

## “There and Back Again”

### **Scripture: Luke 24:13-35**

Graphic: hobbits, road, bread, faith

Key Verse: 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

Ask them to: Work at finding faith in Jesus.

### **1) Introduction**

- a) In the late 1920s, a young father named John Ronald Reuel Tolkien wrote a fanciful bedtime story to amuse his three sons. The book, best known as “The Hobbit” was also titled “There and Back Again” and was first published in 1937 to wide acclaim.
- b) The synopsis of the story reads like this: *There and Back Again* is set in a time "between the dawn of Faerie and the Dominion of Men", and follows the quest of home-loving Bilbo Baggins (the "Hobbit") to win his share of the treasure guarded by the dragon, Smaug. His journey takes him from the light-hearted, rural surroundings of the Shire, which he loves, into darker, deeper territory, meeting various denizens of the Wilderland along the way. By accepting the disreputable, romantic, fey and adventurous side of his nature and utilizing both his wits and common sense during the quest, Bilbo develops a new level of maturity, competence and wisdom.
- c) For those who have read this book, *There and Back Again* tells the story of a journey. It’s the story of Bilbo going on a quest for treasure, for adventure, for knowledge of the world beyond what he has always known to be true.
- d) Along the way, they go into the dark forest of Mirkwood, where they meet amazing creatures, like Giant Spiders and Wood-elves, that try to prevent them from going any further. And they get frightened and they get depressed. Eventually, Gandolf the wizard reappears and assists the company to find and split the wonderful treasure previously hidden in the Mountain.
- e) Ironically, after finding the treasure, Bilbo has no need of all the middle-earthly wealth that comes from finding the bounty, so he returns home comfortable, ready to continue life with a new sense of purpose and hope.
- f) J.R.R. Tolkien has given us a literary gift. Yet, he has also given us a deeper look at what it means to be transformed on a journey into the unknown. He paints a picture of what it means to have hope in a higher purpose, to

following one's dreams, and to follow through to the end. In many ways, Bilbo has faith to go "There and Back Again." But it certainly wasn't easy.

- g) And when it comes to our faith life, it's not easy for us either. Now, we may not be called to battle dragons and giant spiders, but sometimes our lives are filled with much worse.
- h) Determining where our own faith lies in the midst of our lives is like that journey on which Bilbo Baggins embarks. Before we come to church, before we make decisions to read our Bibles and pray, before we make commitments to ministries or missions, we ask ourselves the questions like "What is faith?" "Who is this Jesus, anyway?" "What will belief in something I can't prove do for me?"
- i) And so we go through life, sometimes, not finding real faith because we fail to dive into the unknown with purpose and conviction. We get scared and depressed because what we thought was reality - what we thought was the way life was going to be – is not how it turned out.
- j) We struggle with jobs, and alcohol, and addiction, and gossip, and pride, and you name it. We look for those things to be our savior, our escape, and when they don't produce fruit for us, we wonder what's gone wrong. And we embark on the next journey looking for that thing that will be our savior...the cars, the shopping, the kids, the family reunion, the next big event. Only to find that those don't satisfy us either.
- k) And then, Jesus comes along side us and changes the scene. And we then find that going There and Back Again changes us for ever...

## **2) Scripture**

- a) This morning, our journey takes us along the Road to Emmaus. This is fitting because our Elementary Sunday School is learning about this Road to Emmaus, and so we parents and adults can also be thinking about the life-lessons from this encounter with Jesus.
- b) Our story picks up in Luke 24:13, on the same day as the resurrection of Jesus. Mary and the others and the disciples have gone to the empty tomb, some of them have seen Jesus, and there is a lot of confusion.
- c) For two of the followers, not two of the twelve, the events of the last two days were more than they could bear to carry and they decided that instead

of hang around and look for trouble, they would go back home and rethink their lives, AJ (after Jesus).

