



Luke 24:1-12
 The Story
 Don't Forget The Rest of The Storyⁱ

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It's been said that you shouldn't begin a public address of any kind with a joke. But I came across one a couple weeks ago that really belongs here at the start. A preacher's 5 year-old daughter noticed that her dad always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon. One day she asked him why. He was proud that his daughter was so observant of his messages. "Well, Honey, I'm asking the Lord to help me to preach a good sermon." She then said, "So how come God doesn't help you?"

Ouch.

With that, let's all bow our heads and hearts before the Lord and ask God to help me preach a good sermon...and for God to help us all hear what He's saying to us today through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...Amen.

So, this is the day we remember the most life-changing, earth-shattering, hope-giving event in history: that the power of death has been overcome. Not by getting around death in some way, but by going right through it. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, and then was raised from the grave, giving us assurance of that same victory for us. And this truly is Good News! But many of us have enough concerns about today that we can hardly even think about tomorrow – let alone the other side of death and eternity.

Fortunately, the Good News of Jesus Christ's resurrection not only gives us assurance of eternity with God, but also gives us help for today and hope for tomorrow.

The resurrection is an assurance that when the walls seem to be closing in around us, when darkness is everywhere, when the future seems bleak and all hope is gone: it's an assurance that God has something else in store for us. There's another chapter in the story of our lives yet to be written. But too often, we forget the rest of the story. We forget the story of our lives that's already been written...we forget how God has shown himself faithful and trustworthy in the past – in our lives, in the lives of others, in Scripture, and so forth – and so we forget how that demonstrates that the story of our lives

that is yet to be written will turn out good, and that we can trust God for that.

It's part of our downfall, I guess, to always focus on the difficulties and not the blessings, let alone to remember how the difficulties led to blessings or even turned out to be a blessing themselves. All we remember is the negative. **And as a result, it's easy to forget the whole story, and not trust God for the future story.**

There's a story about a pastor named Roger that I don't think I've shared with you before. Pastor Roger was on a summer vacation with his family in the Pocono Mountains of Eastern Pennsylvania. On a lazy Sunday morning, they worshipped at a little Methodist church. It was a hot day. The heat and the sultry air were making people drowsy. The preacher was preaching up a storm while the folks in the pews were struggling to keep their eyes open...until all of a sudden the pastor said, "The best years of my life have been spent in the arms of another man's wife."

The whole congregation gasped and came to immediate attention. The dozing deacon in the back row dropped his hymnbook, and the usher next to him sheepishly looked around to see if anybody had noticed. The whole sanctuary was in such still and silent suspense you could hear a pin drop. Then the preacher said, "She was my mother." The congregation giggled a little and managed to stay awake until the end of the sermon. Well, Pastor Roger registered the experience in his memory since it was such a good trick to regain the congregation's attention.

On a hot, lazy Sunday morning the following year, Pastor Roger was preaching in his own church. The flies were buzzing around, and the ushers were sinking lower and lower in the back row. Then he remembered the trick he learned at the Methodist church in the Pocono Mountains – it just popped into his head. So he said in a loud voice, "The best years of my life were spent in the arms of another man's wife."

Pastor Roger got their attention. One of the ushers in the back row sat up so fast he hit his head on the back of the pew in front of him. Pastor Roger had them in the palm of his hands. But he forgot what came next. All he could

think of was to say, “And for the life of me, I can't remember her name!” He forgot the rest of the story.ⁱⁱ Too often, we're like Pastor Roger: We forget the rest of the story of what God has done – in our lives, in Scripture, in the lives of others throughout history or today – and so we forget (or lose confidence in) His promise of what He will still do.

To help us remember the story that's been written, and to give us confidence in God for the story of our lives yet to be written, we've been in a series of messages the last few months called “The Story” and will continue for just a few weeks more. I would encourage you to be here for the next four weeks as we bring this series to a close. And this series goes along with a book by the same title, that is essentially the Bible in a streamlined edition, focusing on the main narrative of Scripture. If you've ever found the Bible hard to read and difficult to understand or even stay awake through (like the congregations in the story I just told), then I highly encourage you to pick up a copy of the Story. Many in the church have been reading it as we've gone through this series, and if you'd like to get a copy of it, you can pick one up for \$5 at the Info Center after the service this morning. You can also pick it up at a LifeWay or other Christian Bookstore, online at Amazon or any other book distributor. I'm not trying to sell books: I want people to shape disciples of Jesus, and I think this book helps with that.

One of the things this series has helped us to remember about our faith is that Jesus did not randomly appear and make the claims that he made and die a tragic, meaningless death, but rather: **Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.** The Old Testament and the life of Jesus are linked together. The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years as they disobeyed God; Jesus had his 40 days in the desert but stayed faithful to God. The 10 Commandments were given for the Israelites to follow; Jesus says, “follow me.” Just as the Israelites made a sacrifice of an unblemished animal – usually a lamb – as atonement for their sins, Jesus is the unblemished, once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. When he's called “the lamb of God” in the New Testament, that has thousands of years of history and deep meaning behind that title. It's not random or new. Jesus' life, as he himself says, is a fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and prophets. **Everything that the Jewish people did imperfectly in order to have a right relationship with**

God, has been done by Jesus perfectly on our behalf. This doesn't mean we completely abandon the Old Testament. In fact, Jesus raises the bar for us on much of it. But we live that way as a response to what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We live as God calls us to, out of gratitude.

