

“HOW SLOW YOU ARE TO BELIEVE”  
Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19, I Peter 1:17-23, Luke 24:13-35  
April 25 & 26, 2020

“Florence Chadwick was an American world class swimmer. She had already been successful in swimming the English Channel (both ways – from England to France and from France to England). Next she wanted to take on the twenty-six-mile trek from Catalina Island, California, to the California mainland, as no woman had ever done that before 1952. So Florence went into the Pacific waters with a number of boats surrounding her as she made the trip. She swam and she swam. Hour after hour, she swam. It was a very foggy day when she tried to do this. As darkness set in, she could barely see her hand in front of her face as she stroked away in the water. After swimming fifteen hours and fifty-five minutes, she waved to the boats and said, “I can go no further. I quit.”

“They hoisted her out of the water, and they asked her, ‘Why can’t you keep going?’ She said, ‘Because I can’t see. The fog is just too thick.’ After getting on the boat, she discovered that she was within a mile from the coast of California. All that hard work, and she was ever so close, but she didn’t quite make it.

“Two months later, Florence Chadwick decided to try again. She got in the water when it was bright and sunny, but after about twelve hours, fog set in once more. This time the fog was even worse than before. Again, she couldn’t see, but this time she kept swimming. She kept going. This time she not only swam from Catalina Island to the coast, but she swam there and beat the world record by two and a half hours.

“When she arrived at the California coastline, she was interviewed and asked, ‘Last time you tried this, you quit. How did you make it this time?’ She said, ‘This time it was easy because I kept a mental picture of the California coastline in my mind. And as long as I didn’t lose sight of where I was going, I could handle the trip getting there.’” (Tony Evans, *Tony Evan’s Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 88, #247)

It can be so easy to become discouraged when you aren’t able to see where you’re going. When

the fog of life settles in, when we become disconcerted and disoriented in our life, discouragement is right there waiting for us so that we give up and lose heart. We get lost, we lose our way, and we cannot see what is around us and we just give up. It happens in sporting events, it happens in business, it happens in marriages, and it happens in our spirit. When the way to life becomes obscured by the fogs of disappointment, failure, loss of communication and distancing from God, we are ripe for discouragement to pick us off and beat us up, and we are prone to say, "I quit. I can't do it anymore."

Psalm 116:3 sums it up pretty clearly, "*The danger of death was all around me; the horrors of the grave closed in on me; I was filled with fear and anxiety...*" The fog of life hits us that hard and it causes us to want to just give up. But the rest of Psalm 116 helps us to see where we can go to get encouragement and help. We hear that in verses 1-2 and 5-7, "*I love the Lord, because He hears me; He listens to my prayers. He listens to me every time I call to Him...The Lord is merciful and good; our God is compassionate. The Lord protects the helpless; when I was in danger He saved me. Be confident, my heart, because the Lord has been good to me.*"

When we are surrounded by the gloom and sadness and the fear in the world, God is ready to hear us when we call out to Him. He is ready to support us and help us when we turn to Him. God is ready to encourage us to continue on, granting us the strength to defeat our enemies and find victory in Him. And then, after trusting in the Lord our God, we can praise the Lord for all that He has done for us. God has done great things for all of us! He is ready to help us again when we turn to Him.

And we hear the same thing in I Peter 1:17-23. Listen to these words. (READ I Peter 1:17-23). As we pray to God, our Father, He encourages us to follow His ways and trust in His guidance. And when we do that we focus our hearts on spending "*...the rest of our lives here on earth in reverence for Him*" (vs. 17). As we put our faith and trust in God, He guides us and directs us through the teachings of Jesus. And as we live faithfully to Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit to comfort us and strengthen us and empower us to live boldly for Him, no matter what we face.

But it doesn't take us too long to see the difference that Jesus makes in us. Before we let Jesus

be our Savior, before we let Him guide our lives as our Lord, we had put our trust only in ourselves. We relied upon our own strength, our own wisdom and the “wisdom” of those around us. We put our hope in what we saw around us, what we had in the bank or what possessions we had amassed for ourselves. We trusted in the people we called friends, we relied upon our buddies at work, and we desired local leadership to instruct us in our way of life.

Yet what happens when everything around us turns up-side-down? What happens when things beyond our control afflict us and turn our world in-side-out? Whom do we rely upon when stock markets fail, when fires destroy our belongings, when storms blow everything away, or when floods wipes out all we have? What happens when we lose the job we’ve had for the last 25 years? What happens when we become afflicted with cancer, or HIV AIDS, or are involved in a devastating car accident that leaves us paralyzed? What happens when the bottom drops out of our lives?

You see, if we have hope only in the things of this world and they disappear before our eyes, we tend to give up very easily. Unless we have our trust and hope in Jesus Christ, we are likely to give up on achieving any kind of security or safety for our lives, and we are ready to pitch in the towel and give up the race. Without a sure foundation of Jesus in our lives, we are quickly lost in the fogs of life.

