

His Story in You

Luke 24:13-35

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In 1990 I had the incredible privilege of traveling to Eastern Europe as the Iron Curtain was falling. As we approached the border of Romania, we got rid of all Christian literature. I buried some books in a bag in the dirt in Hungary. Some of my friends had been involved in smuggling bibles across the border, but on this trip, we were just smuggling our intentions and ourselves. Within a mile of the border we had to guard our conversations due to the Romanian high-tech listening devices. At the border, guards with machine guns approached our vehicle. They weren't concerned about drugs or contraband fire arms. They wanted to know if we had Bibles. They checked our trunk and our luggage. It turns out they were disappointed – Romania had just been liberated by Revolution – They were disappointed, for they each wanted a copy of the book that had been outlawed for 45 years. THE BIBLE.

The Bible is the most popular and most illegal book in the world – most hated & most loved, most feared & most despised. It's certainly the most banned – even in this country. It's hugely controversial to even discuss it as literature in public schools, even though no one can argue that it's by far the most influential book in Western Civilization and indeed the whole world.

In many countries you can lose your life for possession of a Bible. Yet on my shelf at home is The Book of Mormon, The Bahgah Vahd Gita, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind and The Koran and no one's worried about it. I can't think of any country that outlaws the Koran, and in Muslim countries it's protected by law and by guns. But go outside and say the Bible's full of baloney and no one will shoot at you.

WHY IS THAT?

WHAT MAKES THE BIBLE SO DIFFERENT?

WHY WAS THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT SO THREATENED BY THE BIBLE? (Turn to neighbor and ask these questions. Feel free to say "I don't know" or "It's a stupid question." Don't worry about impressing anybody.)

Answers from the Congregation:

It has power to give freedom; it's truth; it can be revolutionary; it gives absolutes; it's eternal; it gives hope; it's powerful; it's the Word of God; it speaks of love; Satan hates it

WHY WAS THE ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT SO THREATENED BY THE BIBLE?

A. Because it's true? You have to guard lies in ways you don't have to guard truth.

There is incredible historical and textual evidence for the Bible's veracity:

20,000 ancient manuscripts, New Testament documents dating back to 130AD, Old Testament documents dating back to a few hundred years before Christ. The historical and textual evidence for Scripture's veracity is far greater than that of any other ancient literature.

There is incredible archeological evidence for the veracity of Scripture. My archeology professors Boyous Ayad, Ayad Girgis, Paul Hanna at CU used to say: “Students, all that stuff in the Bible, it’s true.” It’s a treasure trove for archeologists.

It has great internal consistency, but it’s not mechanical consistency. It’s not what you’d expect if someone was just making it up.

It’s true, but the Dictionary is true... the Romanians had Dictionaries.

B. Because it’s powerful – “Living and Effective.” Is that why the Romanians feared it?

Charles Spurgeon said “The way you defend the Bible, is the way you defend a lion. You just let it loose.”

It’s powerful, but not always... I mean, yours may be sitting on your shelf, collecting dust, demonstrating very little power.

SO WHAT’S THE KEY TO UNLOCKING ITS POWER? HOW DOES IT BECOME “LIVING AND EFFECTIVE?”

A few years ago Michael Drosnin wrote some best seller called The Bible code (encrypted messages in Scripture). It’s actually a practice that goes back a few hundred years, with students of Jewish Hezbollah. Supposedly Drosnin predicted Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination and that the Red Sox would win the World Series in 2004.

However, Drosnin’s Bible code has also been used to unlock hidden messages in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. But as far as I know, *Moby Dick* wasn’t banned in any country. So what the key?

WHAT’S THE KEY TO UNLOCKING SCRIPTURE’S POWER?

Some people think its Seminary or Bible school. In Seminary I took courses on Greek and Hebrew... also Exegesis (understanding a text) and Hermeneutics (interpreting and applying a text). It’s stuff like language, genre, historical context, theological context, textual criticism – it’s all really helpful. And now, you can get Bible software that can do more than years of language study in Seminary. I use Libronix Bible software – you can get it online and it’s really amazing to see what it reveals.

