

Noble Doss dropped the ball. ... **One** ball. ... **One** pass. ... **One** mistake. In 1941... he let one fall. ... And it's haunted him ever since. "*I cost us a national championship,*" he laments...

The University of Texas football team was ranked number one in the nation. ... Hoping for an undefeated season and a berth in the Rose Bowl... they played conference rival Baylor University. ... With a 7-0 lead in the third quarter... the Longhorn quarterback launched a deep pass to a wide-open Doss.

"The only thing I had between me and the goal..." he recalls, *"was twenty yards of grass."*

The throw was **on target**. ... Longhorn fans rose to their feet. ... The **sure-**handed Doss spotted the ball... and reached out... but it slipped through.

Baylor rallied and tied the score... with seconds to play. ... Texas lost their top ranking and... consequently... their chance at the Rose Bowl.

"I think about that play every day," Doss admits. ... Can you imagine the kind of despair that would torment a soul... for this many years...?

It isn't that he lacks other memories... of unprecedented honor and success. ... Happily married for more than six decades. ... A father. Grandfather. ... He served in the navy during World War II. ... He appeared on the cover of Life magazine with his Texas teammates. ... He **intercepted** seventeen passes during his collegiate career - a university record. ... He went on to play in the NFL with the Philadelphia Eagles and won two NFL championships.

Most fans remember the plays Doss made and the passes he caught. Doss remembers the one he missed. ... Once, upon meeting a new Longhorn head coach, Doss told him about the bobbled ball. It had been fifty years since the game... but he wept as he spoke.

That is exactly what despair does to us... doesn't it? ... It blinds us to what may so obvious to others.

Despair can attack us on such a personal level... affecting our mental... emotional... and spiritual lives. ... Despair is a deep feeling which leaves us with a sense of hopelessness... a feeling that there is no hope of change or escape from the difficulties of our current situation. ... And without the kind of divine intervention... that we read about in our passage of Scripture this morning... we can easily remain in a state of deep despair... for perhaps 50 years!

If you ever have gone through... or are now in... a time of despair... a time of hopelessness and fear... or perhaps a friend or family member struggles with it... then you will appreciate the two disciples we meet in Luke 24:13-35... who were found on a Sunday afternoon... walking down the road of despair.

Perhaps your faith has been tested...because a sense of God's presence seemed to fade... or disappear. ... Maybe there have been unwelcomed circumstances in your life that made you question whether your responses (whatever your response) even matter... ... Have you ever had such thoughts as... "*What can one person do? ... What difference will my small effort make?*"

In today's encouraging passage of study... we will notice how Jesus handled two of His disciples who were in a state of despair.

During the late afternoon... when the darkness lifted from Golgotha... and the sun was full upon Him... Jesus cried out in triumph... and breathed His last. ... But those gathered around the cross did not recognize His victory. ... As Christ hung motionless... the warm sun spread over his spilled blood. ... As those who had hoped in Jesus slowly trudged away from the scene... the icy fingers of death tightened about their hearts in chilling... numbing... grief. ... Despairing hands prepared His cold body for burial and laid it in the tomb. ... So deep was their despair... that no one possessed even the slightest **thought** of resurrection. ... When at dawn on the third day the women found the tomb empty... still no one suspected resurrection. ... It appears that they did not believe even **after** the angels announced He had risen. ... And when Peter inspected the empty tomb... instead of believing... the Apostle Peter went away **wondering**.

Indeed... all those who had followed Christ were still in despair that afternoon... though they had heard bits and pieces about the empty tomb. As we pick up the story today... two of them are on the road to a village named Emmaus... located a short distance from Jerusalem.

Luke 24:13-27

The two disciples left Jerusalem and began the seven-mile walk down through the hills of Judea... to the village of Emmaus. ...Perhaps... as they conversed... and reviewed the events of the past three days... they found themselves “iffing.” **If** only Jesus had not come to Jerusalem in the

first place... He knew he had such enemies here... **If** only Joseph of Arimathea did not remain a secret disciple as long as he did. He and Nicodemus might have made quite a difference among their fellow leaders... **If** only Jesus would have used His miraculous power that we saw Him use so many times... to save Himself... **If** only Jesus did not remain so silent – He outsmarted them every time they tried to trap Him... If... if... if only...

While they were conversing and discussing... and ... my guess... “iffing” the entire matter of the past week... Jesus Himself approached... and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.”

I believe Jesus prevented these disciples from seeing Him as their risen Lord... because it was the best way to draw them out... show them who they were at this moment... and then point them in the right direction.

You know... often you and I get caught up in the hopelessness of a situation ... and we become blinded to what God is doing beyond that current circumstance. ... A blunt confrontation with the truth RARELY works! ... The sad fact is... that we may hear the truth of God... but the eyes of our hearts are prevented from being enlightened... because we choose to invite despair to overwhelm us. ... But it is not just despair. We also welcome other negative emotions like cynicism. ... And when we add a poor attitude like cynicism... we become blind to the spiritual realities that are behind those events.

