

**Luke 24: 1-27; "O Foolish Ones and Slow of Heart to Believe",
An Easter Sunday Sermon Delivered by Pastor Rendall on April 8th, 2007,
In the Morning Worship Service.**

I have often told you that perhaps the worst of all sins is unbelief. As you grow in the Christian life it becomes very apparent that "without faith it is impossible to please God." When we fall into unbelief we are not looking to God or expecting that He will do what He has promised to do in the Scriptures. From the words that I have read to you just now, it is also evident that even the closest of Jesus' disciples did not believe in the resurrection of their Lord, even after it took place; until it was personally revealed to them. This shows us something about their faith, because Jesus had explicitly told them, on a number of occasions, that He would rise from the dead on the third day. You say to me, "Perhaps this was because they had experienced so much sorrow and discouragement when their Lord died." I would say to you, "Yes, the crucifixion of their Lord had seemed to them like such an overwhelming defeat to the cause of righteousness and truth, an apparent utter defeat to the whole purpose of the life of their Teacher and Master, that it is understandable that they were so perplexed at the thought that He could really have risen from the dead." But that was no excuse for their unbelief. The Lord Jesus Himself says so in verse 25, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe." Some of these disciples had walked with Jesus for 3 1/2 years. They had seen Him not only heal the sick, but they had also seen Him raise the dead. At numerous times during His ministry He had told them that He would have to suffer and die, and then He would be raised from the dead. But they did not understand, and from their reactions on that morning of His resurrection you would never know that they had heard Him say these things to them at all. This is what I want to examine with you this morning.

When we see this tendency of the disciples who were closest to the Lord Jesus, to be slow to believe in His resurrection from the dead, and slow to believe in all the prophets had written, we should think about the possibility that this tendency to be slow to believe in Christ's resurrection, and the power of it, is to be found in ourselves as well. All true believers are those who believe in Christ's resurrection from the dead; but there may be many true believers who are, as Jesus said to the two on the road to Emmaus, "Foolish and slow of heart to believe" in Christ's resurrection power in relation to their living the Christian life. So let us ask the question, "What does it mean for a disciple of the Lord Jesus to be foolish and slow of heart to believe?" I would observe that there are 3 reasons which are revealed to us in this text that explain why we are sometimes foolish and slow of heart to believe in Christ's resurrection power.

1st- Sometimes we are slow of heart to believe because we do not remember the words of Christ which would strengthen our faith (Verses 1-8)

It is true, that sometimes we who believe in the Lord Jesus do not really think about His words in a way that affects our every day experience. Sometimes we really do not think that His words have a greater reality to them, than what people of the world tell us, or what our own experience and our senses tell us is true. But Jesus' words really are greater. They are Spirit and they are life. Jesus' Words have a greater truth and a greater reality to them than what our minds can take in, in one glance. And because of this, sometimes we are foolish and we are slow to believe. You would have thought, that if faith was something that we have by nature, in our heart and in our mind, in our human nature apart from grace; that these disciples would have all been gathered together in the upper room as they later were

gathered, on the day of Pentecost, waiting for the Spirit to descend. You would have thought that they would have been gathered together to await and to celebrate His resurrection. But they most definitely were not. No, it is evident that they did not expect the resurrection at all. "Faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," it says in Hebrews 11: 6. But the disciples did not have that kind of faith, that kind of expectation that morning. Faith in the Lord Jesus is the firm and unmovable expectation that He will do everything that He has said He will do, everything that He has promised that He would. Let us ask ourselves if we have this kind of faith this morning?

What was it that Jesus had said? What was it that He had promised? He had said to them, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." The women, who first came to the tomb, early that morning, came for all the right reasons and with loving motives, bringing the spices which they had prepared. They were in the path of loving duty. If their Lord had died, they still wanted to attend to his dead body at least, and to minister to him in the only way that they knew how. These were the women who had followed Christ from Galilee. Verse 10 tells us that it was Mary Magdalene, Johanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women as well. They are mentioned in Luke 8, verses 1-3 in this way. "And it came to pass, afterward, that Jesus went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." "And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities--Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance." These women were great supporters of Jesus' ministry, but they were slow to believe in His resurrection which He spoke of.

