

Clarity

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[0 : 0 0] What we have in the passage in Luke chapter 24 are people whose minds are reeling from the events of Easter Sunday, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They meet with Jesus on the road from Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they're talking about what's going on, trying to make sense of it. They meet with Jesus and they say to Jesus, have you not really heard about all the amazing and confusing events that have just transpired in this city?

And so what's happening here is that Jesus is going along the road, he enters into the company of these people and they tell Jesus their story. All these things have happened in Jerusalem. We're confused by it and we can't quite make sense of it. And then what does Jesus do? Well, he talks to them, if you look at verse 25 through to 27, and he puts their story and what's happening in their lives at that point, he puts it in the context of the bigger story, the story of the Bible. He says how foolish you are, how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. That's verse 25. Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory, beginning with Moses and all the prophets.

He explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. So Jesus would say to them, if you want to understand the story of what's going on in your own life, then you have to fit your story into the great story of what God is doing in this world.

And we find that story written in the pages of scripture. So the first thing that I want to say to you then is that the Bible has a very clear storyline. Sometimes it's called the meta narrative or the overarching story. But if you begin reading the Bible at the Book of Genesis, which is the first book in the Bible, and were to read right the way through to the end to the book of Revelation, you would find that actually there is a consistent plot line that is being progressively unfolded. So there are lots of different books in the Bible, each with their own stories and tales and narratives. But all of those different books fit in very neatly together under the overarching plot line or the overarching storyline.

So I'm going to pop a couple of slides up, which will hopefully just outline what the Bible narrative is. It begins with creation. So this is right at the beginning, Genesis 1 and 2. And that's kind of answering the question that we often ask about our lives.

[3 : 1 3] Why are we here? So this is about origins of life. Why are we here? And then very quickly the Book of Genesis moves on to what we call the fall. And that's the story of Adam. And it's the story about what's gone wrong with the world and what's gone wrong with us as human beings. And then the Bible moves on to tell us what God's doing about the problems in our lives and the problems in this world. And we call that redemption. What God has done to fix our world. And sometimes the Bible calls Jesus the second Adam, showing us that he's come to undo the chaos created by the disobedience of Adam right there in the Book of Genesis. And the last stage of the Bible story is what we call restoration. The events after the resurrection of Jesus Christ where God is now working to restore our world to be a sinless and perfect creation. So if you wanted to know what's the storyline of the

Bible from beginning to end, there you have it in four simple stages. Creation, fall, redemption and restoration. And whenever you pick up the Bible to read it, you should be trying to think, how does the part of the Bible that I'm reading fit in to the big picture story that there is in the Bible? Now this is really important because we just want to be clear that the Bible is clear. We want to be sure that when we pick up the Bible, we're reading something that has a clear, strong and unmistakable message. And if we have that outline in our heads, it's obvious to us that the Bible has a very clear storyline.

And we can sum that storyline up if you want as the story of God saving grace. What God has done in history to show grace and to save people from the consequences of the fall.

There's another slide I think, if we want to move it on. And as I've said at the beginning, what Jesus does with the people he meets in the road to Amethyst, he takes their story and he places it in the context of the bigger story. And that's also really how we have to look at the story of our own life. We have to begin to say, how does my life and my story fit into the bigger story that God is telling in the Bible? So in the Bible we see two things happening. One is Jesus entering into the story of our lives. He comes into our world.

He shares our planet with us. He's made human. He shares our humanity with us. He grows up as a young boy, goes through adolescence, into adulthood. He works. He experiences all the same kind of things we do in life. Pain, grief, sorrow, happiness, joy, family life, friendship.

[6 : 34] So Jesus really does come into our world and share our story. And then what Jesus wants to do is to take us and draw us into his story. And so when you look at your life, you're asking the same kind of questions. The Bible asks in its big story line. The creation question is the question we all ask, why am I here? What am I doing in this world? What's the point of my life? Does it, if any point, is it just a meaningless accident? Fall, again, is saying why do I worship the wrong things in my life? Why is my life so messy, broken and frustrating? It's in Augustine called this disordered love. And when he was trying to explain what's wrong with us as human beings, he says, we order our loves in the wrong way.

We give them the wrong priority. So he talked about a hierarchy of loves. And he says, life is really about working out our hierarchy of loves, which loves are most important.