These two disciples on the road to Emmaus had supported Jesus — and because of that their life had not been easy. ... Now they ached with grief

and confusion. ... The Scriptures promised a Messiah... and they thought Jesus was the One... but Jesus did not deliver. ... They needed a word from God.

Did God care?

Indeed He did! ... (And He cares just as much today!) ... Our resurrected Lord understood perfectly the confusion in these disciple's hearts... and the best way to help them! ... He intercepted them on the road

Their countenance when Jesus intercepts them says it all... they stood with their faces downcast. ... For these disciples... hope had been buried in the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had provided. ... God's divine sovereignty kept them from understanding until the full reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus could be understood.

"What is this conversation you are holding with each other as you walk?"

He asked. ... Jesus had apparently walked up behind these men... so they assumed that He too was a pilgrim traveling home from **Jerusalem**. ...But if He had been in Jerusalem... how could He not have known what had happened there? ... The way that one of them... Cleopas frames his response... reveals complete shock... and some annoyance... that this stranger would not have known what had just happened... And he answers with cynicism...

Wow! Despair **and** cynicism...! What a dangerous combination. But there is great danger with any cynicism — especially in the life of believers who claim to have a "living hope." Christian author, Scott Sernau writes:

Cynicism kills in the manner of frostbite: the only symptom is a deadening numbness. And even Christians are often tinged with this frostbite. Callousness and doubt numb us to life and joy. We find ourselves leaving the triumphant lyrics of the old hymns on the church doorstep, because they appear hopelessly out of step with the world waiting outside. Our problem is not that we've been taught to question our faith, but rather that we've been taught to reject any answers. Doubt can be a state of mind—or it can be a way of life.

Annoyed and cynical at first... the two disciples from Emmaus continue their discussion with this apparent fellow traveler... And revealing the story to this stranger of what had happened... they give us a glimpse of where their minds were... Notice how they refer to Jesus in verse 19... merely as "**a prophet**"... instead of the Son of God... Christ... or Messiah. The two followers described him as **a prophet** who did wonderful miracles... and was a mighty teacher. ...They had heard Jesus teach and had seen Him perform miracles of healing... but... as far as they knew... He had died like all the other prophets before Him... The death of Jesus had spelled a seeming end to their hope that He was the promised Messiah... the very Son of God.

"Doubting Thomas" is the disciple who gets all the press for his doubting the resurrection. ... But Luke 24 makes it clear that he was merely one of the crowd... including these two travelers. As we go further into Luke 24 next week... we will see that **all** of the disciples were slow to believe.

This whole resurrection idea was too hard to believe. Jesus began to address this... by giving a major lesson on the Emmaus road. First He draws them out... by bringing the cynicism that was in their hearts to the surface. ... Jesus asked them about their discussion... as though He did not know...

He had been at the heart of all that had happened in Jerusalem, and now He was asking them to tell Him what occurred! ... How patient our Lord is with them... and with us... as He draws us away from our wrong attitudes and our wrong thinking. He started with them... where He needed to start.

After having heard **an amazing report...** of the women who had been to the tomb... and seen the body of Jesus missing... heard the angels' words telling them that Jesus is **alive**... ... **then** two reliable Apostles (Peter and John) verified what the women had said. ... After all that... there was still this gloom... and disbelief.

The longer Cleopas talked, the more he indicted himself and his friend for their unbelief. What more evidence could they want? ... Six different times Luke records how Jesus foretold His suffering... death... and resurrection after 3 days... Then when it DID occur... witnesses (including Apostles) had seen the tomb empty. Angels had even announced that Jesus was alive. Witnesses had seen Him alive and heard Him speak. The proof was there! What more did they want...?! ...As readers... we almost want to yell at the two – OPEN YOUR EYES! TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT WHO YOU ARE WITH!!! – Or at least THINK how all those miracles Jesus performed show that His predictions about His Own rising from the dead... would happen!!!

So why did Jesus approach them this way...? Why not open their eyes immediately...? Why doesn't Jesus eliminate... right away... the torment of confusion that they were suffering...? Jesus is not being cruel here... but His gradual revelation of Himself... breaks up the hardened soil of their hearts... and then plants seeds about trusting God's promises. ... The

disciples had been told about these events many times... but they just would not allow themselves to believe that these things actually did come to pass.

As we remember God's promises to us... we often have difficulty resting in them... do we not...? We too have hardened soil that needs to be broken up. How many times have you read the verse or heard sermons on Romans 8:28... but in times of discouragement or despair... we become cynical... and we just cannot rest in it...?

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

But there is hope for loosening our hardened soil. Look how Jesus loosens theirs... so they would believe what they had heard and seen so many times...

