

Living Beyond the Shroud

From the series, *Encountering Jesus: The Gospel of Luke*

Luke 24:13-32

By Dr. David H. McKinley

As we turn to this passage of Scripture in Luke 24, we meet two of the disciples of Jesus who have left Jerusalem. They're making a journey to a town called, *Emmaus*, about seven miles outside of Jerusalem. They're on a road trip—not driving, but walking.

As you know, you can have all kinds of experiences on road trips. They can be miserable, and they can be memorable. Both of these experiences are a part of what we will read in our passage. What were these two disciples talking about on the afternoon of the first Easter?

"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" (Luke 24:13-16).

Jesus comes and steps into the conversation, but they don't recognize Him. They don't know who He is.

"And he said to them, 'What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, **looking sad**" (Luke 24:17, *emphasis added*).

The conversation between these two disciples was not delightful, celebratory, or exciting. It was sober, serious, and somber. They were dejected. They felt defeated. They were despairing. On the road, they are trying to process what's just happened in the rear-view mirror of their lives, and trying to come to terms with what God is doing.

"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 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'" (Luke 24:18-24).

These two disciples, these two followers of Christ, share a conversation—a conversation, trying to process and reflect on all that had happened.

Walking the Emmaus Road is...

1. A Journey of Disillusionment and Despair

These two disciples are not celebrating the great news of Easter; they're not rejoicing that Christ is alive. To the contrary, they did not recognize what they had seen and heard. They could not reconcile what they had experienced as they watched Jesus taken and beaten, and ultimately, nailed to the cross. They saw Jesus bleed and breathe out. They saw Him taken and wrapped in the shroud, and put in a grave. They knew it had ended in death. Instead of feeling triumph, they felt complete dejection and frustration like some of the other disciples who had run, scattered, and hidden. They were struggling with raw emotions and the shocking reality of how things had ended with Jesus.

Somehow that is so very relevant to our conversations over these last few days as we and our nation, our world, have been rocked and shocked by the horrific death of young Charlie Kirk and all that has unfolded around his shooting. The one thing that was true of the disciples then, and the one thing that is true of us today, is simply this: life isn't turning out the way we planned or expected!

The predictable has become the shocking. Instead of the predictability that life will go on, we are shocked with the interruption and the impact of what happened. And in many ways, these two disciples were struggling, feeling as though God had let them down. Therefore when they paused to respond to this Stranger who walked up, the Bible says they were looking sad. Their faces, their countenances had fallen. They were bearing grief.

Many of us have been grieving over these past few days because of the horrific sight and terror of seeing a young man, a strong believer, a courageous Christian, assassinated in a public arena while simply speaking the truth in love.

Charlie Kirk is a martyr because of who he was and what he believed in Jesus. The reason Charlie was rejected and ultimately, the reason violence was taken against him was because he sought to live out his faith in the public square.

As news of this shooting came to my office, I turned on the television and sought to process what was being said. Trying to come to terms with this horrific image, I immediately reflected back to my childhood. I remember being six years old when JFK was shot in the public square in Dallas, a city I later lived in. But I'll never forget seeing those images as a child. I lived in the city where Martin Luther King was assassinated. Of course, I lived in the days when Robert Kennedy was assassinated as well.

Yet suddenly, here I am looking at a young man and dynamic Christian—not a politician, but a believer—who believed in the importance of moral clarity in life, and who spoke out and challenged a

new generation to follow Christ, to stand up for truth, and to defend freedom. This young man's life had been taken, leaving a wife and two children without a husband and father. He was martyred!

As I continued to watch the unfolding news in my office, I also reflected on the fact that just a few feet from where I was sitting was Simmons Hall where the Shroud Experience had on display a life size sculpture of Jesus and how He looked once He had been taken from the cross. I thought about the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by this world, and was beaten and crucified and put to death, certainly for our sins and for the sins of the world. The world rejected Jesus, and it was that same Son of God who was sacrificed for us and said to us, *"As the world has hated Me, so it will also hate you."* (See John 15:18).

Charlie Kirk was killed because he loved Jesus and the world hated who he loved.

I couldn't help but think about the martyr, Stephen, mentioned in the book of Acts. Stephen was a young man who the Bible tells us had a brilliant mind and strong spirit. When Stephen spoke publicly, people could not resist the defense of his arguments. His apology was strong, so there was an effort to come against him. Ultimately, he was taken and stoned. But I love the fact Scripture says that when Stephen stood before the council, he had the face of an angel. Stephen was a young man who smiled and radiated his faith, yet he was the first martyr of the church.

I had to remind myself that martyrdom was a regular experience for the first century church; it's a rare experience for us in America. As the news came out this week about the sudden, sad, and shocking loss of this young man, Charlie Kirk, how do you think the first century church felt when word came out that Stephen had been stoned?

