

Recognize Jesus

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 24:13-35. [Page 885](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are continuing our series through the book of Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] "If God had a face, what would it look like? And would you want to see? If seeing meant that you would have to believe in things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets?"

This question was posed by Joan Osborne in her song "One of Us" in the mid-90s. She asks us to imagine God as an average person trying to ride the bus home. Would you want to see God's face? Would you want to recognize God for who He is? Would you recognize Jesus? Would you want to?

What I like about the question Joan Osborne asks is the implication of desire and belief. If you recognized the resurrected Jesus, it would demand something of you. You would have to believe. And that really is one of the motivations behind Luke writing His gospel account. He wants Theophilus and all of us to believe and recognize that Jesus has risen from the grave. And it has implications for every single one of us. So our main idea is simply this:

[Proposition] Recognize the resurrected Jesus.

In the verses we'll look at today, we'll see two men's interactions with the resurrected Jesus. We'll notice how, in their experience, Jesus goes from being unrecognized to recognized. So that's how we'll divide this sermon. First, we'll look at Jesus unrecognized. Second, we'll look at Jesus recognized. Unrecognized, then recognized.

[Main Point 1] Jesus unrecognized

We're going to learn four things when we see what it's like for these men, and for us, when Jesus is unrecognized. While He goes unrecognized let's notice first

[Subpoint 1] Who He is

Look at vv. 13-15 with me

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.

This Jesus is the same Jesus we read about earlier. Jesus himself, we're told. Regardless of their experience, this is stated as an objective fact. The same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem. Grew up in Nazareth. Was baptized by His cousin John the Baptist. Taught and healed in Galilee and throughout Judea. Was crucified outside Jerusalem. And now left an empty tomb. And He has a physical body. He can come near. He can walk. He should have been recognized for who He is. But He continues to go unrecognized.

Jesus is unrecognized. But it really is Jesus. But why does He go unrecognized? That brings us to the second thing to notice when Jesus is unrecognized.

[Subpoint 2] Who decides?

Who decides that Jesus will go unrecognized or be recognized? Look at v. 16
But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

We are forced to encounter a deeply humbling reality in these verses. And we find that they are consistent with the whole Bible. Jesus goes unrecognized because there is Someone behind the scenes who controls all things. Every detail. This verse is in the passive voice. Ultimately, the One who decides if the resurrected Jesus is to go unrecognized is our Triune God. He decides. He decides who will recognize Jesus and who won't.

It's humbling that God would keep people from recognizing Jesus. It tells us that every option is not always open to us. God can do things that we don't understand. But it also makes sense too, doesn't it? If God really exists then things aren't left to chance.

[Illustration] This level of God's control, or sovereignty, as Christians call it, solidified for me when I was going through chemotherapy the first time. I had just turned 19. I made efforts to do everything that the doctors and nurses told me to do. I drank protein shakes to keep from losing weight. I walked to my nextdoor

neighbor, a nurse, to give me shots. Shots causing my bones to very painfully produce more white blood cells so that I could take chemo on schedule. I submitted myself to the reality that I was going to spend a large chunk of summertime hooked up to IVs, or in bed, or throwing up in the bathroom. I could control that. But what I couldn't control was whether the chemo killed the lymphoma. Ultimately, God would decide whether I lived or died. Not because I was a better person. Better people have died of Hodgkins Lymphoma who took the same chemo. Not because I was a younger, healthier person. Because younger, healthier people died of this stuff. Ultimately, God decides everything. This is mysterious, and humbling, but also comforting.

God not only decides who lives or dies physically. He decides who recognizes Jesus and who doesn't. We're seeing that Jesus is unrecognized. We've looked at who he is. Then who decides. Now, third,

[Subpoint 3] How it feels

How does it feel when Jesus goes unrecognized. Let's read vv. 17-24

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. 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.

When Jesus goes unrecognized here's how life feels: sad and confusing. These guys were walking. Now, they've stopped. It probably feels like their lives have stopped. They feel sad. The redemption they hoped for was merely political change. But Jesus's redemption goes much deeper. Before the crucifixion, they say, "We had hoped." Hope was in the past. Now sadness hangs over their heads like a dark cloud. But it's also confusing. You see, the reality is that Jesus' tomb is

empty. And if you don't recognize the resurrected Jesus, then you've got to come up with some explanation why. You've got to come up with some explanation why so many people throughout history have claimed that Jesus is alive. Like the women mentioned here. Like Cleopas, whose name is mentioned *probably* because he is Luke's source. Cleopas may have been alive for Theophilus and other first century readers to find and speak to.