And so if somebody loves his reputation more than the truth and so lies to protect their reputation, well, that's a disordered love. Or if somebody loves money and success more than their children and so neglects their career in favour of their, or neglects their family in favour of their career, then putting career before family is disordered love. And when we disorder our love, when we get our loves in the wrong priority, then that makes life messy and frustrating, broken and hard. And the fundamental disordering of love is that we fail to love God first and foremost above everything else. And that failure to work out the priority of love is what sends our lives into a spin, makes them such a mess.

That's what Adam did in the Garden of Eden. He loved himself more than God. That's what we do when we worship money or power or sex more than God. We disorder love.

So when I speak about the fall or sin, then I'm speaking about something that's real to all of us and part of our story, the mess that we make of our lives and the world we live in. But the good news for us is that in God's story and our story, God hasn't just left us, but he's come to us and given himself so that we can have a new life, a new beginning and become part of God's family. And then restoration. If we become part of God's family, then God will use us to bring about his new creation and his new kingdom.

[9 : 46] So as you kind of look at those four things, I just want to ask you to ask yourself, you know, where do I see myself in that storyline? If this is the big story, if this is God's story, if this is the story that's clearly told in the Bible, where do I see myself slotting in? Do I understand why I'm here? Do I understand what's wrong with me? Do I believe that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are his action to bring me freedom from these false loves that I've enslaved myself to? Do I believe that I'm part of God's purposes for this world to restore it to its original grandeur and beauty? So it's an amazing thing when we see that our story is bound up in God's great story and that we are part of what God's doing in this world. So that's the first thing I want to say. You can put its slides off now, Ali or Andy, that the Bible has a clear storyline. The second thing

I want to say is that the Bible then, and this follows on very naturally, is understandable. I spent two days in Venice recently and I had been in Italy for 20 years and I popped a phrasebook out on the plane on the way over and learned Bon Diurnal, See and Know. So three crucial phrases for two days in Venice. And it's very funny being in an environment where you can't speak the language, can't understand what anybody's saying to you. And it makes you very hesitant about speaking, communicating or engaging with people. And some people think that reading the Bible is going to be like sort of travelling to a foreign country and trying to learn a whole new language. And after a few days in Italy, I kind of thought to myself, well, I will never learn Italian. And a lot of people think, well, I will never learn Bible talk. I'll never understand really what the Bible says. But if we look at verse 25, Jesus says to the people that he met on the road to Emmaus, we know one of them's name was Cleopas, but he says to them, how foolish you are, how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Now, what that shows is that Jesus clearly expected that they should have understood what the Bible taught. How slow you are, he said, to believe what the prophets have spoken. So Jesus was saying the Bible is a book that we can clearly understand. Sometimes we might want to think that the Bible is a book for experts and we should leave it to experts. It's not really for the likes of us. Or some people seem to think that the Bible is a kind of coded message book and you've got to read it and look for hidden meanings. But the Bible was originally written for ordinary people like you and me.

It was written for farmers, for administrators. It was written for bureaucrats. It was written for servants. It was written for slaves. It was written for children. It was written for kings. It was written for all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. And the Bible is still read by billions of people every day. Ordinary people in ordinary life circumstances. So the Bible is a book that we can understand and we shouldn't then approach it as something mysterious, as a kind of code breaker mentality that we need to take towards it. But the problem is that we often bring to the Bible a closed mind or a lazy mind or a confused mind. And we read twice, first in verse 32, then in verse 45, that as Jesus communicated, first of all, on the road to Emmaus and then when he appeared to the disciples, what he did is he opened the scriptures to them. So in verse 35, where not our hearts burning within us, while he talked with us in the road and opened the scriptures to us.

Verse 45, then he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures. So if we're coming to the Bible and we're bringing a lazy mind, a confused mind or a closed mind, then one of the things we simply need to do is to say to Jesus, help me, open the Bible up for me. Let me be able to see what it really is saying. So in John chapter 16, verse 13, Jesus promised this, when the Holy Spirit comes, the spirit of truth, he will guide you into all truth. So there's a promise there that we have the Holy Spirit and that part of what the Holy Spirit does is just help us to understand truth. So when we come to the Bible, we should expect to understand what it says. It's not a mysterious hidden message. And we should pray that God will help the clarity of that message to find a home in our thoughts and in our lives. So the Bible has a clear storyline. The Bible is understandable. The third thing I want to say is that opening the Bible is like lighting a fire. So verse 32, after Jesus disappears from the sight of the people on the road to

Emmaus, they ask each other, we're not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us. So as the Bible was opened up for them, something extraordinary began to happen in their lives. You see, sometimes we can open the Bible and it's like opening a bottle of flat coke. And it's disappointing. It's got no real kick to it. Sometimes we can open the Bible and it's like drinking a can of red bull and energizes you and strengthens you and is vivid and it's alive and it's powerful.