How do you think they felt when they heard Saul had organized a group against Stephen? How do you think they dealt with the losses of Peter and Paul and many of the disciples as they were put to death? How many times did they have to find resilience in their faith because of the fact that the world hated them and resisted them? We are living in a world at war with God. The hostility of the world toward those who believe is real!

Charlie Kirk is not the only tragedy we've seen in recent days. In fact, I saw an interview with Charlie Kirk earlier in the week where he reflected on the horrific death of Iryna Zarutka who was murdered and slaughtered on the public transit system in Charlotte—the callousness and ugliness of what happened to that young lady who escaped Ukraine and came to America for a better life.

I thought about the young mother and grandmother who just a short distance from where we are this morning was gunned down by a man on a parking lot in our own community with a five year old little boy watching. And all that I could think in the midst of this was just how evil this world is apart from God.

I want to be very clear and make sure you understand something theologically this morning: evil is not environmental or social. It is a deep problem of spiritual reality in the human heart that is corrupt

without God. There is nothing but evil in the core of humanity, and the only One who can deliver us from the sin, the evil, and the darkness of the world is our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, said it this way:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
(Jeremiah 17:9).

The propensity and capacity of the human heart to bring murderous, slanderous, deceitful, and horrible impact to other human beings are beyond our ability to understand or describe. But the Bible speaks about this repeatedly. When Paul was writing to Timothy about his ministry, Paul said this:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared” (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit” (2 Timothy 3:1-4a).

The Bible’s picture of humanity is not one of the goodness of man; it’s the wickedness of the human heart. That’s why as we face the impact of loss and while we look and talk about the importance of justice in the world, let us never cloud this reality: the reason God allows government to stand is to bring law and order to a lawless and disorderly people who will do anything to satisfy themselves.

C.S. Lewis once said, “When sin and evil are treated as illnesses to be rehabilitated, justice gives way to false conceptions of ‘compassion.’ The innocent are harmed, and the evil thrives.”

That’s what we see today. Evil is thriving in our world. While we can’t explain moments in time like what we’ve seen, we know they’re real. The reality is we are living in a time (as I’ve just read) where these moments are real and regular, and we have to deal with them. The easiest thing to happen is for us to lose heart, to become faint and overcome with fear. That’s just the opposite of where God wants us to be.

“If you’ve ever tried to hold faith in one hand and disappointment in the other, this walk to Emmaus is for you. If you’ve ever looked for God and not seen God until later—until hindsight or communion or a whispered moment—then this is your road too.” —Pastor Jason Elder

Walking the Emmaus Road is...

2. A Journey with Discussion and Debate

While the two disciples are walking, processing, talking about, and saying, “Can you believe that this happened?” suddenly, this stranger walks up and walks alongside them. As they’re talking about what has happened, Jesus comes!

What a beautiful picture this is to remind us today that God often shows up in moments we didn’t expect and in ways we didn’t initially understand! He does things we don’t expect and in ways we can’t understand. It doesn’t make sense to us.

But here Jesus steps into their grief, their disillusionment, and their despair. He listens to what they’re saying and what they’re talking about.

“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” (Luke 24:25-27).

What was their issue? They thought Jesus was going to be the political Messiah who was going to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. They had all these ideas based upon, well, what they had heard about the prophets. However, what they had missed in Scripture was that the whole storyline of Scripture was not about Israel and its kingdom; it was about Jesus and His Kingdom. Therefore Jesus went back and said, *“Let Me show you here in the Word that it’s all about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.”*

Where did Jesus take them? How did He initiate the conversation? What did Jesus do to bring resolution to their doubts and disillusionment? He took them to the Scriptures, and that’s where you need to go.

In the midst of the uncertainties of life—the things we can’t understand and reconcile—the one place we go again and again is to the truth of the Scripture.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

Our strength is in the power of Scripture—the Word of God, the revelation of God. And God is not finished. He has not forgotten or forsaken His people. God will be faithful to His Word!

So the Bible tells us in Luke 24 that Jesus took them on a walk through the Bible.

“Perhaps Jesus started in Genesis 3:15, the first promise of a Redeemer, and traced the promise through the Scriptures. He may have lingered at Genesis 22, which tells of Abraham placing his only beloved son on the altar. Surely He touched on the Passover, the Levitical sacrifices, the tabernacle ceremonies, the Day of Atonement, the serpent in the wilderness, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53,

and the prophetic messages of Psalm 22 and 69. The key to understanding the Bible is to see Jesus on every page. He did not teach them only doctrine or prophesy, He taught 'the things concerning Himself.'" —Warren Wiersbe

We need to be reminded today about "the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27b).

