

The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

When we consider the events that took place during the week of Easter, it is a roller-coaster ride of emotions for everyone:

On Palm Sunday as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowd were cheering for their hero. Many had come to see him as a prophet of God. They had had many prophets before, many teachers of the law but there was something about this man that was different.

When he spoke he spoke with an authority unlike anything they had seen from other religious leaders. When he spoke, it didn't only make sense, it penetrated the heart. When he spoke, his words hit you right at the very centre of your being. His words could not simply be ignored.

He performed many miracles. Countless people could give personal testimony of his gift of healing, thousands of people witnessed him feed a crowd of 5,000 with just five small loaves of bread and two fish. One boy's sandwiches but Jesus really knew how to make a sandwich spread! They had seen him do amazing things.

Many people believed he was the Messiah, the chosen one of God who the prophets had written about. The one who would bring them freedom from Roman rule. For many years the people of Israel had dreamed of a glorious new future when the Messiah would set them free. And in Jesus they had found the man they had been waiting for. All of their hopes and dreams were pinned on Jesus and there was great excitement in the air.

But things had not turned out as everyone expected. Within the space of a week they had seen their hero stripped of power, arrested, beaten and killed on a cross. It left a hole behind for those who had followed him. Jesus was their everything, all their hope was in him, they believed in him, some had given up everything to follow him believing that he was the one. No one expected this, this wasn't supposed to happen. What were they to do now?

Well we are told of two of the disciples at least who decided to return home. As they walked along they were still discussing everything that had happened. Probably still in a state of shock and disbelief, still trying to put the pieces together, reconstructing the events in their minds to work out where things had gone wrong.

As they walked and talked, Jesus turned up and began to walk with them but they didn't recognise him. They probably assumed he was a visitor to Jerusalem just like them. That he had travelled to Jerusalem for Passover and was now travelling home again just as they were. Jesus asks them "what are you two talking about as you walk along?" His question seems to stun the two travellers. What does he mean "what are you discussing?", what does he think they're discussing?, the same thing that everyone is discussing. If this 'stranger' was a pilgrim to Jerusalem like them, how could he not have known what had happened there? So we see their response is "Don't you know what's happened in Jerusalem over the last few days?"

As they make the journey back from Jerusalem we see them in a bad state:

1. Faces downcast (v17)

A very different expression on their faces now than they would have had a week ago on Palm Sunday. Back then they were full of joy, shouting at the top of their voices "Hosanna to the son of David". A week ago they were overjoyed, great big smiles on their faces, waving palm branches in the air. Now, their faces were downcast.

2. Disappointed (v21)

"He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people."

They believed that Jesus was someone special because of the things he said and the things he did. They believed he had a special anointing from God. They believed he was the chosen one, the Messiah.

"...we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel."

They had got their hopes up that Jesus would be the one to overthrow the Romans. They thought he was going to be a military leader so they were disappointed that the Romans had actually defeated Jesus.

Although notice that it isn't the Romans here who get the blame. (v20) "The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him." If the Chief Priests and religious leaders had hoped to pin the blame on the already unpopular Romans, their plan had failed. Everyone knew who was responsible for Jesus' death. But nonetheless the disciples were disappointed with the outcome of the events of the last week. Their redeemer was dead and so were their hopes and dreams.

3. Confused (v22-23)

First of all they are still trying to make sense of what had happened but to add to that confusion was the report of the women:

²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

The two disciples knew what the women had said but they didn't understand. It seems that they didn't know what to make of all this. What had happened to Jesus' body? It doesn't appear that the two travellers could accept that Jesus really was alive again, after all, if they believed that why were they so miserable? So they were in a state of confusion. They had been there when Jesus was crucified, they had seen him nailed to the cross, they had seen him hanging there, they had seen him die. All of these things they had witnessed with their own eyes but apparently as far as they knew, no one had actually seen Jesus alive again. They probably wished it was true, but how could it be? They had seen with their own eyes that Jesus was dead. He had been checked by Roman soldiers and certified dead and besides all that, he'd been buried for more than two days! – it was absolutely impossible that Jesus could be alive.

They knew what the prophets had said about the Messiah but they didn't understand. The prophets had spoken about a saviour who would redeem Israel but they understood this to mean a political and military redeemer. They did not understand.

They knew that Jesus had talked about three days but they didn't understand this. It was now the third day. They may well have been expecting something to happen but they didn't understand that it already had happened. Jesus had risen from the dead and was standing talking to them.

So a little like the optical illusions we looked at earlier, they saw but they didn't see. Like when you look at one of these pictures, the hidden object is there all along, you just need to be looking in the

right way. When we are not looking for the right thing, it is as though it isn't there, even though it is right in front of our eyes, we don't see it.

The remarks of Jesus to the two disciples come as a bit of a surprise to us:

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

That seems a bit harsh doesn't it? Why did Jesus call them foolish? I mean however you interpret these words, they're certainly not a compliment are they? But you see the problem was that they were looking at things from a worldly point of view, from a human angle instead of seeing things in God's light. They knew all the prophecies, they had the report of the women which had been verified by other disciples, they had heard Jesus himself talk about three days but on a human level, none of it made any sense now. The two disciples needed to see this not through human eyes and with human understanding but through spiritual eyes and with spiritual understanding. Jesus begins to open their spiritual eyes:

²⁶Did not the Christ^[b] have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

So Jesus gave them a Bible study as they walked along the road. He went over the prophecies again for them and explained it to them so as they could understand it. And their spiritual eyes were starting to open. Inside they could feel the stranger's teaching touching their hearts, just as it used to when they heard Jesus preaching. This was stuff they had heard many times before but somehow they were beginning to see it differently. They were fascinated by this stranger's teaching and before long they were in Emmaus.

Jesus went in to stay with them and when he broke the bread their eyes were opened and they finally recognised who the stranger was. It was Jesus, he was alive. The penny had finally dropped and their doubts turned to belief.

They now understood why the tomb was empty.

They understood what the prophets meant when they talked about a redeemer.

They understood what Jesus meant when he said the temple would be destroyed but in three days would be rebuilt.

And they returned to Jerusalem immediately. Notice that they had been concerned for Jesus still travelling because it was late. But now they are so excited that they can't wait until morning, they hurry back to Jerusalem straight away.

They no longer had downcast faces, they instead had burning hearts.

They were no longer disappointed but were once again full of hope.

They were no longer confused, their eyes were opened and they could see.

Now there's a really interesting little detail that Luke has included for us.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther.

²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

Did you notice that? Jesus acted as if he were going farther. Why? What would have happened if the two hadn't have asked Jesus to stay? I think the simple answer is that he wouldn't have stayed. I think this little detail shows that Jesus doesn't impose himself on us. He doesn't force us to let him in but he is ready to come in if we invite him in.

If the two disciples hadn't invited Jesus in, they would have remained in the dark. They probably still wouldn't have been able to accept that Jesus was alive again or understood that he had not come to save Israel from the Romans, but to save people from their sins. They would have remained ignorant.

Jesus stands today waiting for an invitation to come into our lives but many people today chose not to let Jesus in and so they remain in the dark, not understanding that Jesus died and rose again for them. Just like these disciples, some people can even quote Bible verses but they miss the main point.

But when we open the door to Jesus and he comes into our lives, he brings illumination and understanding, he brings hope and he sets our hearts on fire.

One writer put it like this:

They were looking for a lion, he came as a lamb and they missed him

They were looking for a king, he came as a servant, and they missed him

They were looking for liberation from Rome, he submitted to the Roman stake and they missed him.

They were looking for a fit to their mould, he was the mould breaker and they missed him.

Will you?

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