Well, education and scholarship are tremendously helpful. However, the Bible is largely the story of how the educated Bible scholars just didn’t get it. They didn’t get it, while shepherd boys, fishermen, carpenters, slaves, prostitutes and tax collectors did. If education was the key, couldn’t the Romanian government just outlaw Seminaries rather than Bibles? That would have been far easier.

SO WHAT’S THE KEY TO UNLOCKING ITS POWER AND MEANING?

Two weeks ago, we talked about how the Bible is personal gospel. It’s good news addressed to you – it’s a love letter. Reading a love letter in faith that it is addressed to you, makes it very meaningful and powerful. The Bible is a love letter.

Last week, we talked about the fact that it's a Stack of Love Letters, tied with a ribbon... That comprises a story and stories reveal persons. The person is Jesus. The Person is also the Logos, the meaning, the Plot. Jesus is the Beginning and the End – the Plot. We talked of how the plot changes the meaning of every event in our story, producing a communion of stories – a communion of persons.

So when we read the Bible with faith in the plot, we lose ourselves in the story, and then find ourselves in the story. For the story has found its place in us → so we become the story.

Last week we didn't have time to look at the text I was aiming at, so I'd like to read it this week and then take a look at how the key unlocks its power and meaning and makes it our story.

I began last week's sermon with the story of a little boy in WWII. He lost his family and his home in the Luftwaff bombing. Leslie Weatherhead found him and asked him who he was. He replied "I ain't nobody, nothin'." He'd lost his story.

Well, the two men in our Bible passage feel like "nobody, nothin'." They just watched their story get destroyed on a cross. But in a few paragraphs, they go from "nobody, nothin'," that can't make sense of Scripture, to "somebody, somethin'," that is Scripture.

This is Luke 24: 13-35:

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

(as if their blindness had a purpose... perhaps your blindness has a purpose)

And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?"

(Literally, Jesus the Logos says, "What are these *logoi* you throw against each other?")

And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And he said to them, "What things?"

(Do you really think Jesus doesn't know? He asks them questions because they don't know. Perhaps He wakes dead men slowly so they don't die of shock.)

And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should

suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus Himself is the KEY.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going father, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

Here’s a really important question: Where did He go? For He said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Jesus Himself is the key that unlocks Scripture. The plot is the key to a story. But this plot is also a living person.

They key to understanding Susan’s love letters in college really wasn’t the concept that they were love letters or that they formed a story, or that I could read and decipher language, genre, context and culture and plot. The key to understanding Susan’s love letters was Susan. She wasn’t a concept; she was a living presence in my life. So for me, the word had become flesh. (And lo, is seated in the first pew.)

The word became flesh for us 2000 years ago in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus of Nazareth appeared to them on the road that day. Now you may say, “That’s just great – the Person of Jesus came to them - that day. But where is He now – this day?”

Well, He said, “Lo, I’m with you always.” And He “gave us His Spirit.” Now you may say, “Great! But where’s His Body?” That’s a great question... Where is His body?

Well, in this passage, Jesus himself applied the Word to His disciples or maybe I should say Jesus applied His disciples to Himself (the Word). Almost like they become the Body of the Word...

Let’s look at how it happens - I have 10 points:

1. First, it happened while they were walking – it’s a process. It did not happen in a school or at a church meeting. Don’t leave Scripture in school or church or on a night stand by your bed. It takes on meaning in life, when you take it walking. And yet if you never study, never memorize, never read in the first place, you really can’t take it walking at all. So I hope you set aside some time to study it, read it, and memorize it, so that you can take it walking.

A rabbi was asked a question by a pupil, referring to Deuteronomy 6:6 – “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart.” “Why is it said this way?” the pupil asked. “Why are we not told to place them *in* our heart?” The rabbi answered that it is not within man’s power to place the divine teachings directly in his heart. “All that we can do is place them on the surface of the heart so that when the heart breaks they will drop in.”

The hearts of those two disciples were broken and Jesus Himself, the Living Word, the great farmer, showed up and dropped the seed – Word of God – into the most fertile soil. The most fertile soil is a broken heart. Scripture says, “We are God’s field.”

2. It often happens in the place of disappointment, where your dreams die, where you “lose your life.” The Scriptures have never meant as much to me as they have in the last couple of years, as my heart was broken and my dreams died.