But sometimes we forget all that part of the story – the connection between Jesus and the Jewish faith and history. Or we don't know it to begin with. And so when we come to Easter, it is so important for us to remember that whole story because it brings meaning to Jesus' life. It brings meaning to his death. It brings meaning to his Resurrection. And it brings meaning into our lives. **But sometimes we forget the story.**

Now, we aren't the first, and neither will we be the last, to do this. In fact, the disciples could have done a better job of remembering the rest of the story themselves. For instance, when we look at the behavior of the 12 Disciples after his death and before His resurrection, we see that His death seemed like the end to them. They huddled up. They were confused. It was a dark time. They were without hope.

And yet, Jesus had told them he would be killed and on the third day, would rise again. He had told them what the end of the story would be. For instance in Luke 18:31-32, Jesus says to the twelve disciples: **“The Son of Man will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again” (Luke 18:31-32).** Jesus names six things here that will happen to him. Five of them are negative – mock, insult, spit, flog and kill. One of them is positive – rise again. And even though that one positive out-weighs and overcomes the five negatives, it's not enough for the disciples. All they were able to focus on where the negatives. In the immediate time after his death, they weren't able to see beyond their current situation and remember that Jesus had told them this was coming and that there would be another chapter added to the story shortly after the cross.

And isn't that way in life so oftentimes? We focus on the negatives. (At least, I do...maybe you're different.) We (I) get caught up in them and they can even defeat us. In fact, I could get five pieces of *good* news and *one* bad one,

and I'd probably focus mostly on the bad news. We turn on the news and not very much of it is uplifting or inspiring. Just in the last few days I have tracked the headlines on the Seattle Times' website to see if this was true even in the moment. And sure enough, the front-page headlines have been about shootings, tragic deaths in car accidents, recycling issues with China that have potential environmental impacts, and the annual tragedy of the Mariners season just two games into it. ☺

And then there are all kinds of personal challenges we all face that cause us to forget the rest of the story. Or maybe some of us say, **“Well, I don't know the rest of my story – that's in the future; how can I forget what I haven't yet lived?”** God answers, **“I have told you the rest of the story.”** Let me give you a Biblical illustration. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were taken captive and lived under foreign rule on more than one occasion. Even in Jesus' day, it was the Roman government that ruled the land. But there was one particular time several centuries earlier when the Israelites were exiled from their land and were under Babylonian rule. It was a dark and heavy time. Hope was lost. But here's what the Lord said to the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah as they were about to go into exile: **“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,”** declares the Lord, **“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,”** declares the Lord, **“and will bring you back from captivity”** (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

That is the promise of God to his people then, and it is still God's promise for you and me today – when we have a relationship with God. Notice all the words that indicate a relationship between God and the Israelites: they will call upon him, come to Him pray to Him, He will listen, and so forth. And it wasn't always that way. The relationship was broken as the Israelites turned their backs on God. So this is looking to the future when the relationship is reconnected and they've returned to Him. And this promise of blessing is the fruit of that relationship, and the promise comes even in the midst of

challenge – when we are in relationship with Him.

The specifics of your life may have yet to be revealed, but God’s will is to bless His people. And the resurrection of Jesus backs up God’s promises more concretely than any other intervention of God in history, and tops all that God had done previously: God creating the Universe out of nothing? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. God delivering the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. An army of 300 defeating an army of thousands? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. David taking down Goliath? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. Daniel escaping the Lion’s den? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. Israel being delivered out of Babylonian, Assyrian, and Persian captivity? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. A miraculous birth that we celebrate every Christmas? As much as I love Christmas...the Resurrection of Jesus tops it. Feeding of 5,000, healing of the blind, the lame, and the sick? The Resurrection of Jesus tops it. **The resurrection of Jesus exceeds all the other miracles or amazing movements of God. And it is His promise that no matter what we face, there is still more to the story, and we’d better not forget that.**

Like the Disciples after Jesus’ death, all of us here this morning are facing, or will face, some really tough stuff in our lives that will seek to rule the day and hold us captive, that will act like it’s the end of the story and has the final word: The doctor says it’s cancer. Your child is failing in school. Your spouse’s (or your own) addiction seems to be forging deeper roots. Loved ones are in the hospital. Hospice has been called in. You’ve been abused. You’ve lost your job. Your spouse wants a divorce. Your body is breaking down. You’re lonely. You’re fearful. Those are the times that we have the opportunity to remember God’s Word to us. That’s when we really need to seek God, call out to him, pray to him, seek him with all our heart (like in the Jeremiah passage)...and be reminded that the story isn’t finished. God has planned a good and hope-filled future, there’s another chapter, and the resurrection of Jesus is the proof and the promise. It’s then that we can remember the words of the angels to the women, **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!” (Luke 24:5-6)** And it is then that God will meet us, just as those angels met the women, and speak words of comfort and hope into our lives, and spur us on to the rest of

the story.

Because Jesus Christ is risen: *that* is the rest of the story. And it means everything for us for today, tomorrow, and eternity. It is *the* story that governs the rest of *our* story when we are in relationship with the Author of the Story. God has made all of this known to us. And in his providence, grace, truth, and love: it's a triumphant rest of the story that through faith can be your story too, because: He is risen. He is risen indeed! Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 24 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.

ⁱⁱ I don't know where this story came from. I've had it in my files for some time.