[16:19] And the Bible is what we call a transformative book. It's a life changing book. Millions and millions of people in the history of this world have read the Bible and had their lives transformed by it. Now, how does that happen? Well, one of the things that I like to do is tweet. Okay, so I've got a Twitter account. I'm not looking for followers, but it's Neil MacM, if you want to follow me. And people who are on Twitter often follow their favorite celebrities. So you might be very interested in music, so you follow musicians you like, or you might be interested in books, and so you follow authors you like. And if you follow a celebrity on Twitter, then one of the things you want to do is to get them to retweet you or to give you a shout out on Twitter. And if you can connect with a celebrity in this way, then that gives you a Twitter cutus. So I follow Ian Rankin, who's a Scottish Novelist, a Prime Novelist on Twitter, and I think I've got him to reply to one tweet and to retweet another. And both were sort of landmark events in my miserable little life of unexciting things.

So there you go. Ian Rankin responded to my tweets, didn't I? I feel such a connection with him now. We're buddies. We're friends. We're Twitter friends. We're pals. Now, you see, so there you want to do, you know, it's people who want to connect with the author of the book and feel some kind of connection to them. And that's what's transformative about the Bible, that when you read the Bible, you are transformed not just by reading, but by meeting the author. The Bible's called a living book. And we meet the God of the Bible in the word that he has given to us. He clearly communicates himself to us. So he doesn't just tell us about himself. He comes himself through his word, in his word, and meets us in his word. And that's what happened on the road to Emmaus. They met the author of the book. They met Jesus. And as they met with him and talked about the book, the book came alive. Now, we don't meet with Jesus in that same physical, literal sense.

But nevertheless, it's his living word. And when we read it, he communicates himself to us in it. And that is a transforming life change. And that's what sets our hearts on fire because what he does is he begins to show us more what he's like. And the God we meet within the Bible shows us that he's a God of amazing power, majesty, glory, truth, purity. He's everything we would want God to be. He's loving. He's merciful, but he's just and he's true. And so the more we get into the Bible, the more we see the glory of the God of the Bible, the more he communicates his glory to us, and that leaves its mark on our lives. So although the message of the Bible is very clear, and it's got a clear plotline storyline, it's also a message that's, one way of putting it is progressive. So the more we read the Bible, the more we learn, the more we understand. It's not like God just has a sort of one off, here's the message, do you get it? Fine. But rather, it's a great unfolding book of truth. We meet with the clear message of the Bible, and then as we go on reading it more and more, we find there are increasing depths to it. One of the ways that somebody described this is like sort of a mountain range. So if you're standing looking at the mountains from a distance, so I was on the West Coast this week in a place called Loch Karen, and enjoy driving through the hills in the West Highlands. So say you see a mountain far in the distance, well you can see it's clear outline in its major features. So when we first encounter the Bible, we see the clear outline, creation, fall, redemption, restoration. We see the most important features. This is a story above all about Jesus Christ. But the closer we get into the mountain, the more we will find smaller but wonderful features. Maybe a hidden valley, or beautiful little glen, or some lovely streams and rivers, a meadow full of green wildlife, so on. So the closer we get, the nearer we get, the more we walk its paths, the more we discover its beauties and its treasures, and the Bibles like that. You see, at first sight we see the great outline and the major features, but as we walk its pathways, the more we discover depths of beauty and goodness and glory and truth and loveliness and joy, and it's a, you know what it is?

It's a lifelong adventure. So it's a progressive truth. A progressive truth. And it's a truth, of course, that centers all around Jesus. And that's what we love, that the more we read the Bible, the more we get to see and understand who Jesus is and what he's really like. So how does Jesus explain the Bible in verse 26 and 27? He says, well, the Bible is speaking, of course, about as the Old Testament. Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? That's the clear message Jesus is saying, beginning with Moses and all the prophecies explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures about himself.

