

65. Jesus on the Emmaus Road

Luke 24:13-35

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

The Unrecognized One

In 1984, when my wife and I lived in Jerusalem, Israel, we attended a prayer conference focused on praying for revival in Israel and the presence of God to return to Jerusalem. The place was significant because the meeting was at Ma'aleh Hachamisha, several miles to the west of Jerusalem. This was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept for three months in the house of Obed Edom after being captured by the Philistines (2 Samuel 6:11-15).

To close the conference, the 120 believers and Sandy and I walked along the same path that King David and the Priests of God walked as they carried the Ark of the Covenant from Obed Edom's house to Jerusalem. We sang and prayed during the walk, which lasted several miles. This walk had a profound effect on me. We prayed for the peace of Jerusalem and God's blessing on the city as we walked.

Ma'aleh Hachamisha is also approximately the same distance away from Jerusalem as biblical Emmaus was, now believed to be the village of Al-Qubeiba, just to the north of where we were walking. We were possibly on the same path to Emmaus that Jesus decided to reveal Himself to two despondent believers:

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" ¹⁹"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 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" (Luke 24:13-24).

Here in this passage, we have two disciples of Christ walking together toward the village of Emmaus, seven miles westward of Jerusalem. We are told the name of one, Cleopas (v. 11), but not the other. The day they were walking we know to be Resurrection Sunday, the third day after the crucifixion of Christ (v. 21). Passover had finished, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread, lasting seven days, was continuing. To walk any further than a mile on the Sabbath was considered work, so this was their first opportunity to walk more than a mile. We don't know

why they were walking westward away from Jerusalem; it may be that they were walking to their homes or a place of work. □

As they walked, a stranger came walking along behind them. The stranger was the resurrected Jesus who caught up and began listening to a very deep and intense conversation between the two. Cleopas and his friend were comparing notes with one another and reflecting on the last three days' events (v. 14). Perhaps, they talked about the curtain torn from top to bottom in the Temple (Matthew 27:51), i.e., the curtain that separated man from God. Maybe they talked about the tombs breaking open at the death of Christ and about the bodies of many holy people coming out of their grave (Matthew 27:52). The two were believers but not of the eleven Apostles. They were probably two of the 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, still forty-seven days away (fifty days after Passover).

The two disciples had become disillusioned since the One they hoped would redeem them was murdered at the hands of the religious leaders. Depression and discouragement had settled in their hearts, due to the terrible events of the Passover weekend, *"We had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel"* (v. 21). As the three of them walked together, *"They were kept from recognizing him"* (v. 16). Some think it was the setting sun in their faces as they walked westward in the late afternoon. Others believe that it was because Christ had a cloak with a hood on it that kept them from seeing His face. □

It is a lesson to those who are strong believers to come alongside those who are discouraged or weak in their faith. We are to encourage one another by explaining the Scriptures that our God is never far from us, even when we are low in our faith. He is always close at hand and ready to meet with us, especially when we lack understanding in what He is doing in us and through us. God will manifest Himself to those who are seeking Him and enquiring after Him: *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13). Mark, writing about this same meeting, said that Jesus appeared to the two in a different form: *"Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country"* (Mark 16:12). Luke uses a Greek term that is a theological passive to describe that their eyes were divinely kept from recognizing Christ.

Question 1) On this first day of Christ's resurrection, why would Luke write about Jesus' appearing in a different form to two discouraged believers? Why would Jesus travel incognito?

This is not the only time our God has hidden Himself from His people. On that same morning, when Jesus was resurrected, He hid His identity for a short while from Mary Magdalene:

¹³They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, *but she did not realize that it was Jesus*. ¹⁵"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" *Thinking he was the gardener*, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). (John 20:13-18).

Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel (Isaiah 45:15).

Perhaps, these two disciples would have talked differently if they knew Who it was that was walking alongside them. They were able to share with Jesus and articulate why they were so low and disillusioned. The Word of God tells us that their blindness was of a spiritual nature and not a natural phenomenon at all. God has shown up incognito on several occasions in the Scriptures. For instance, Gideon spoke with the LORD without realizing to Whom he was speaking (Judges 6:22-23). Samson's parents spoke to the LORD Who appeared as the Angel of the LORD (Judges 11:16-23). Abraham also had YHVH appear to him in form as of a man, described as the Angel of YHVH. When the word LORD is capitalized, it always means YHVH, God Himself. Most Christian scholars believe The Angel of the LORD to be a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus. I wonder how many of us have had angelic visitation or that Jesus Himself has come alongside us. He comes alongside us to bear our burdens, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2).