**d) READ LUKE 24:13-35**

- e) So, Jesus died and was crucified, and now this is the third day. It's after the Passover and as was the custom, the pilgrims that came to Jerusalem are on their way home.
- f) The first part of this passage relates to us the encounter that these two travelers have with Jesus. The ironic thing is, first, that we know something that the two travelers did not know: that it was **Jesus** walking beside them. And secondly, that the topic of their discussion **was the very person** who comes up to meet them and walk with them.
- g) And so, in the second scene, Jesus comes, as the two were discussing the perplexing events of the last weekend, and like any good traveling companion, Jesus asks (*expressively*), "So, what are we talking about?"
- h) The two are kind of indignant that this person, this stranger, doesn't have a **clue** as to what's going on. This guy must have come from under some rock, right?
- i) One says (my paraphrase), "You know, about Jesus the great prophet, and how he got in trouble with our leaders, and was crucified, and put in the tomb, and then this morning, two of the women and some of the eleven (remember Judas is dead at this point) said they saw angels and saw the risen Christ. Then some of the others went, but they didn't find him. And so...aww, forget it, it's all a mess and we don't know what to think anymore...we just want to go home and get on with life..."
- j) Now it's very revealing that the two travelers refer to Jesus as a *prophet, who did great things*. They have a picture of Jesus which was incomplete...they didn't see the real Jesus. And at this point in this encounter, they don't recognize him at all. If we fail to seek out, understand, and put our faith in the REAL JESUS, the Messiah, the Savior, God's only Son, then we fail to recognize him at all, and he us.
- k) And the irony is that the travelers assume that Jesus is the only one in all of Jerusalem that **doesn't** know the scope and complexity of these events that have taken place, and yet, ☺ Jesus IS the ONLY ONE who **knows** the full meaning of all that has happened.

- l) Cleopas, who is named as one of the two travelers, has another ironic moment in verses 20-21, when he confesses that they had hope Jesus was the fulfillment of scriptures and the words of the prophets, but views the death of Jesus – which really WAS fulfillment of part of the plan – to be the end and a cause for sadness and disappointment.
- m) Again, as we go There and Back Again, a metaphor for our journey in life, if we fail to seek out the bigger picture of Jesus, so many things along the way that are meant to be salvation for us – that are meant to rescue us, can become a source of discouragement and not hope.
- n) Near the end of this discussion with Jesus, Cleopas states that even though the women went to the tomb and saw Jesus, the men went to the tomb, “But Him they did not see”, he says emphatically. As if to say, “Now, we don’t know who or what to believe.”
- o) All this, while Jesus was standing next to them. They see the risen Lord, but still they do not understand.
- p) Jesus, then, in verses 25-27 lays out for them in detail the meaning of the events and what it means to the world. To us.
- q) Then we get to the good part ☺
- r) Jesus finishes his roadside teaching session and makes like he’s going farther ahead of them once they reach Emmaus, but the two urge him to stay.
- s) Jesus stays, and in the breaking of the bread, the eyes of the two followers were opened, and BAM! (clap) they at once recognized Jesus, and he was gone. And they, no doubt, sat there dumbfounded by what had just happened.
- t) Now, they weren’t celebrating Holy Communion in that house in Emmaus...they weren’t even reliving the Passover or anything like that. They were simply eating dinner. Sharing a meal.
- u) I think sometimes we think that faith in Jesus can only be built at church or when we’re baptized or confirmed. In the common, everyday act of eating, Jesus revealed his identity and these followers saw him and believed.
- v) And then they ran back to Jerusalem (7 miles maybe), told the eleven and their companions what they had seen, and testified to the faith of other.

Basically, they confirmed that Jesus had most likely really appeared to Simon, since he appeared to them too. And faith is born in them, too.