Now think about these two, they said, “We had hoped He was the one to redeem Israel.” They had hoped that Jesus would establish the nation-state of Israel and drive out the Romans. They had a very worldly hope just like most, in the nation-state of Israel today. But now they had just watched as all their dreams were nailed to a Roman tree. They thought they’d be assigned cabinet posts in Jesus’ new government... they’d be “Somebody, somethin’.” But now they were “Nobody, nothin’.”

Well, you and I know that their dreams were not too large, but too small. If you’re a follower of Jesus and your dreams die, it’s not because they were too big, but too small... not that they were too great, but too little.

“You lose your life to find it.” “You have to lose you little dreams to receive His dreams.”

He doesn’t only redeem the little nation-state of Israel; He redeems an entire creation from inside-out, and for all eternity.

Yet, the seed begins to grow in the soil of a broken heart. He’ll break it. Jeremiah 23: “Is not my word like a fire, declares the Lord? And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” We have a stone heart and Jesus, the Living Word, will crack it open to plant Himself – the eternal seed.

3. It often happens through confusion and through questions.

Remember Jesus is the Word, the God-man that wrestles Jacob, transforming him into Israel. Jesus will ask questions and feed us questions. He’ll make us wrestle with Him – the Truth.

I met a friend this week who sometimes attends our church. He said, “Peter, I’m an agnostic atheist. I used to know the answers. I spent 2 years in Seminary, but now I’ve given up faith. In Seminary and at church, they wouldn’t tolerate my questions. They told me that I just had to “have faith”, but I desire “the truth.””

The irony is that my friend may have more faith in Jesus than most of the students at that Seminary, and that’s because Jesus is the Truth, and to seek the truth, you must have faith in the truth. Even if you don’t yet know Truth is a person, and His name is Jesus.

If people say “don’t ask questions” – “just have faith” – they probably have very little faith in the truth, who is Jesus. Jesus said “Seek and ye will find.” To seek is to question. I suspect that Jesus will make you ask questions in the place your old dream died or even to make the old dreams die in order that you might seek Him.

I suspect that Jesus is feeding my agnostic friend with questions, just like Jesus is feeding these two disciples with questions. He says, “What are you guys wrestling about?” And then “Tell me about these things.” And they tell him about the women at the tomb and the vision of angels.

4. Pay attention to strange women and visions – Jesus will ask about that. And then they tell Jesus how some of the men conducted empirical research and found the tomb to be empty.

5. Pay attention to science – evidence in the physical world.

6. Pay attention to heartburn – evidence in your heart.

If God is a person and He made you for Him, perhaps this is the best evidence for the validity of His Word... that it finds a place in you, that you desire Him... (the Truth, the Light, Love Himself)... that you Hope.

They said “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road while He opened to us the Scriptures.” Pay attention to heartburn out on the road, and in the Scriptures.

You know on the road you’ll see a sunset or hear a song or your kids will do something, and your heart will jump with hope and joy.

Maybe you couldn’t sleep, so you’re up late watching old movies, like E.T. E.T. has descended into our world from another world and in him is life. Adults can’t understand him and so they want to dissect him and gain his power. However, the children love him. They know him and enter his world and his kingdom. He dies, but lives. His heart burns with light, then as he leaves this world, ascending into the heavens, he touches little Elliot on the forehead with his lit-up finger and says, “I’ll be right here.” And you start weeping.

Pay attention to that – It’s not hormones; it’s the gospel.

Pay attention to your heart burning with faith, hope and love, out on the road.

Pay attention to your heart burning when you read Scripture.

And why don’t we? Isn’t it because we’ve hoped and been disappointed? And so we’re afraid to hope again? Well, if your hope is in Jesus – God’s Word – it will not return void. “Hope will not disappoint us.”

7. Don’t be slow of heart.

Jesus said, “Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

Satan teaches us to have a slow heart, in fact, a hard heart. So we’ll be controlled by this world, and limited in our ability to love. “But love hopes all things, bears all things, believes all things and endures all things.”

Sometimes I get scared that I've overestimated the love of God.

Is that possible?

Is it possible for you to get to Heaven and hear God say, "I know that Peter said I was super-duper loving, however I'm only kind of loving – sorry to disappoint you!" I don't think so – GOD IS LOVE.