In verse 45, he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them this is what is written, Christ will suffer and rise from dead, the dead in the third day. So in both of these different instances, he says the same thing. What's the story of the Bible? Focus about most of all are centered around me and my death and my resurrection.

[22 : 57] That's at the heart of the whole Bible story. And so as we go on reading the Bible, what we're learning more and more about is the goodness, the glory, the love, the majesty of Jesus Christ. So just want to say two or three things about that. So bullet points.

One is, read the Bible every day because what is happening in the Bible is that God is opening his heart to you. And in that amazing thing, isn't that a wonderful thing? God would open his heart to you and give you a written testimony, clearly understandable. So it's good. Why would you want to leave it closed when the God of all glory is trying to speak into your life through it? Read the Bible every day. Read it with others because sometimes we don't want to hear what it's saying, we harden ourselves against it. But other people can say, are you really listening to what the Bible has to say into your life at this point?

And then there are some parts of the Bible that are more difficult to understand, not impossible to understand, but more difficult to understand. And what do you do with them?

Two things I would say. One is, you always read the harder parts of the Bible in light of the clearer parts. So the clear things of the Bible shed light on the more difficult things of the Bible to understand. And secondly, never base a belief on one verse or one passage alone, but rather let the whole Bible inform your reading of any particular part of the Bible. So read the Bible every day, read it with other people and let the Scripture interpret Scripture as how it said sometimes, but let the harder parts shine light on them from the clearer parts of the Bible. And please don't read it looking for hidden messages.

It's not like playing an LP from the 1960s backwards to see what somebody said that might spook you or freak you. You don't need to play it backwards. It's all there. It's written clearly. It's written in your own language. You can understand it and enjoy it.

[25 : 23] The last thing I want to say is that because the Bible is clearly understood and clearly understandable, we should open it with others and for others. So it's a message for us, but it's a message we're to share and communicate. In verse 47, what Jesus says is that the message of the Bible, Christ rising from the dead and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

So what we to do with this clear message, with this crystal clear understandable message about Jesus, well, we are to preach it. We're to communicate it. We're to share it. Now preaching doesn't just mean standing in a church, maybe in a grand pulpit like the one behind me or in a simple pulpit. Preaching is just what we do when we communicate. They could proclaim, tell the message of Jesus in any circumstance. So preaching happens in churches, but it also happens in streets and homes and offices and in all kinds of different situations. Wherever we tell the truth of what Jesus has done and bear witness to it.

So it's a message that we are to share and to communicate clearly and confidently with others. Christ was dead, but He is risen. That's the message we've got. We're the witnesses to that message in our world, and it's a message that can be communicated simply. It's a message that is clear and understandable. We've to ask people to repent and we've to tell them about forgiveness of sin. It's a really great message. It's a message that's saying repent.

Now repentance means turn. Turn from where you are from what you're doing, from your disordered loves and turn towards the one who should be the great and true love of your life who is Jesus Christ. And if you do that, then God will meet with you. God will forgive your sin and God will make you whole. He'll free you from the brokenness and the power of sin. Now that's the gospel message. I don't know if it's a message that you believe personally or not, but it's the message that the Bible is communicating and it's the message that the church is communicating that God has stepped into the story of our lives and into the mess that we've made and He is willing to put it right. And that's a personal message for me and for you. Things aren't right with us. We have mixed up and messed up the priorities of love. And because of that, we've hurt lots of people and we've offended God. And how does

God respond? Well, as Easter tells us, God responded by sending His Son Jesus into the story of our world and our lives. And what He does is He takes our sin and makes it His and suffers for it, dies for it on the cross so that we can be forgiven. And then He rises again so that He can give us a new life. And I hope that that story will be your story as well. So let's conclude there. I'm going to pray we're going to sing a couple of songs.

[29 : 48] Lord God, we do ask that we would see where we fit in the story of the Bible. We thank you that the Bible is a book that is clear and understandable, a book that helps us to understand our own story and what's going on in our own thoughts and our own lives and our own circumstances. And we thank you that the story that we have in the Bible is a story of hope that you've come to put right what we have messed up. And so we ask that tonight we will invite Jesus into our story, into our lives, into our situation and that we will repent, that we will ask for forgiveness and that we will ask that we would love you more than anything else, more than life itself. Oh Lord, do re-prioritise, re-order the love of our hearts so that we will love you above everything else. May we give you worship now because you gave your Son for us. Amen.