According to Romans 10:17... Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"... This explains why Jesus opened the Word to these two disciples... as the three of them walked to Emmaus. ...Their real problem was not in their heads... Theirs was not a problem of recalling the actions and teachings of Christ. ... Jesus could have reminded them of all those experiences for days... and never arrived at a satisfactory answer. ... What they needed was a fresh understanding of the Word of God... and Jesus gave that understanding to them. ... He opened the Scriptures and then opened their eyes... and they realized that Jesus was not only alive *but right there with them!*

So... What was their basic problem? ... They did not believe all that the prophets had written about the Messiah. ... That was the problem with most of the Jews in that day: they saw Messiah as a conquering Redeemer... but they did not see Him as a Suffering Servant. ...As they read the Old Testament... they saw the glory... but not the suffering... the crown but not the cross. ... The teachers in that day were not unlike some of the “success preachers” today... who want us all to believe that God wants us every Christian to be healthy and wealthy... and if you have any problems in your life... your faith is lacking. ... That is very selective Bible belief. It is so blind to the *total* message of the Bible.

But... what Jesus demonstrates for us... is very important! ... The Lord... in speaking about His resurrection... did not show them the prints of the nails in His hands to prove it. That would have been so easy! ... He didn't refer to all the undeniable evidence of power that He showed over the past three years of being with them – He didn't even point to His raising Lazarus from the dead... “*See... it is not impossible!*” ... Instead... He referred them to the Scriptures. ... He told them, “*You should have believed what the prophets said.*”

Romans 10:17... Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith does **not** come from undeniable experiences that happen in your very midst.

It is well to note the Lord's attitude toward the Bible. The day in which we live is a day of doubt. ...There are people who are actually saying that you cannot be intelligent... **and** believe the Bible. ... Many people are afraid that they will not be considered intelligent... so they don't come out flat-

footed and say whether they believe the Bible or not. ... I suppose it is the most subtle and satanic trap of our day... to discount the inerrancy and integrity of the Word of God. ... Christ says a man is a fool not to believe it. And in today's passage... He gave a unanimous and wholehearted acceptance of the Bible's statements, with no ifs, ands, or buts.

Luke 24:28-35

By giving thanks and giving bread to them... Jesus takes the role usually held by the head of the household... which He had exercised among His disciples. ... And it was in the intimacy of fellowship... that Jesus was recognized. This setting was not random. ... I think it is a direct message. It is through sitting with Jesus in intimate fellowship... listening to His Word that He opens yours and my eyes... as well!

Pascal said, "Human knowledge must be understood to be believed, but divine knowledge must be believed to be understood." I think the Bible is a closed book to the critic and the infidel. He can learn a few facts, but he misses the message. On the other hand, some simple soul whose heart is turned in humble faith to God will be enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God. The eyes of his understanding will be opened.

Karl Barth ... the famous Swiss theologian... the story is told... was on a streetcar one day in Basel, Switzerland. ... An American tourist to the city climbed on and sat down next to Barth. ... The two men started chatting with each other. "*Are you new to the city?*" Barth inquired. "Yes," said the tourist. "*Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?*" asked Barth. "Yes," he said, "*I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl*

Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning." ... The tourist jumped up... got off the streetcar quite delighted. ... He went back to his hotel saying to himself, "I met Karl Barth's barber today."

Is it possible that you and I settle for much less than the satisfaction of knowing Christ better...? ... How many of us get so excited when we read a good Christian book... or hear a good message. We might thrill to the things we have learned... and come to prefer reading such materials... to reading God's actual Word and having intimate fellowship with Him. ...
"I met Jesus' barber today!!!"

It is through sitting with Jesus in intimate fellowship... listening to His Word that He opens yours and my eyes.

Two souls were left flaming in the dark at Emmaus. ... Jesus was gone... but they still sensed His presence. ... Otherwise they would not have rushed from their table... back to Jerusalem with their dynamic news. Sensible Jews did not travel lonely roads at night... for fear of thieves and muggers... but these two disciples could not keep their news to themselves.

"They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. ... There they found the Eleven and those with them... assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' ... Then the two told what had happened on the way... and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread". ... They would see Jesus again later that evening along with the rest of the apostolic band. ... But for now they were thrilled

that Peter had seen Christ... and all were beginning to grasp the wonderful truth. ... This was the beginning of what would become the fellowship of burning hearts... a band that would bear potent witness of Christ to the entire known world.

... ..

At this very moment Christ knows where you are... and where I am. ... He knows the geography of our lives inside and out. ... He knows the temperature of our souls. ... He knows whether there is ice or fire.

Whatever our state... tremendous joy... or deep despair... His call is the same — that we meet regularly with Him... intimately... in the context of His Word. This is where He opens our eyes and reveals Himself to us.

My urging cannot be any stronger. Seek a daily intimate fellowship with Him in His Word.