

We had hoped he was the one . . .

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WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR with the story of the two on the road to Emmaus, commiserating the events of Christ's crucifixion. When Jesus, who had come alongside them in their travels, asked them what they were talking about, the text states:

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. (Luke 24:17-21 ESV)

Because we know the end of the story, I believe that we may too easily miss the emotion of the moment. Note that the two stood still, looking sad. Also note their statement, "*But we had hoped . . .*". Christ's crucifixion had completely crushed their hopes. We don't know how long these two had been followers of Jesus, but even if they hadn't been with Him for the duration of His ministry, they surely had heard the accounts of all that Jesus had done from His long-term disciples. They considered Him a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. These two travelers very possibly were among the crowd during Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem just a week prior to His crucifixion. Imagine the euphoria experienced by those shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

Their euphoria was based not only on the previous few years of Jesus ministry, but also upon their belief that Jesus was the promised messiah. This promise of a messiah was woven into the very fabric of Israelite life, a tapestry that had been woven by the prophets for over 2,000 years. According to how some of the religious leaders interpreted Daniel's seventy weeks, the messiah was due to appear during the time that Jesus came on the scene.

When this storyline is coupled with the fact that since the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity they had always been subjected to foreign rule, and the prophets had foretold the time when Israel and Jerusalem would once again be exalted among the nations, we perhaps can begin to sense the building excitement among those who believed Jesus to be the messiah.

At first there was skepticism in some (*can anything good come out of Nazareth?*). After all, there had been many potential messiah candidates over the centuries, but none of them panned out. But over time, Jesus proved to be different than the others. He healed the sick and raised the dead like the prophets of old had done. He spoke with the wisdom of Solomon (*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*). He spoke with authority, not as the religious leaders of the day. Many came to believe as did Peter, “*You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God.*” Among them were the two who traveled the road to Emmaus that day.

Furthermore, after Peter's confession regarding Jesus, He had mysteriously told His disciples to not tell anyone else. During the triumphal entry, however, He was prominently entering Jerusalem with the crowd publicly proclaiming Him as the promised king of Israel. He was crossing the Kidron Valley toward Jerusalem on a donkey as both David and Solomon before Him had done. And as Matthew informs us, Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (Zech 9:9). At long last, the hopes of Jesus' disciples for the last three years, and the hopes of national Israel for centuries were about to be gloriously fulfilled! Imagine the excitement and euphoria.

But then the unexpected happened. A mere week after the fever-pitched triumphal entry, with the crowds announcing Jesus as the promised Messiah from the line of David, He was dead, crucified as a common criminal by the Roman governing authorities. In what seemed an instant, the hopes and excitement of His followers were vaporized. It is here that we pick up with the two on the road to Emmaus.

We can only surmise the content of their discussion prior to Jesus joining them. Surely they were elaborating on the theme “*we had hoped.*” Obviously, they no longer believed Jesus was the promised Messiah, as the past tense “*we **had** hoped*” indicates. Did they question how they could have allowed themselves to get caught up in a false-messiah movement? How could they have believed that Jesus was a mighty prophet before God? Did they wonder where they had gone wrong, how had they missed God's plan? I think it is not far-fetched to believe that these types of thoughts raced through their minds.

Their hopes had been so crushed—they were so disabused of the notion that Jesus was the Messiah—that even the strange report of the women claiming to have seen angels at Jesus' tomb declaring that Jesus was alive sparked no hope within them. What did they think of the women's claim? “And now, to add insult to injury, someone has stolen His body. Even if He wasn't the Messiah, He was a good man. Couldn't God allow Him to rest in peace?”

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. We know why the tomb was empty, and we are all familiar with how Jesus came alongside them and explained all these events from the Scriptures.

Just as the disappointment and shattered hopes of the two on the road so clouded their minds that they could not imagine that this was all part of God's plan, so we experience times in our lives when we find

ourselves on a personal “road to Emmaus.” The life that we thought God was leading us to, the ministry that we were sure He had called us to, has vaporized before our eyes. We may become so disillusioned and discouraged that even hints of a resurrection (“the angels said He was alive”) are lost on us. These hope-crushing twists of fate come in many forms: a failed relationship; an unsuccessful ministry; unanswered prayer; the seeming absence of God’s presence. For some, perhaps preterism itself has become that disappointment. How many have embraced the preterist view with the excitement of Andrew (we have found the Messiah), only to become discouraged and disillusioned by the rejection from without and the factions within (we had hoped . . .)?

Thankfully, none of our stories end there. You see, we serve the same God as those two on the road to Emmaus. That doesn’t guarantee that only a few days after our hopes are shattered that there will be a miraculous resurrection. But we are guaranteed that God works all things together for good, and that His plan will succeed. We must come to realize that our definition of success is very often not God’s definition. That is much easier said than done, but when we can clear our hearts and minds enough to think the matter through, whose success would we prefer, ours or God’s?

I’m not saying that preterism is going to miraculously win the day. Nor am I saying that your Emmaus Road experience will see a sudden turnaround like the two travelers experienced. I’m simply saying that we need to remind ourselves that God is in control, and, despite the circumstances, His plan will succeed. We need to say with the psalmist,

*This is my comfort in my affliction,
that your promise gives me life. (Psalm 119:50 ESV)*

Furthermore, we need to remind ourselves that many of the Old Testament saints did not see the promise fulfilled during their lifetimes:

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised . . . (Heb 11:39)

According to the remainder of Hebrews 11:39, those promises were fulfilled during the lifetime of the New Testament saints. We have the record of those fulfillments, and the record of the two travelers to Emmaus, as testimonies to us that even if our hopes are dead and buried, we can trust that God is still at work. We may not see all of the fulfillments in this life, but we can trust that God’s plan will not be thwarted. ✝