Let's see if we can discover why this is. They approach the tomb, but they find the stone rolled away. They go into the tomb but they do not find the body of the Lord Jesus there. It says in verse 4 that they were "greatly perplexed about this." It seems pretty obvious that they simply thought that someone had taken and moved the body, and not that He had risen from the dead. This is confirmed for us when we turn over to John 20, verses 11-15, where we find a more in-depth account of Mary Magdalene's thoughts on that morning. She was one of the women that is mentioned in our text. It says, "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb." "And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." Then they said to her, "Woman why are you weeping?" She said them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." This is the perplexity that came to their minds. They did not understand. They did not believe that He was going to rise from the dead. These angels are the same two who are referred to as "men," in verse 4 of our text. They stood by them "in shining garments." The women were afraid of them and bowed their faces to the ground, but the simple question that came from the lips of one of these angels was, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" "He is not here, but is risen!" This good word, God knew, needed to be declared to them by angels. Sometimes when we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we still do not understand. Things are far different than we imagine. Jesus is risen! He is alive! But we, who are slow to believe, do not think of Him that way, and because of this, the resurrection power is not at work in our life in as great a way as it could be. God has done or is doing something very great, but we do not see it. And so, since it is not seen or understood, it is not believed. Some aspect of knowledge must be given to us to complete what is lacking in our faith. The Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3: 9 and 10 says, "For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your

sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" Sometimes our understanding is veiled in some way. Turn with me over to Matthew 17, verse 22. It says there, "Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And then it says, "And they were exceedingly sorrowful." Here again, the words, these glorious words of Christ's resurrection are not understood and they apparently are not believed. All that it says is that the disciples were exceedingly sorrowful. The women of the text that we are studying were there when this statement of Christ's was made. The angel says to them in our text, "Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee?" But all they could focus on was the sorrow of losing Christ in death. They could not look beyond it to the resurrection.

This leads me to say to you this morning that it is possible that sorrow over the loss of one whom you love very much, one who has taught you much about life and faith, one who you have looked to, to be there for you in your time of need; this sorrow may degenerate into unbelief. Great sorrow may lead to our being slow to believe that God really cares for us or will really help us; or that all of God's promises will be faithfully performed to us. But this should not be. We should not be looking for the living among the dead." Christ is risen! It is not as you think. If your loved one whom you have been so close to has died; if they have believed in Jesus, they still live. They are one of the great "cloud of witnesses" that have gone before you. If they were still here they would exhort you to "run your race with endurance", "fixing your eyes on Jesus" who is "the author and perfecter of your faith". There may be some of you here who are sorrowing because you do not sense the presence and help and grace of the Savior, and you are weeping, even as Mary Magdalene was, in the garden, saying, "Where have you laid My Savior?" And all the while, the One that she was speaking to, when she had those real concerns was Christ Himself. Christ sees your sorrows dear one; but do not let your sorrows lead you to question the words and promise of Christ Himself. Your loved one may not be with you, but Christ is. He is alive! It says in verse 8, "And they remembered His words." Oh what a great part of faith consists in remembering Christ's words. "Blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe!" Believe what? Believe the testimony of the word concerning Christ, or the words of Christ Himself. Do not be slow to believe, but remember the promises of God are all "yes and amen" to the glory of God, in our Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection power and grace are great, not to the one who disbelieves, but to one who believes.