My goal today is not to talk about Charlie Kirk, even though this experience has been shocking and has touched all of us at one level or another. My goal is to help you see Jesus because what made a difference in the life of Charlie Kirk was the commitment of his life—live or die— to stand up for Jesus! That's the issue we need to address in our lives today as we deal with all this.

"This story is profoundly relevant today. We live in a world filled with confusion and disillusionment, much like the disciples felt. The passage teaches us that Jesus walks with us, even when we don't recognize Him. It calls us to be attentive to how God reveals Himself in Scripture and community."
—Rev. Michael Johnson

Walking the Emmaus Road is...

3. A Journey Including a Dinner and a Discovery

The two disciples are walking along and talking with Jesus. The whole thing started by these disciples asking Jesus, "How could you not know? How have you not heard all of this?" Then they begin to hear all the things Jesus has to say. They get to (I guess) the outskirts of the edge of Emmaus and this is what the Bible tells us about Jesus:

"So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, 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" (Luke 24:28-31).

As the two disciples with Jesus neared the town, Jesus said, "*Okay, see you later, guys.*" And they responded, "*No, no. Wait! Come in! We want you to come back. We want to keep hearing more.*" And so they went into the house and set up for a meal. The Bible says that Jesus actually picked up the bread and blessed it. That means He prayed a blessing over the bread, and then He began to hand it to them. "*Would you like some bread?*" I'm sure you've asked that before in a restaurant, "*Would you like some bread?*"

As Jesus offered the bread, look at what they saw... the nail prints! They saw the scars and the evidence that the One who was with them was the One who had been in Jerusalem nailed to the cross, brought down, wrapped in a shroud, and put in a tomb. In that moment they realized Jesus was alive! Yet the Bible says,

"And he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31b).

Poof! Jesus vanished! I don't get it. I can't explain it. But it was something Jesus could do in His resurrected body. What a moment that transformed everything in their lives! The fundamental, foundational claim of the Christian faith (just as Dr. Jeremiah Johnston affirmed with us last week) is this: Jesus Christ is alive! He's alive!

Let's not forget this truth even in the darkness, and in the depths of the grief and pain we endure humanly.

I heard about a pastor and three guys in his discipleship group. One day the pastor was trying to get the men to evaluate their life and faith. The pastor said, "I want to ask you a question. When you die and there's a funeral and people are standing in front of your casket looking at you, what do you want them to say?"

The guy to the right of the Pastor said, "I want people to say I was faithful to my wife and to my family, that I was a family man and lived out my faith at home." The Pastor smiled and said, "That's great." He looked at the second guy and said, "What would you want people to say if they're standing and looking at you?" The man said, "I want people to say I was a man of integrity, that I was honest, that my character was real, and I exemplified the character of Christ." The Pastor responded, "That's a great answer!" He looked at the third guy, and asked him, "So tell me, what do you want people to say as they are standing and looking at you in the casket? This man replied, "I want someone to say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

Jesus isn't dead, He's alive! He's risen! He ascended and is coming again!

"Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion. The concept of resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed." —John Stott

Why? Because it is the resurrection of Christ that confirms and assures four essential things in life:

Jesus is Who He Claimed to Be—The Son of God

... "and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord Jesus" (Romans 1:4).

Jesus' Sacrifice is Accepted and Salvation is Provided (Romans 4:24-25)

The book of Romans talks about those who are justified by faith—like Abraham (see Romans 4:13-25). "But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his [Abraham's] sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:23-25). Jesus makes us right with God, and that's sealed because of His resurrection.

Jesus Gives New Life to All Who Look to Him and Believe on His Name (Romans 6:4)

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Why? Because only through the power of the gospel that transforms can the human heart that is corrupted by sin be given a new heart that can be made right with God.

Jesus is the One Who will Judge the World (Acts 17:31)

The resurrection of Christ confirms and assures (according to what Luke provided us in Acts 17) that He is the One who will judge the world.

"He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

The resurrection is the assurance of a just and good Judge, but that judgment is coming to the world. So the resurrection is the critical issue. Every one of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) includes one detail—the risen Christ! The linen cloth was left in the tomb! This detail can be quickly read over as a non-essential, but I'm here to tell you—whether we have the image of it here or whether it exists in Turin or not—the linen cloth was the proof to the early disciples that Jesus was no longer dead; He was alive!

Death didn't win. Jesus walked, and because Jesus walked, we have confidence in Him!

Now, back to Luke 24. These two disciples not only began to realize when their eyes were opened that they had been with Jesus, but they talked about how their hearts were burning within them because of how powerful the fire was of what Jesus was saying about Himself in Scripture.

The Bible then tells us they got up from the table and said, *"We need to go back to Jerusalem right now."* They didn't sleep and wait until the next day. *"They rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:33a). They walked seven miles back to Jerusalem and *"found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed'"* (Luke 24:33b-34a).