That’s where we see the disciples of Jesus those days after His crucifixion. Even when amazing reports come saying that Jesus had risen from the grave, they cannot begin to believe it. But listen to what happens when the disciples begin to trust in more than what their eyes can see and their hands can feel. This is Luke 24:13-35. (READ Luke 24:13-35)

These two followers of Jesus had been surrounded by the fog of life. They had come to know Jesus and they had trusted that Jesus was the Messiah, but yet there they were on Resurrection Morning returning home, having given up! Luke says that when Jesus joined them, they were “*downcast*,” gloomy and sad. Yet, the women who had gone to the tomb had reported back that there was no body in the tomb. Peter and John had gone and returned reporting the same thing. What caused these two to be “*so slow of heart to believe everything the prophets said?*” (Luke 24:25) Why were they so sad?

**First, They Had Heard What The Prophets Said, BUT Didn't Understand What Was Said.**

They were confused as to if the Messiah was going to be a political Messiah, chasing out the oppressors and creating a new nation of Israel, or if the Messiah was going to be a spiritual Messiah, leading the people back into a relationship with God. If He were a political Messiah, He would have created an army to overthrow the Romans. But if He were a spiritual Messiah, He would have brought peace to the people's hearts and minds bringing them closer to God so that no matter what happened from the Romans, they could live knowing that God would take care of them.

They also were confused as to what kind of freedom the Messiah would bring. Would it be freedom for Israel to rule their own country again without interference or oppression from another country? Or would it be the freedom from the greatest enemy that humanity faces, the separation from God because of our sin? Freedom for the country would involve a political Messiah, whereas freedom from the punishment of sin would involve a spiritual Messiah.

Then they were confused about whether the Messiah would reestablish the repatriation of the nation, or whether He would bring reconciliation to God. Again, depending upon how they perceived the coming Messiah would determine how they saw the work of the Messiah. If the Messiah was going to reestablish Israel as a great nation, He would need the power and the force and the army to accomplish it. But what would be necessary to bring about the reconciliation to God? Certainly the Messiah could work through the religious authorities to renew God's approval to the people. Yet the Temple leaders were the ones who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and had handed Him over to the Romans without so much as an uprising or riot. It was confusing to them.

Second, these two men **Misunderstood What They Had Heard From Jesus**. They had heard Jesus say, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). They heard Him claim, "*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). They heard Jesus say, "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die...*" (John 11:25). They had heard Jesus say, "*The*

*hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23). And they heard Jesus say, “Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again” (John 2:19). They were contemplating and talking about all these sayings of Jesus, but they had misunderstood the meaning behind each one. They did not understand the reason for Jesus having to submit Himself to the leaders of the church and then the government to fulfill his role as the Messiah.*

Third, as much as the news was suggesting, **They Did Not Believe It Possible For Resurrection.** The myths of the Roman and Greek gods and goddesses coming back to life after achieving great feats of strength and power were abundant, but nothing like what they had just witnessed. This just didn’t happen, someone rising from the dead after being in the grave for three days.

To them it was more reasonable to believe that someone came during the night and stole the body of Jesus right out from under the noses of the sleeping guards who were supposed to secure the tomb. That’s the explanation that the chief priests told the guards to tell everyone when asked what happened to Jesus’ body. That explanation was more plausible to the people than someone rising from the dead. It was easier to believe the body was stolen than Jesus rising again. How could that happen?

Again, that means that they really didn’t listen to Jesus’ words of warning that He would be arrested, tried, beaten and then crucified, **BUT ON THE THIRD DAY** rise again. It was so hard to believe that Jesus would be arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified, much less rise again after three days.

Fourth, it was very obvious by the way that they were acting that these two men **Did Not Understand God’s Purpose** that was accomplished by Jesus. They did not comprehend God’s plan of redemption for the whole world through Jesus’ death. They thought that the Messiah would be only for the nation of Israel, that it would be God’s favorite people who would find this redemption so that they could survive beyond all of God’s wrath and punishment when the time finally came.

Then, they did not grasp that the only way to fully forgive the sins of humanity would be through a perfect sacrifice made on behalf of all of us to cancel the penalty of sin. The animal sacrifices that were made on a continual basis covering the sins of the people was only a stop-gap means of dealing

with their sin. But for the complete forgiveness of sin meant that a perfect sacrifice had to be made once and for all, so that anyone who believed in it could find the forgiveness of their sins. These two, as well as the other disciples and followers of Jesus, missed this aspect of Jesus' purpose here on the earth.

Finally, these men did not get that what Jesus did, what He went through, and what He had accomplished by His death AND resurrection was the fulfillment of all of the prophecies about the Messiah written hundreds of years before. They were so focused on just this one part of the picture that they missed the whole plan of Salvation by God for the people of the world.