Question 2) Have you ever sensed the presence of an angel or the Lord Himself close to you? Share about it. If Jesus were to walk alongside you today, what heavy burdens would you like Him to carry?□

I wonder how many times the Lord has been walking with us, and we have not been spiritually aware that it was He. As Christ drew alongside them, He took the initiative and said to them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" (v. 17). Cleopas and his friend were amazed at Jesus' question about what had been going on in Jerusalem. Their body language portrayed their incredulity. Verse 17 tells us that they were shocked to a standstill with their faces downcast. "One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?' " (v. 18). Their hearts were low as they talked about their hopes and dreams for the future being broken and dashed by the crucifixion of Christ. The Lord often asked a question to draw out people. He said to them, "What things?" (v. 19).

Our God longs that we share with Him exactly where we are at in our faith. He knows us more than we know ourselves, yet He loves us more than we can ever realize. It's not that God doesn't know what is going on in their hearts and ours. He longs that we might talk with Him about our situation. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). He is a good listener. I'm sure that Cleopas and his friend shared more than is written down for us, but the Lord did not reply until they unburdened themselves. This was a courageous thing for these two disciples to confess that they were disciples of Jesus, especially to One they thought was a stranger. Since the beginning of Passover, the disciples of Christ had been experiencing great fear, and the eleven disciples had locked themselves away in an upper room in case they were betrayed and killed, too. He took the initiative to ask them to talk about why they were disillusioned. Their pain caused them to pour out their hearts openly to a stranger. When they were finished sharing their disillusionment, He replied by explaining to them the Scriptures, i.e.,

not by getting out a scroll but by sharing the thoughts and meditations laid up in His heart and mind.

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ 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 (Luke 24:25-27).

Question 3) Why did Jesus take the disciples through the Scriptures instead of just plainly telling them Who He was? What stories do you think He may have shared that spoke of the work of Christ?

Explaining the Scriptures

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that the Old Testament Scriptures were written down as picture language for believers that would be around for the end of the age: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). These two disciples needed to understand what the Scriptures taught. They only had a limited understanding of what God was going to do. When they read the writings of Moses, they did not look closely and ask the "why" of the text. We can learn a lot by the "who, what, when, where, and why" questions that we can ask of the text. The two disciples had clouded vision due to their belief that Jesus' mission was to release them from Rome's bondage and occupation. The Lord began to explain the Old Testament Scriptures to them, starting with Moses and the Prophets (v. 27). □

Perhaps Jesus explained what Moses wrote in the first five books of Moses, that God would send a Deliverer to crush the serpent's head (a picture of Satan): "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). He probably explained how the substitutionary Passover lamb's blood that was shed and placed on the lintel and door posts of the doors would deliver the obedient from Pharaoh's slavery. Perhaps, He explained that the Rock that was smitten by Moses, thus bringing forth water for Israel, was a picture of the Rock of Israel, Christ, being struck for sin so that the Holy Spirit would be poured out for the thirsty (Exodus 17:6). Paul the Apostle also wrote about Christ was and is the Rock of Israel. He wrote that they all "drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Perhaps, He explained that the heavenly food that came to Israel while in the desert was a picture of the heavenly bread of life that God would give, i.e., a picture of Christ, the Bread of Life:

³²Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."
³⁴"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." ³⁵Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:32-35).

Perhaps, He also explained that Moses had said, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Pharaoh and Egypt were a picture given hundreds of years before Christ of the greater bondage and servitude of sin that will not release its slaves unless payment is made by the death of a substitute, i.e., the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). □

To these two, disheartened disciples, Christ also went to the prophets. He might have spoken of King David, who wrote of One who would come Who would be scorned, despised, mocked, and Whose clothes would be divided and lots cast for His garment (Psalm 22). His hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16). He might have mentioned Zechariah's prophecy of One upon Whom they would look, the One who had been pierced for them: “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son” (Zechariah 12:10).

He might have mentioned Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant Whom God would send to make atonement: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). He certainly would have spoken of David's prophecy that the Messiah (Christ) would be raised from the dead and Whose body would not see corruption: “because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay” (Psalm 16:10).

What Jesus was doing with them was the most necessary thing that needs to take place today, i.e., a clear explanation of the Word of God—what God has done in Christ, and how a man needs to respond to the finished work of Christ on the cross for us and as us. A person is not genuinely converted if his will is still heading in an opposite direction. “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still” (Benjamin Franklin). The will can only be reached through clear reasoning to the mind. Jesus took the two disciples to the objective Word of God and clearly explained the mission of Christ to make atonement for sin.

Jesus, the Gentleman □

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. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread (Luke 24:28-35).

