and the supper scene in which the disciples recognize Jesus and recall how he “opened the scriptures” to them (24:28-32). See E. Earl Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke: New Century Bible Commentary* (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1974), 276. Yet, another possibility is: Disciples in Conflict Flee Jerusalem (24:13-24); The Character of Jesus Revealed (24:25-30); and Disciples with Renewed Hope Return to Jerusalem (24:31-35). See Walther, O. Kenneth, “A Solemn One Way Trip Becomes a Joyous Roundtrip! A Study of the Structure of Luke 24:13-35,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 14 (1981): 65.

⁵ The term is derived from the Hebrew *pasach* which means “to pass over.”

⁶ For Jesus’ background in Nazareth and as a Nazarene, see Luke 4:34 and 18:37.

⁷ Nothing else is known about Cleopas or the identity of his companion. It may have been his wife. Morris has suggested that the unnamed disciple may have been Luke. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 367. The two disciples were not the only ones to whom Jesus appeared. This point is significant, because the resurrection is witnessed by many different believers. First Corinthians 15:5-8 gives a short list of Jesus’ appearances. The multiple reports in this passage indicate how widespread the testimony became. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 617.

⁸ The Emmaus Road account is only recorded in Luke’s Gospel.

⁹ Emmaus (lit. warm springs) was about seven miles west of Jerusalem, toward the Mediterranean Sea. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Luke*, 2008 ed.: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/luke.pdf>, 270.

¹⁰ The discussion in 24:15 seems to have been intense, since the word used (*syzetein*) suggests strong debate (cf. its use in Luke 22:23; Acts 6:9; 9:29). Bock, *Luke: NIVAC*, 612. See also the rendering of the NET, which translates the word “debating.” In Luke 24:17, the stranger [Jesus] uses the word *antiballo*, which has the nuance of “arguing” or “debating.” The word is used only here in the NT.

¹¹ Luke seems to suggest that these men are unbelievers. They appear not to have recognized that Jesus was more than a prophet or a political Messiah but the divine Son of God. See also Constable, *Notes on Luke*, 271.

¹² The major point surfaces in the contrast between the travelers’ report of recent events (24:19b-24) versus Jesus’ teaching about what must take place (24:25-27). Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1903.

¹³ For Jesus’ background in Nazareth and as a Nazarene, see Luke 4:34 and 18:37.

¹⁴ For background on Jesus’ prophetic ministry, see Luke 4:25-27; 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19, 35:13:31-35.

¹⁵ The phrase “mighty in deed and word” was used of Moses in Acts 7:22. Pate notes that this description may have identified Jesus as a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18-19). C. Marvin Pate, *Luke: Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 471.

¹⁶ The “delivering up” (*paradidomi*) of Jesus to death and crucifixion recalls Luke 9:44; 23:13; 24:7.

¹⁷ These two disciples were among the skeptics mentioned in Luke 24:11.

¹⁸ Bock, *Luke*, 1914.

¹⁹ See also “Doubting Thomas” in John 20:25.

²⁰ Luke uses the Greek word *dei* (“it is necessary”) to make the point about the divine design. These things “have to” be, since they are part of God’s effort to restore relationship with humanity.

²¹ The adjective *anoetos* (“foolish”) only appears ten others times in the Scriptures: Deut 32:31; Ps 48:13, 21; Prov 15:21; 17:28; Rom 1:14; Gal 3:1, 3; 1 Tim 6:9; Titus 3:3. The two usages in Proverbs are particularly instructive.

²² The rebuke is for failure to believe the promise of Scripture, a theme that will appear in Luke 24:43-47 as well. See NET Study Notes.

²³ The early church recognized the suffering of the Messiah in passages like Pss 2; 16; 22; 100; Isa 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12.

²⁴ Though this passage only gives a general reference to the promises in the Law and the Prophets, the specific texts in view have been noted throughout Luke. Bock, *Luke*: NIVAC, 616.