When the resurrected Jesus is unrecognized, we still learn some things. We learn that even unrecognized; this is the real, historical Jesus. We've seen who decides whether we can recognize Jesus- God. We've learned how it feels when He's unrecognized- sad and confusing. Now, one more thing when Jesus is unrecognized

[Subpoint 4] How the Bible functions

Look at the role of the Bible for those who don't recognize Jesus, by reading vv. 25-27

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.

The Bible is a closed book when Jesus goes unrecognized. It's a mystery. It is not understood. It is not believed. It's not viewed as telling a single story. It's just verses and advice and poetry and strange oracles. And it's not believed. So our unbelief is always our fault. We view the crucifixion as a tragedy of history, but not relevant to us. The Bible, when Jesus goes unrecognized, is unimportant. Useless.

[Application] If you don't recognize the resurrected Jesus then things are not going well for you spiritually. Things are going poorly for you. Some of you are here and you *know* things are going poorly. You know you need help. You know you feel sad. You know you feel confused. You know the Bible should have more sway and influence on your life. You hear Jesus correct His disciples and you think, "Yes, I am foolish too. I am slow of heart to believe. I don't get this Jesus." Things are not going well for you spiritually, and you know it. You may be a Christian or

you may not be. Well hang on because there is help for you. And take a tiny bit of comfort in this: you are not in the most dangerous place spiritually.

Let me say this again. If you don't recognize the resurrected Jesus, then things are not going well for you spiritually. Things are going poorly for you. Jesus would warn you that the eternal Hell will be your destination unless you recognize Him. But some of you are here and you don't even know that things are going poorly. Sure, things aren't perfect, but you don't feel very sad. And you don't feel confused. You've got things well sorted. You can use the Bible however you want. You can quote it or ignore it however you feel fit. And usually that's to make yourself look good and others look bad. And even as I say these things, you are hopeful that other people are paying attention, because I couldn't possibly be talking to someone like you. You are in the single most dangerous place spiritually. Jesus told a very religious person that there is such a thing as the Kingdom of God. It's there and real, but we will completely fail to even see it or the King unless the radical change of being born again occurs. You think you know the resurrected Jesus. Here's the proof of being born again: You believe. Would you want to see, if seeing meant that you would have to believe? In Jesus. Instead of yourself.

But the resurrected Jesus is the only one with power over death. If you don't recognize Him. You're dead. Spiritually. And you will face an eternity of consequence for your unbelief. Of thinking that a Bible and what it proclaims about the crucifixion and the empty tomb have nothing to do with you.

That's Jesus unrecognized. But the goal is to recognize the resurrected Jesus. So now let's see our second big idea.

[Main Point 2] Jesus recognized

We'll move through those same four points from last time. Which means we'll look first at

[Subpoint 1] Who He is

Read vv. 28-30 and v. 34

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.

Later we hear this report from Simon Peter in v. 34

...saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

Now, why Jesus acted as if He had somewhere else to be, nobody really knows. But there are honest mysteries about every person who has ever lived. Even the most honest.

As before, this is stated as an objective fact. This is the same Jesus. He has a physical body. His followers can tell it’s Him. He can break bread with His hands. He can pass it to others. Whether Jesus is unrecognized or recognized, He has physically risen. It is an objective fact. It is not merely a subjective experience. Jesus is alive! Hallelujah. He has risen indeed!

Jesus is recognized. We’ve seen who He is. Now let’s notice, secondly,

[Subpoint 2] Who decides

Look at v. 31

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight.

Jesus’ resurrection body seems to be somewhat different than our everyday experience. But it is the same body and He was recognized when He prayed and broke bread. He was only recognized because their eyes were opened. This does not mean that they walked seven miles with them physically shut. This means that God has opened their eyes and given them spiritual sight. God decides who recognizes Jesus.

These men didn’t go to Emmaus looking for Jesus, Jesus came looking for them. And if God can raise the dead, then we should rejoice and take comfort in the fact that He has the power to open people’s eyes and recognize Jesus. Anyone. It’s not up to our feeble efforts and tactics.