- And the Prophet says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end."
- And the Prophet says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."
- Isaiah says, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance" (45:23)
And "All the end of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:10)
"All flesh shall come and worship before him." (66:23)
- Jeremiah tells us "God will not be angry forever." (3:12)
- Ezekiel tells us "The son of man prophesies to the dry bones and they live." (37:11)
And that "Sodom will be restored." (16:55)
- Zephaniah tells us "All the people will call on the Name of the Lord."
- In the Psalms, David says "All the ends of the earth shall turn to the Lord, all the families of the nations and before them shall bow all who go down to the dust."
- Peter preaches in Acts 3:21 that all the prophets prophesied a time when God would restore all things.
- And then the greatest prophet, Jesus Himself, from the throne in the Revelation 22:5, He cries out "Behold I make all things new."

When I read those prophecies my heart burns with hope: HOPE that Jesus died for all, that He paid for all, that He will redeem all, that He will make all things new, that Hades – Hell – is not the Last Word. My Jesus is the LAST WORD. For He's the END.

I hope it, I hope it, I hope it.

And the religious establishment tells me that I can't even hope it... unless I also confess that it's an impossible hope. Impossible for God. And yet Jesus stands next to us on the road, and He whispers in our ears "Do not be slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken." A slow heart is a dull heart – an ungraced and ungracious heart. "All that the prophets have spoken."

All means ALL, and so make no mistake – there is a lake of fire, and Sodom was destroyed with that fire. There is a realm of the dead and time as we know it will come to an end, and the earth will be consumed with fire. And if that's a contradiction for you, please understand Jesus didn't say, "Explain all the prophets have spoken"... He said, "Believe all the prophets have spoken." And "All the prophets have spoken" "All the promises of God find their yes", find their fulfillment in one person – one man named Jesus... crucified and risen from the dead.

So Jesus says "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter His Glory?"

Suffer then Glory. That's the plot.

8. Don't be afraid to go to the frightening places.

- a. On the road
- b. In Scripture

On the road, Jesus' questions took those disciples back to the place of their greatest fear – Golgotha – the Hill of the Skull. There they watched as the Messiah, the Son of God cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

All horror movies ever made... All the nightmares ever dreamt are but faint echoes of what Jesus endured and what they witnessed.

But the very place of the greatest suffering was about to be revealed as the Greatest Glory. “For this is the plan for the fullness of time... to unite all things in him, making peace by the blood of his cross.” You see, that's the plot. But you can't get to Easter without going over the Hill of the Skull. So don't be afraid to go to the most frightening places on your road and in your life with the Word of God. For that's where you're bound to see Christ's glory.

Of course the most frightening place on anyone's road is their own guilt and shame. Don't be afraid to go there with the Gospel, for God's Glory is grace. A Savior is most glorified where you most need saving. Walk into the frightening places on your road with Scripture and walk into the frightening places in Scripture. For you know the plot – he's good.

Many of the ancient Jews avoided prophecies like Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 and Zachariah 12 -- prophecies of the Messiah suffering. Yet it was those very prophecies that revealed God's Greatest Glory, His heart, and how He makes “all things new.”

The places that have most terrified me in Scripture are also the places that have most blown my mind with glory. I used to be scared to read most of the Old Testament. I was really bothered by Genesis 1-3. I was petrified of The Revelation and the lake of fire. I hated Jesus' stories about Gehenna and the eternal flame in Matthew. But now, those frightening places are my favorite places. For it's there I see the Glory of God → that on a cross and descended into Hell, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” That's what Scripture says.

So... Jesus is Everywhere in Scripture and Jesus is Everywhere on the road. So let Him show you His glory and don't be “slow at heart” to believe.

9. Let Jesus show you Jesus everywhere. He's the Living Word. Let Him reveal Himself in the written word.

In verse 27, Jesus shows them the things concerning Himself in all of Scripture. You know all the letters in Susan's stack of letters – they all came together in one person, one face, saying “Peter, I love you.” And all these letters and concepts in Scripture: anger, wrath... as well as compassion and mercy... all these apparent contradictions. They all come together in one battered face, crying from a cross “Father forgive them.” Scripture says “we've seen the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Jesus is still showing us His Glory – He is the plot. He is the beginning and the end. Invite Him in and He's your beginning and your end.