Those were the things that they were talking about on their way back to Emmaus that day after Sabbath in Jerusalem. **BUT THEN, Jesus entered the scene.** He began walking with these two, and for the rest of the day “...*explained to them what was said about Himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets*” (Luke 24:27). That One on two mentoring correctly laid out the proper view of the Messiah, that He would be a spiritual Messiah, freeing not only Israel, but the whole world from the ravages and destruction of sin. Jesus explained what His teachings meant using the Old Testament Scriptures as basis for what He taught and did. Jesus explained with the Scriptures that the prophets foretold the rising of the Messiah from death, having found favor with God in all that He did. And Jesus laid out for them the whole plan of God for the salvation of the world.

I'll bet by the time they got to Emmaus at the end of the day, that the minds of these two believers were swimming with the whole concept of God as laid out in the Scriptures. It would have been a tremendous Aha! Moment for them to be able to put it all together under one nut shell.

But still they did not recognize that this man was Jesus. Only when they all sat down to eat supper were their eyes opened and Jesus' true identity was exposed for them. Maybe it was that they had the chance to see the nail prints in His hands as He broke the bread and gave thanks to God. Maybe it was their notice of the nail prints in His feet, or the scars around His brow from the crown of thorns that made everything click. But however it happened, these two suddenly realized that the Risen Christ was right there in front of them serving them the food for the evening. **AND THEN HE WAS GONE!**

Everything fell into place, and these two finally understood Who the Messiah was, that it was Jesus, the very One who had walked with them and explained everything to them of the purpose of God's Only Son coming into the world to take away the sins of all people through His death, and giving all those who believe in Him, God's abundant grace through His resurrection. Suddenly the image of the women telling them that they had seen the Lord Jesus risen from the grave comes into their minds and now it made sense. The scales of blindness were lifted from their eyes and they were able to see clearly that Jesus Is the Christ, the Son of God, the Promised Messiah.

Can you imagine the delight welling up within these two? They no longer think about spending the night in Emmaus. They had to get back to the other believers to report to them that Jesus really had risen from the dead and had explained His purpose to them as they traveled.

So dropping everything, leaving everything right there on the table, they rush back to Jerusalem. They travel the seven miles in world record time in order to report their encounter to the others. And when they arrive at the place where the others are, they learn of Jesus' appearance to Simon Peter.

But let me ask you a very important question today. “**What is keeping you from believing** that Jesus is the Messiah, the Risen Christ, the Son of God come to take away the sins of the world? What is making you so slow to believe all that our Scriptures have said about Jesus? What has blinded your eyes and dulled your minds from fully understanding the purpose of Jesus Christ for our world today?”

You see, unless we fully grasp what Jesus has done for us, unless we see the whole picture of God's great love for us, whatever it is that is blinding you is all that you see. Are the things of this world becoming so important to you that you miss out on who Jesus is for you? Are the worries of today narrowing your vision of the greatness of God in Jesus Christ? Do you find yourself with tunnel-vision because of what those around you are telling you, or what the influences in your life are calling you to believe? Are you being misled by false teachers who are telling you that you can live in opposition to God's Word and still find favor with God?

If so it means that we have not fully understood what the Prophets have told us about the

Messiah. It means we have not really comprehended what Jesus has told us through the Scriptures. It means that we really don't believe that anyone can possibly endure or ever conquer death. It means that we really don't see the whole picture of God's purpose for us here in the world.

Jesus invites us to come to terms with what is written for us in All of the Scriptures found in this book we call the Bible. He calls us to contemplate and learn All of the truths in these pages that expose who He is for us. Jesus wants us to be people of THE BOOK so that when the inaccuracies told by the world in effort to belittle or ridicule the truth of the Bible can be recognized, and we can stand firm in the Way, the Truth and the Life of Jesus. That is the way that the fog of life will become lifted from our eyes. Trusting in Jesus brings direction back to us, enabling us to see the journey ahead of us, and to continue to press on until we complete the work that God has given us to do.

**Jesus gives Eternal Life** to all those who will believe in Him and trust in Him and follow His teachings as the Risen Christ, the Promised Messiah, the Very Son of God. It's not going to be taught to us by CNN or NBC or ABC or CBS. We can only learn it from J E S U S, as we read the accounts of His life with us on the earth, receive His teachings for us to be His followers, believe in Him as our Messiah, the crucified and risen Savior of the world, and then live each and every day in submission to Him and Him alone.

Friends, **Jesus does not want us to give up on Him.** He does not want us to be disillusioned or discouraged so that we turn away from Him to follow our own things. Jesus wants us to press on, to become fully informed believers in Him so that we might accomplish all that God has called us to do. And then, like these two disciples of Jesus, we can turn to those round us and tell them the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus, and help them, too, to believe in Him.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for sending Jesus here to the earth to give us a future and a hope. Thank You that His death brings new life to those who will believe in Him as the Savior of the world. Thank you that Jesus' resurrection defeated the death penalty of our sin and has provided us eternal life with Him as we believe in Him and follow Him. Thank You, in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.