As they approached the turnoff for the village where they were going, Jesus made as if to go on further, probably saying goodbye to them. □

Question 4) Why would Jesus act as if He were going farther? Why did He wait until He got an invitation?

This is not the first time that Jesus acted as if He would pass by them. In Mark's Gospel, we are told of a time when He went alone to a place to pray through the night. While praying in the dark, He saw that they were having difficulty rowing the boat against the wind on the Sea of Galilee, so He went out to them at three o'clock in the morning:

⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." ⁵¹Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished (Mark 6:48-51).

Why would Jesus be about to pass by them? Was it because He knew that they would be frightened by someone walking on water? Perhaps, it speaks of the gift of free will that God has given us, i.e., that He will not come into the boat or our home and walk with us without invitation. If we want Him to be with us, or for us to be with Him, we will have to lower our defenses and invite Him to come to us. How beautiful it is that Christ took the time to eat a simple meal of unleavened bread with them (the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted seven days). He would not force Himself on them; it was only due to their fearful cries and invitation on the Sea of Galilee that He turned and came to their boat. Our God delights in being wanted not for what He can do for us but for Himself. He gently awaited their invitation to go to the house where they were staying. □

Have you invited Him into the house of your heart? He has given you the gift of free will and longs to walk this road with you, casting your sins behind His back, if you will openly confess where you are. Give Him full control of who you are and everything you own. He wants to come and dine in sweet fellowship with each of us reading this message. At their strong invitation, He went with them. □

As they ate with Him, their hearts burned within them as Jesus opened their understanding of the Word of God. He was connecting with their hearts as He talked. Their later confession was, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us" (v. 31). The fire burns within our hearts when the Spirit of God breathes on His word as we meditate on the Scriptures. "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned" (Psalm 39:3). Do not underestimate the power of simple reading, meditating, and pondering on the Word of God. □

As Christ shared the Scriptures with them, they sensed a kinship in some way. What a model the Lord Jesus is to each of us. He didn't preach a long sermon to thousands of people after His resurrection. He took time to be with the ones and twos, teaching them the Scriptures and building them up in the faith. I'm sure they were convinced this man must be a Rabbi to know the Scriptures and expound on them as Jesus did. □

Usually, the host will break the bread and bless the food before his guest, but in this instance, Jesus was invited to bless and break the bread. As the unleavened bread was broken, the blessing was pronounced, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the world, Who has caused bread to come forth out of the earth." At the blessing of the bread, their eyes were opened, and they recognized that it was Jesus. With shocked expressions on their face, He disappeared before their eyes!□

Question 5) Why would Jesus disappear upon their recognition of Him?

Walking by Faith

We are to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). His disciples were relying on His visible presence, some of them for three years, but now it is time to lean on His invisible presence. The disciple Thomas was an example of one who was not ready to walk by faith. He trusted only in what could be seen and experienced through his senses. The disciples were entering into a new relationship with the Lord, one that would require them to walk by faith, not by sight. Thomas wanted to see and feel before he would believe that Christ had, indeed, risen. When the Lord invited Thomas to touch the nail marks in His hands, Thomas no longer needed to feel the nail prints or the spear hole, and he fell to his knees, saying, "My Lord and my God!"□

To Thomas' credit, once he saw Jesus, he did not hold back but immediately worshiped Him. Unlike Thomas, not all believers have evidence given to their senses. There are those who will not take a step of faith because they are waiting for a supernatural sign or a prophetic word from the Lord. The Lord sometimes confirms His Word in unusual ways, but we should step out in faith on the objective Word of God and the inner confirmation and peace of the Spirit inside us. We must live by faith and not by sight. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). If you are a believer, Jesus was speaking about you!

In the fictional C.S. Lewis book, *Screwtape Letters*, a training session was going on between a seasoned senior demon and a young demon. The young demon is in need of advice on his first assignment trying to disrupt and destroy the faith of a new Christian. C.S. Lewis offers an interesting insight of a Christian learning to walk by faith and not by sight:□

He [God] wants them to learn to walk and must, therefore, take away His hand, and if only the will to walk is really there, He is pleased even with the stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.¹

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Co., 1959), page 47.

Those who have not perceived by the five senses but still have believed express the kind of faith for which God is looking.

What about you? Will you believe that you are unique to God and that the Messiah, Jesus, would come alongside you this day and lift your heart to behold Him? Perhaps, you would like to prepare bread and even a glass of juice and ask Him to come close and reveal Himself to you as you break bread. Give Him the weight of your troubles. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and refresh your life with His presence.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I invite You to walk beside me in what I am going through. Help me to recognize that You are with me. Reveal Yourself to me, and make me aware of Your master plan for my life. Amen.

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