2ndly- Sometimes we are slow of heart to believe in Christ's resurrection power because we are skeptical of the testimony of other Christians, especially if they are women. (Verses 9-12)

Verse 9 says, "Then they (that is the women) returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest." And what was the response of these great men; of these apostles and men who had followed the Lord Jesus most closely? Verse 11 says, "And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them." This surely shows their folly and slowness of heart to believe. I think that we need at this point to show some of the many times that the Lord Jesus had spoken to His apostles and disciples in the past, about His death and resurrection, so that we might see what the source of this unbelief on their part was. Turn with me to Mark chapter 8, and verse 31. Peter has just before this, rightly confessed that Jesus was the Christ. And Jesus strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him." He did this because He knew that if many people knew, and were convinced that He was the Christ, they would come and try and make Him the king over an

earthly kingdom at that time. But He knew that this was certainly not the time for His exaltation. Rather it was the time for His humiliation and His suffering. Verse 31 says, "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after 3 days rise again." Peter didn't like this idea of His Messiah having to suffer, especially after he had just been given the keys to the Kingdom, as it is recorded in Matthew 16: 19. But it says, "Jesus spoke this word openly." "Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him." Matthew 16: 21 says that Peter said, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You." And Jesus turns and gives Peter one of the sharpest rebukes that He ever gave to any of His disciples, "Get behind Me, Satan!" "You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Truly Peter was sinfully mistaken in the way that He thought of Christ's purpose for coming to dwell among men. He "must suffer many things", and "He must be rejected by the elders and chief priests and be killed." But He must also, "after 3 days," rise again. Peter is slow to believe in the glory of this great work of Christ's.

But before we think too critically of Peter and the other disciples on this occasion we need to think just as much of ourselves. Peter did not understand or believe that Jesus should have to suffer before He came into His Messianic reign. He did not understand the nature of the kingdom of God, or how it would be built. He would in time learn this the hard way. We find him very agreeable to the transfiguration of our Lord in chapter 9 of Mark. Peter there is recorded as saying that he wanted to make 3 tabernacles and settle down in the bliss of heavenly glory upon the earth. But the idea that Jesus would have to suffer; this was not acceptable to him. It was unthinkable! We find that Peter was unbelieving in relation to how the Church would be founded and established; the very church of which he was called to be an apostle! This does account for what took place on the day of Christ's resurrection, both with him and with the others. They had some real preconceptions that were not right. They carried these preconceptions with them all the way to the time when Jesus went to the cross. They must have believed that if Jesus had to die, that then, it was all over; that the kingdom would not be established; when in truth, it was through Christ's death that the kingdom's foundations would be laid! They did not understand why Jesus must die. They didn't understand that it would be by a suffering Savior that the Kingdom, Christ's New Testament church, would come into being. It was through this means, that sin would be atoned for and power given to live a godly life.

Similarly, you and I sometimes do not understand how we can grow in holiness through Christ's resurrection power; how we become better witnesses, how we become those who see Christ's kingdom advance in our hearts. We still have much pride and self-sufficiency in us, by nature, and we cannot see sometimes what it will take, to build godly character in our lives. But God does. Take such a simple matter as it being a fact that Christ revealed Himself first to the women. Christ sovereignly chose to do this. These apostles and disciples should have been able to receive the testimony of these women with great joy and wonder and with a thankful heart. Why shouldn't Jesus reveal Himself to them first, who were so concerned to serve Him even in His death. But the testimony of our text is, "their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them." They considered their testimony to be the ravings of their strained imaginations, flowing from their emotions and hopes that Jesus still lived. If the angels had revealed it to these men and leaders, then they would have received it immediately. But because it is a group of women, they are very skeptical. When will we come to understand that God does these things, in this way, for very good reasons. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things

of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29) Christ did this to show the apostles and disciples something very important about his revealing Himself to those who they thought were inferior in this matter of revelation. They thought that if Christ was raised from the dead, then He would surely reveal Himself to them first. But they needed now, at this critical point of their experience, to understand the truth of Galatians 3: 28. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

You and I need to understand from this that there are things that are revealed to many of Christ's plain and ordinary servants, people who are not outstanding for their position, their gifts, or their intellect, who we can learn from. Yes, even men can learn from women. Women are not allowed to preach or exercise authority in the church, but they can share things which God has revealed to them under the authority of their husbands or of the church itself. Something may have been revealed to them from God's Word, in relation to their experience, that may be of great value to us, or to many others. It is something that the Lord knows would be very important for us to learn. Christ is risen! I need to receive it. But as we think about the person who is trying to share this with us, male or female, we may disqualify them because we think that we know more than they do. This shows that we do not understand Christ's resurrection power well enough yet. But God will demonstrate it to us. "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise." Why should Christ reveal Himself to men behaving like the apostles were, that day? They were skeptical, they were not believing. But He is merciful and gracious to have revealed it to them by the testimony of these women. Peter, at least, had the faith to run to the tomb and see. The rest would not do so. They would take a wait and see attitude.