²⁵ Jesus was known as a man of authority. See the following accounts in Luke’s gospel: Luke 4:32, 36; 5:24; 7:8; 9:1; 10:19; 12:5; 20:2 [twice], 8; 22:25.

²⁶ Sailhamer notes, “It’s is no doubt significant that precisely these two features of the witness of the early church are likewise stressed in the book of Acts: proof from Scripture (Ac 2:14-28) and fellowship around the breaking of bread (Ac 2:42).” John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 483. Marshall writes, “In the reading of Scripture and at the breaking of the bread the risen Lord will continue to be present, though unseen.” I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: New International Greek Testament Commentary series* (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1978), 900.

²⁷ See Klaus Issler, “Commitment: Seeking the God who Hides” in *Wasting Time With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 127-128.

²⁸ Daniel Hill, *The Gospel of Luke: Grace Notes* (), 334.

²⁹ This act surely recalled Jesus’ actions at the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:14-23) and the feeding of the 5,000 (Luke 9:10-17). See Pate, *Luke*, 474. The wounds in His hands may not have been since Luke did not mention them.

³⁰ The expression “their eyes were opened” is unique in the NT. The theological passive *dianoigo* is used with a variety of objects: womb (Luke 2:23), Scripture (Luke 24:32; Acts 17:3), mind (Luke 24:45), heaven (Acts 7:56), heart (Acts 16:14; 2 Macc. 1:4), ears (Mark 7:34-35), and eyes (Luke 24:31; Gen. 3:5, 7; 2 Kings 6:17). The travelers recognize Jesus. Luke uses language that reverses what was said about their lack of recognition in 24:16. Bock, *Luke*, 1920.

³¹ Luke said that their eyes were opened (passive voice, cf. 24:16). Someone did it for them. Clearly God gave them understanding. God is the One who reveals His Son to people by His Spirit.

³² The verb “vanished” (*aphantos*) appears only here in the NT.

³³ This idiom could mean that their hearts were grieved at Jesus’ convicting words on the road (see Ps. 72:21 LXX), but more likely means they felt a strong urge to respond to Jesus’ powerful words (see Ps. 38:4 LXX; Jer. 20:9). Mark Straus, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1, Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 499.

³⁴ Bock, *Luke*, 1920.

³⁵ The NASB gives the impression that the men from Emmaus are speaking; however, the eleven disciples are the ones who are speaking (see NET; NLT). The eleven disciples tell Cleopas and his neighbor that indeed Jesus was raised, and He appeared to Simon before He appeared to them.

³⁶ No NT writer described this appearance in detail (cf. 1 Cor 15:5).

³⁷ Bock writes, “There is perhaps no better commentary on this passage than Hebrews 1:1-4. God has spoken to us in his Son, who, as heir of all things, has sat down at the right hand of the Father, having made purification for sins and become superior to the angels, reflecting in the process the name, nature, and role of Son. There is no greater privilege than knowing the Son of God. He is known only through the recognition that God raised him from the dead to become the centerpiece of his promise and plan.” Bock, *Luke*: NIVAC, 618.

³⁸ While this could have something to do with the differences in Jesus’ resurrection body, the passive suggests that God intentionally prevents their recognition until the moment of revelation (see 2 Kings 6:17 for God’s opening blind eyes to spiritual realities). Straus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, 499. It is worth noting that the lack of recognition of the raised Jesus occurs elsewhere (John 20:14-15; 21:4). Geisler and Howe note that there are many reasons why Jesus was not immediately recognized by His disciples: dullness (Luke 24:25-26); disbelief (John 20:24-25); disappointment (John 20:11-15); dread (Luke 24:36-37); dimness (John 20:1, 14-15); distance (John 21:4); and different clothes (John 19:23-24; cf. 20:6-8). See Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 397.

³⁹ See Rom 1:4 where Paul writes that Jesus “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”