"He's really alive! He's risen. He's living. We've seen Him with our eyes. We took bread out of His hands, and then He was gone. But He's alive!"

Peter and John and the others confirmed the same thing, because they, too, had seen Jesus. All the evidence God had provided brought them to the place where a horrible journey of discouragement turned around into a dynamic moment of realization that *"the Lord has risen indeed"* (Luke 24:34a).

Walking the Emmaus Road is...

4. A Journey Ending with a New Demand and Direction

After the disciples had experienced these things, the Bible tells us that Jesus talked to them and said,

"You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.

But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49).

What was Jesus referencing? The day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would come upon the church and the people, when Christ would inhabit His people and perpetually, all who confess that Jesus is Lord will become a part of living souls because the life of Christ is in them.

The purpose of this life is not to protect this life; it is to proclaim the glory and the honor of the One whose name is Jesus, even at the risk of death.

Do you know what the Greek word for *witness* is? *Martyres*. It is the word from which we get our word, *martyr*.

Jesus said, "You are martyrs of these things." Yes, some would be killed. Some would risk their lives. Others would serve and live out a full life. We can't know and understand the ways of God and the length and longevity life. But what we do know is that the purpose of our lives is to be lived out in the mission of God.

And as believers, if there's something we all need to affirm, appreciate, and celebrate, it is that Charlie Kirk was living out the mission of God in his life because he loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave witness of Him. Charlie Kirk gave his life because of what he believed about Jesus and the impact of what that would mean in a society.

A couple of days ago, I came across a post where someone simply asked this question to AI: "What would Charlie Kirk say about this week?"

In just a matter of minutes, there was a post in Charlie Kirk's voice based on his message that has been heard and repeated on college campuses and everywhere he's been. It was a one-minute witness to his life and his faith. It so moved me, I wanted you to hear it.

"I want you to know I'm fine, not because my body is fine, but because my soul is secure in Christ. Death is not the end; it's a promotion. Don't waste one second warning me. I knew the risks of standing up in this cultural moment, and I'd do it all over again. Second, do not let this violence divide us further. The enemy wants chaos, fear, and retaliation. Don't give it to them. Instead, double down on truth, double down on courage, double down on your faith and on your families. That is how you honor me. Third, remember this: America is worth it. Free speech is worth it, fighting for the unborn, for families, for sanity. In a culture gone mad, it is all worth it. So dry your tears, pick up your cross, and get back in the fight. Do it with joy. Do it with strength. And never, ever let evil think it won." —Charlie Kirk (AI generated answer)

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Charlie Kirk faced evil, but he always did it with a smile. He did it for the good of a generation, for the good of humanity, for the good of the family, for the good of life, and for the good of freedom. That's a powerful testimony! What a purposeful life!

As I share that with you today, I want to ask you a simple question: What's driving you? Are you constantly shut up because of fear that you might offend someone? Are you living faint-hearted and thinking all of life is just tragic because it's just one tragedy after another? Certainly, we see a lot of suffering in this life. Jesus said,

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Are you living by faith? Do you have a legacy of faith because you love Jesus, love people, and live out the love of Jesus Christ in your life?

I don't know about you, but I believe that what we've seen and heard is a call for us to be the people of mission. I'm calling on you, Warren, to live out the mission of God together—at risk with sacrifice, engaged, serving, giving—and doing it all for the glory of God through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Charlie Kirk was all in for Christ. How about you?

"My hope is that when I die, all of hell rejoices that I am out of the fight." —C.S. Lewis

Amen!

Father, I pray we would fight the good fight of faith. I pray we would not linger and languish at the place of grief—though grief touches us—but we would let the grief we have known and experienced, the bitterness of loss, move us to trust You, to get to Your Word, to stand on Your promises, to proclaim the glories of a living Christ, to live with hope and heartache, and to be able to suffer not without hope, but to suffer with purpose and confidence in You.

I pray today for Erica Kirk and her two children—the horrible things that have been seen and even said since this tragic moment. Father, we thank You that Your Word says for the believer "to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8 KJV).

While we feel Charlie's life was taken too soon, we are trusting You will make it even more, as one of our deacons prayed this morning: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). I pray there would be a fruitfulness for truth in America and in the hearts of a new generation—no more, "My truth and your truth," but standing on God's truth.

Father, I pray right here and now that You would move by Your spirit in the hearts and lives of people who are here, that some today would step in, would step out, would step up, and follow Jesus. For I pray it in Your name, Amen.

This is an edited version of a message preached from the pulpit of Warren Church, 3203 Washington Road, Augusta, GA 30907 on Sunday, September 14, 2025, by Dr. David H. McKinley.

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