[Gospel] Those of you who are in the earlier category: Not going well and you know it. You feel, in some sense, like you are in a room with no doors. Your life,

whether it's your health, your marriage, your depression, or whatever has made you aware that you have spiritual problems that you can't solve. But you know there's no way out. The solution is not a new tactic. A new philosophy of life. A new job or spouse. No, the solution is the living Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit is here presenting Him to you to recognize today. Jesus is alive! He has gone to the cross as a substitute for His people. He was buried. But now He's alive! Apart from Jesus, things aren't going well for you, and you know it. But here's the One who can change everything. You will have to humble yourself and follow Him in faith. You'll need to trust that He knows what's best in all circumstances. But, Oh, it is so worth it! Which leads us to the next point.

Jesus is recognized. We've seen who He is and Who decides the people and timing of recognizing Jesus. Now

[Subpoint 3] How it feels

Let's read vv. 32-35 and notice something

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 bread.

Heartburn, but not from what they ate, but what they've heard. Pure joy and excitement. Through the Bible and conversation, they have had a personal interaction with the Living, Resurrected Jesus. And it's like they've woken up to a new world. They are ecstatic. They have a joy that begins to overcome fears. In v. 29 we saw the word "evening" which may be what we would call afternoon. But it also says that the "day was far spent." So I'm inclined to think it was close to night. If that's the case, then these men probably made the seven-mile trek back to Jerusalem through some amount of darkness. Which was scary and possibly dangerous. No exhaustion and no fear can stop them. And I have found this among people when they personally recognize Jesus as alive. Joy! Courage! Love! A desire to tell others! A desire to be with other Christians!

We're contrasting when Jesus is recognized to when He goes unrecognized. We've seen that it's Jesus who's recognized. We've seen that God ultimately decides. We've noticed how it feels when someone recognizes Jesus. Now, finally,

[Subpoint 4] How the Bible functions

Let's look at v. 32 again

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?"

These men had words aplenty when they walked toward Emmaus. They were disputing about all kinds of things. What they needed was God's Word. And God's Word is needed to interpret events so that they can make sense. I have spoken to non-Christians who've read the whole Bible, and it all seems like nonsense. Then, they were converted, they recognized Jesus, and the Bible came alive just like Jesus. And the Bible kept pointing them back to Jesus so that they recognize Him and get to know Him more and more.

[Application] We look at our lives and we see that we've lost so much. Dreams have been shattered- no dream job. No dream spouse. No dream house or vacations. Marriages full of disappointment or abandonment. Children who died in the womb or after breathing our same air. Loved ones who have abandoned the faith. Loved ones whose time on earth has ended. Watching the same old bad guys win and struggles continue. That seems to have been the sense that Cleopas and his friend were living in too.

They were in a category of people that so many of us Christians fall into. Not that things are going poorly and they either know it or don't know it. No, they were in the category of people where things are going well, but you don't know it. Jesus was alive- even when they were sad and confused! Their salvation had been purchased, their friend was well, death was defeated. But they didn't know it.

For those of us in that category, notice this: Jesus is alive, He's present with you by His Spirit. He's teaching you. But you just aren't quite aware of all the blessings you are getting. These disciples thought that a crucified Savior was proof He's not the Messiah- instead it's proof that He is. And we can know that too. Further, we feel the crosses and pains of this life. It feels like things aren't going well. But then we learn that crosses and painful disciplines are often proof that we belong to

God. Jesus is alive! Doesn't that shake us awake to the reality that things are going well?

And the last category of people. Spiritually, things are going well and you know it. Your troubles are small. This is where we all want to live. Daily you are remembering that Jesus is alive! You are living knowing that you will follow Him in His resurrection. And you realize that there is not a single problem that the resurrection can't cure. Evil hearts transformed. Broken bodies healed. Shadows of disappointments shrink in the light of the eternal Son. Patience and unity at a level where there is no relationship challenge that can't be overcome. You have a relationship with a living Lord. He hears you. He intercedes for you. He is your righteousness.

The question for most of us is: How do we get there? How do we get to where we're doing well and we know it? I think that I read this somewhere from Ray Ortlund Jr. We do what the men on the road to Emmaus did. You stare at Jesus until you see Him. No matter what category we fall in we humble ourselves and we stare at Jesus as we find Him in the Word. Until we see Him.

[Conclusion] Back to Joan Osborne's hit song. Jesus is proof that God does have a face. And He is proof that we actually would want to see Him. Stare at Him until you see. And He will drive away doubt.