10. That's #10. They invite Him in to abide with them and to commune with them. Then His story becomes their story; and their story becomes His story.

You see, it really makes a difference when we know the plot. For when we don't, we walk into "nowhere and nothing." And when we do, we are "somewhere and something," and all things work together for the good.

So when you're walking down the difficult road, shrouded in darkness, disappointment and fear... When you think your story is over and death is the end, ask yourself: Is this how His Story ends? For History is your story. Jesus is the end and that changes everything.

Movie Clip from *Big Fish*:

In the movie Big Fish, Edward Bloom is walking through a dark forest on his life's journey. He narrates his own story saying the following:

Ed Bloom:

"That night,
I reached two conclusions.

The first was that a dangerous path
is made much worse by darkness.

The second was that I was
hopelessly and irrevocably lost.

These woods would become
my graveyard.

As difficult as it was to reach Spectre,
I was fated to get there eventually.

After all, no man can avoid
reaching the end of his life."

As Ed Bloom says these things, the trees start to move. Animated, they reach out and grab Ed. They strangle him and begin to swallow him, down into the "lower parts of the earth."

Ed Bloom:

"And then I realized
this wasn't the end of my life.

This isn't how I die."

As soon as Ed remembers that this is not how his life Ends (for he had had a vision of the end – his end – where he is immersed in a river, becomes his true self and swims away). As soon as Ed remembers his End, this "lying End" has no power.

Edward literally remembers his baptism. Baptism is dying with Christ and rising with Christ. He remembers the plot and steps back on to the way.

Jesus is the plot and Jesus is the way and Jesus is your end. And this isn't a trick. When you have faith in the plot, your story becomes His story and His story is history.

Did you notice we're reading about these two no name disciples 2000 years later? And did you notice we're reading their story and His story – the Word of God? And did you notice that these disciples changed the world?

And this is how it happened: They invited Jesus in to abide with them, commune with them, and then somehow the guest becomes the host. And He took bread and broke it and gave it to them. He gave Himself to them, body broken. All at once they forget themselves and see Him. Then He vanishes from their sight! Where'd He go? Where's His body?

Well, His Spirit is in them and they are His Body. They run back to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel. Not because they applied the Word to themselves. No, the Word applied themselves to Him... Himself. They are the Body of Christ – Created in God's image, with a Word.

It wasn't far from Emmaus, in another little town named Bethlehem, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in perfection. Herod shook and the angels sang – it was Christmas. But now the Word is still taking on flesh – a body. We're not perfect, but we're being perfected – the Body of Christ. The in-carnate Word.

And by the way, I found out why the Romanian government was so terrified of Scripture... because of that. It has a way of taking on flesh. And in Romania, I met some of that flesh: persecuted Christians.

My friend Peter rolled up his sleeves and showed us his scars. They weren't really his scars; they were Jesus' scars, for they were emblazoned on His body. In Romania, the Body of Christ, filled with His Spirit, believed the Gospel, forsook the fear of death and singing hymns, caused a revolution. Peter was a part of it and told me the story. The dictator was deposed on Christmas Day.

And so, tonight, here in this place, we've walked down the road a while... talked about Moses, talked about the prophets. And now we remember that Jesus, the Word of God, took bread and broke it, saying "Take and eat. This is my Body." In the same way after supper, He took the cup, saying "This is the New Covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins."

And so if you don't want to be "Nobody, nothin'," stuck in nowhere... If you're ready to surrender your dreams and surrender your life, for his dreams and his life... He wants you to be somebody, somewhere... He wants you to be part of His story. So he invites you to the table.

So come to the table. Ingest the plot. It's Christmas in July.

Prayer: So Lord Jesus, the Living Word... would you be the air that we breathe at The Sanctuary Downtown? And would you make us a Biblical church, your very body? In Jesus name I ask it, Amen.

Well, this is the end of a 3-week series on Scripture, and I've preached it because I hope that we would be Biblical. Not so we can judge other people, and not so we can learn a bunch of rules, but so that we can discover who He is and who we are. "As a man thinketh, so is he." Just who do you thinketh you are? Paul said "It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." The Word in me. The Word Incarnate. So read your Bible to learn your story, and live your story. In Jesus' name, Merry Christmas!

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