Turn with me over to Mark 9: 31 and I will show you another reason why these apostles and disciples fell into unbelief on the morning of Christ's resurrection. This is not long after the incident that we studied a minute ago. In verse 30 it says, "Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it." "For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him." "And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." Now notice this comment that follows. "But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him." Why were they afraid? It was because they believed in an earthly kingdom and did not understand the spiritual and heavenly kingdom in the way that they should. Christ must suffer, He must die, so that we could have eternal life; the forgiveness of sins and new heart. This was the only way. Christ's death on the cross threw the apostles and disciples into a great temptation to unbelief. And some of them succumbed to it. What about you, my listeners this morning? Do you believe that there could have been some other way for you to come to know God; some other way to obtain the knowledge of sins forgiven, some other power than Christ's resurrection power to make you over into the person God would have you to be? Check yourself out. Check your own heart. And remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 3. In verse 9 he confesses his greatest desire is to be found in Christ, not having His own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to His death." Every true Christian who would grow in grace, who would grow in faith, yearns for this same thing; the power of Christ's resurrection to be seen in their heart and life. It is Christ's great power that

enables us to do anything in the Christian life which is profitable to God. It is not our natural strength or zeal which accomplishes the will of God. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding." (Ecclesiastes 9: 11) It is to those who are simply trusting in Christ crucified; and believing in Christ raised from the dead. We will be slow of heart to believe if we are leaning upon our own understanding and are afraid to ask questions, as the apostles were in Mark 9. They were afraid because they sensed that the kingdom of God was not what they had thought. It would involve the suffering of their Savior before His exaltation. If we know Christ's resurrection power we will also come to know the fellowship of His sufferings. But we will also attain to the resurrection unto life.

3rdly- We are sometimes slow of heart to believe in Christ's resurrection power because our eyes are restrained so that we do not know Christ when we see Him in our experience.

We see this point exemplified in the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus. I will preach to you more about their faith and experience this afternoon, but right now I would like to share with you this last point. Both the 2 on the road to Emmaus and the disciples and apostles of the Lord have this point in common. The two on the road to Emmaus that resurrection morn were traveling on the road and they were talking together of all the things that had happened concerning Jesus' death. And now, they had heard, just that morning, the report of the women that Jesus was alive. But they, like the apostles, were slow to believe. It says in verse 15, "So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them." "But their eyes were restrained so that they did not know Him." They couldn't recognize Jesus because it was God's will that they not do so until a certain point later in their conversation. Now turn with me to Luke 18 and you will find a similar thing. In verse 31 and following it says, "Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.'" "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon." "They will scourge Him and kill Him." "And the third day He will rise again." "But they did not understand none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken." "This saying was hidden from them," it says. There are some things in our experience of Jesus and sufferings, and Jesus and His resurrection power that we do not understand at one point in our Christian experience that we will at a later point. And all of these things will fall out according to God's purpose, and His will for our life. This is another reason why we are so foolish and so slow of heart to believe. There are things which God saves back in our experience to surprise us. There are things that God hides now that He will reveal later with great power and glory. This is the beauty of what happened on the day of Christ's resurrection. What a beautiful and wonderful and glorious surprise that through His death, Christ conquered sin, and opened the door to eternal life for sinners like us. I once was lost but now am found, 'twas blind but now I see." Some things God believes are worth hiding for a time, so that when they are revealed that we will have great joy and exaltation in receiving them. I will speak more about this in the afternoon service. What a glory and a joy that Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!