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Luke 24:13-48

Golden Ticket Mystery: Joyous Disbelief



Golden Verse

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

The disciples are clearly having trouble wrapping their brains around the reality of a risen Jesus. At this point in Luke’s gospel most of the disciples had only heard what they considered idle tales of gossip of Jesus’ resurrection. But upon seeing Jesus, they believe He is a ghost. A ghost was a more likely scenario to them than a person rising from the dead.

After inviting them to see His wounds, something shifts in their souls. This beautiful phrase – joyous disbelief – captures so much about the nature and power of the gospel. It reminds me of one of my favorite childhood movies, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. For my young brain, Roald Dahl’s description of Charlie Buckets’ life enthralled me.

He had a loving family, but they were so poor that his grandparents, all four of them, lived with them and were crammed into a single bed. Then of course the mesmerizing Chocolate Factory with this reclusive confectionary genius had a contest in which all the children from around the world vied for a Golden Ticket to gain entrance into this wonder. I still remember the moment in which Charlie peeled back the wrapping of the chocolate bar. The joyous disbelief on his face was incredibly mesmerizing, powerful, exciting, and entralling.

It is this unbelievable thrill that I imagined the disciples experienced upon discovering that the reality of Jesus was unbelievably more amazing and joyful than any of them could even dare have conceived! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God! Which means that God truly is a God of forgiveness, love, and not to mention incredible power!! The best thing, like Charlie, that could possibly be conceived is real!! That is why we sing and say with such abandoned joy on Easter, “Jesus Christ has Risen Today!!! A-a-a-le lu u ia!!!”

It was in this state of joyous disbelieving that they were finally able to understand Jesus’ teachings. He unfolds Old Testament prophecies, and you get the sense that this time it was sinking in.

Notice that before they understood, prior to an intellectual agreement, they felt the joy of knowing the risen Christ. In fact, this joy, this encounter with the risen Christ, seems to be a pre-requisite for understanding and acceptance. First comes our encounter with God and then comes our belief. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth describe faith as a crater. The meteor of God strikes our souls, and it leaves an impression, a powerful mark on us that cannot be easily done away with.

This means that divine encounters normally precede belief. God is so much bigger than we can comprehend. We cannot find God in a mathematical proof. Perhaps not surprising then before the joy, there was doubt, and fear and a failure of faith.

Jesus reminds them that He told them all of this was coming to pass! But they dared not believe Him, just like all too often we dare not trust the true promises of God.

Failure to trust is the great blockade of faith. John's gospel depicts a similar failure but in his account the disciples were huddled behind locked doors even though Jesus had already risen. They failed to have the courage to trust, which resulted in complete inaction on the part of the disciples. Doubt is part and parcel of faith. But faith might be best understood not so much as firm convictions based on evidence, but the courage to act in the midst of doubt, and in the midst of lack of convicting evidence. This is why it is called the "leap of faith" we leap into the unknown, trusting in the power of God to bring about goodness.

Thus, God cannot be truly comprehended or accepted apart from a golden ticket encounter with God. The truth of God in Jesus Christ is simply too absurd.

I like to think of myself as a person of science. I love to read popular books on string theory, biology, quantum mechanics, geology and more. Besides the enthralling concepts they include, I am fascinated and somewhat in awe of the brilliance of scientists who can piece together seemingly disparate facts like puzzle pieces that when properly assembled, make a clear picture. The great scientific insights almost always fly

in the face of accepted views of the world, so it takes a type of intellectual integrity and courage to make these leaps. But when made they make such plain sense of the facts one is compelled to believe.

But there is another aspect of this world and life in general that to me is even more compelling, that discloses even deeper truths of the world and our place in it.

Mystery.

Einstein himself believed the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.

In an article entitled "The Opposite of Faith isn't Doubt, its Certainty", Jesuit thinker, Kevin O'Brien, muses on the importance of mystery. He first acknowledges that Thomas' insistence to touch Jesus' hands and side as proof of His resurrection is a perfectly normal human response. Perhaps Thomas wanted to believe his friends but it sounded too desperate and deluded and so he wanted to use his senses as we all do when we seek to understand reality. But we cannot stop there.

O'Brien writes:

We live in a hyper-rational ...society where many assume that things not observable by physical senses and not understandable by the human mind either don't exist or have no importance. ...But Christians are called to go beyond the limitations of our physical senses, and to experience another reality: the reality of God's presence and active involvement in our lives.

Jesus gave the disciples proof of His resurrection, and it led them to slack-jawed amazement, the “joyous disbelieving” Luke describes. This experience is the acknowledgement that even in the midst of seeing God right before us there is a mystery and wonder that is beyond our full knowing.

So, without Jesus showing us His hands and His side how do we come to embrace this mystery?

C.S. Lewis wrote, *“I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”* We may not see the risen Lord, but we can we see all the amazing light He shines. Jesus reassures the disciples He is not a ghost by showing His hands and feet; by eating. How are we convinced that Jesus is not a ghost? Not a wispy figure of our imagination, but real, powerful, active, and alive? Ghosts don't leave footprints, but God does. Everywhere.

Just like Jesus ate that piece of fish for the disciples' benefit, He sometimes leaves footprints in strange places for ours – like home appliances.

As a single mother of four boys, you can imagine that at times money was tight. At one point all five of us, me, my three brothers and mom were in schools with tuition. One particular week we weren't sure where gas and lunch money were going to come from. It wasn't a dire situation, the next paycheck would come soon, but nonetheless money was scarce. So of course,

we decided to do laundry. The first load produced a dollar bill, a few pennies, a dime, and perhaps a quarter. It must have come from my jeans I thought. The next load was about the same with a few more dollar bills. As we moved through several loads of laundry the money kept coming. By about fourth load we were checking our clothes thoroughly in advance of washing them for any spare change. It didn't matter; the money kept coming. I even considered re-washing some clothes but thought that might be pushing it! In all I think we netted about \$25. In this case the money helped. Along with paying for some gas and lunches, instead of Charlie's chocolate bar I think I bought a Reese's Cup. But it is still a Golden Ticket mystery of God's providence even to this day, a gift of God's love.

There are many aspects of discipleship that require hard work. But this joyous disbelief requires nothing but awe. God reaches out to us in love and sometimes walks through walls or makes money from a washing machine to give us hope. To me it's something like watching The Masters victory a few weeks ago.

In this life we think we are trying to be Jon Rahm, the ultimate winner, that we are trying to win The Masters of faith, but Jesus is the victor. We are to be the Jim Nantz, the announcer, who gave the play-by-play describing the astounding feat Mr. Rahm accomplished. Remember no matter what happens, God is already won the victory!