### 3) Application

- a) Going from There and Back Again tends to transform people. Events and revelations along the way give us cause to think and mold us. Yet, we may not have the opportunity to walk with the risen Lord...I pray someday, in this lifetime perhaps.
- b) And if we aren't able to walk physically with the risen Lord, how can we have faith. In John 20:29 Jesus words to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We want to be blessed...right?
- c) We don't want to be walking around life like the two followers on the road to Emmaus, dejected and sad, regretting things, feeling like we were robbed of our chance to shine. We don't want to be walking around life with no hope...with no Jesus!
- d) And if that's the case, how can people who have not seen the risen Lord come to know him...
- e) It's clear from the experience of the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus that the Lord is known in experiences that transcend the resurrection appearances. It's not all about Jesus' appearance to the Marys and Peter. If it was, if that was the only way people could come to faith in Jesus, then all of us sitting here are faking it, we have no faith, because we haven't seen the Lord in that way.
- f) We know that's not true. But there IS something to having to have an encounter with the risen Christ in order to be saved. Now we know that Jesus can appear to us as travelers. In other parts of the Bible, we read that Jesus appeared to Paul in the form of a blinding light. And if that can happen, we also know that Jesus can appear to the disciples through solid doors and walls. He can appear as the Holy Spirit fire at Pentecost.
- g) And in order for us to have faith in Jesus that is more than head knowledge of the events of Jesus' life, we, too, must have some kind of encounter with Jesus. Have you?

- h) Have you encountered Jesus in some way that you were assured you in your faith?
- i) Remember that Jesus never forces himself on anyone. Jesus was content to “go on ahead” of the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus. Yet they insisted that he join them for dinner. And Jesus came to them. Faith must always be a spontaneous, voluntary response to God’s grace, and not something that is imparted to us by someone else.
- j) It’s an invitation you extend to Jesus as a faithful act in need of salvation.
- k) So what are the ways we have an encounter with Jesus that builds faith?
- l) Fittingly enough, the breaking of the bread, the reading of scripture, and learning about Jesus has the affect of inviting Jesus to come and reveal himself to us. The point of the road to Emmaus is to willingly encounter the living Christ...to want to have our eyes opened.
- m) And the primary way this happens in the church today, is through Holy Communion. The words we pray over the elements are not mere prayers that are nice words to make us remember the life of Jesus. The elements are not mere bread and juice we bought or made from ingredients we got from Brooks’ Market.
- n) Holy Communion is the real presence of Jesus Christ for us today, in this sanctuary – believe it! If you stop to think of the weight of what I just said, you will enter into Communion today with a potentially life-changing perspective.
- o) This sacrament invites the real presence of Jesus Christ in the same way the two on the road to Emmaus invited the real Christ into their hearts. There is mystery in it...there is a God-thing here, working. We can’t explain it all, nor should we try. The point is to give yourself to this act of obedience – to this incredible invitation from Jesus. Give your heart to Christ through this act.
- p) Together we are continuing to experience the presence of the risen Christ when we gather at the Lord’s Table. Have faith that Christ will meet you there with the others who come.

#### **4) Conclusion**

- a) Bilbo Baggins had choices to make during the adventure from the Shire to Mountain and back. Would he respond to the dangers and stubbornly try to do it his way, or would he learn to have faith that this quest on which he found himself was for real.
- b) As seekers after Jesus, the choice is this: either (as it says in verse 25) we will be *slow of heart to believe*, or we will *know the joy of those whose hearts burn within them*. Faith! The burning hearts were a result of Jesus words and the interpretation of scripture before them...the real presence of Jesus.
- c) God has given us all we need to turn our lives fully over to him. Scripture, prayer, Jesus, the fellowship of the church...all together sufficient for salvation. As you've already found out in your life, you can not do this alone, and all the other things we've tried don't really work.
- d) Find faith in Jesus today...and the fire that burns in you will continue to grow and in you will be occasion for God to receive glory and honor for a life redeemed from the darkness of despair and doubt. He's waiting for you to invite him in for the first time or the hundredth time today. Don't wait any longer.
- e) As you come forward for communion in a little bit, I invite you to kneel at this altar or in the aisle or wherever in comfortable, and commit or recommit your life to Jesus. There will be people to prayer with you, if you want. This is not an emotional response to my words...but a heart and head response to the clear call of Jesus in your life. Take some time to think about that as the choir is singing and we lift up our prayer and fellowship...
- f) Have faith in him today!
- g) Let's pray...