

Sunday 8th. April 2018
The Road to Emmaus
Luke 24. 13-35

Part 1.

The Story.

Two men are on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter Day, which for them was not a special day – yet! The journey was about seven miles and would have taken them about two hours to walk, all things being equal. They were leaving Jerusalem sad after the recent unexpected and troubling events. None of Jesus followers expected Jesus to be crucified, they may have been expecting a gigantic miracle. Jesus had fed the five thousand, raised the dead, walked on water, received the adulation of the crowd a few days before, why did he not declare Himself King and take the kingdom of Israel for Himself?

These two were quitting the city which had become a different place for them, a place of confusion and numbness, where a few days before it was a place of excitement.

All of us want to quit at some time in our lives. Sometimes it is the best strategy. Jesus left locations when things were getting risky. Sometimes it is good to move our geographical location out of reach of people who have used or abused us and get a new start out of reach.

Other times we want to quit and move to get a new start, but it is not possible, or does not work, because we take us with us to the new place, and we are the problem!

These two were on the journey, and they were discussing all that had happened in the past few days, and all that Jesus had said and done while with them. They were disciples. They had probably been in the circle of those who followed Jesus, hence their discussion. I say this, because ask yourself this question, how many people have you heard talking about Easter. How many have asked about the special services, the marches of witness, why we have Easter Eggs or why there is a Cross on the hot crossed buns? Probably not many, and very possibly none! Easter is a holiday for most, not a holy day, and this was as true on the day of the resurrection as it is today. The fact that these men were discussing it all shows that they had a real interest in it all.

These men were devout. They were walking and talking and having fellowship together. This is notable and important. One of the saddest features of life today is that many Christians have bought into a dangerous idea that Church does not matter. Others want to do TV church or on-line Church. However the down side of that is that you may be in a virtual congregation of a thousand, but be in fellowship with no-one. Church matters, fellowship matters. It is the beasts at the edge of the herd that the predators take first. Why do you think that fish shoal? It is for protection.

Church, you see, is not a human invention. It is God's design. The minute we join up, it becomes less perfect, but that is not an excuse to avoid it, ignore it or rubbish it. Church

is for the glory of God, not our convenience, or entertainment. We come to give to God, and God is not slow to give to us, but firstly, it is about God. I think the Church often serves the young children and teens badly by giving the impression that it doesn't matter if we are there or not. If you want an interesting take on that, read the history of the Welsh Revival of 1904, and the behavior of Evan Roberts. He did not want to miss anything God might do, so was at every service, and when revival came, he was in the thick of it. Or think of Thomas. Where was he when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples?

Do you remember the favourite verse often quoted when the prayer meeting is small? Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I am in the midst. This is what happened to these two men. As they talked about Christ, Jesus came up and walked with them, but their eyes were blind to His identity.

Can you imagine that Jesus, the risen Jesus was strolling up the road with them, in no rush, chatting with them and asking them questions, and they had no idea who it was with them!

Two things from this. When we meet together in fellowship, Christ often manifests Himself and we know that we are in the midst of a God moment. At other times, we are in fellowship and we are unaware that He is there until almost the end. It doesn't matter if we feel Him present with our senses – which is lovely, or believe He is there, either way, He is there. This is why Church and fellowship meetings, call them house groups, prayer groups or Bible Studies or whatever, but believers meeting with other believers matters, because Jesus comes.

Over the years, I have often been so aware of God's presence in prayer meetings, but then when we go into the Church building, it seems to evaporate. I think one reason for this is that often, when we come together we are unprepared. A Messianic Jewish group called Lamb sang a song many years ago that goes, 'I will talk to my brother's about God my Father, together we'll sing His praises.' A thoroughly Biblical concept of meeting together!

Verse 17 tells us that these disciples were downcast. When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, it says they stood still, their faces downcast – their hearts were heavy, they were astonished that anyone had not heard the news of Jesus death. The description of their action and look shows that they were feeling all that had happened very sorely, almost as if it was too much to recount the whole shocking history to a stranger!

Why were they sad? We know the full story that Jesus was alive, so it is easy for us to ignore the place they were in. They were traveling on the day of Resurrection, but living in a day of death and dashed hopes. Verse 19 and 21 tells us that they had a high regard for Jesus. They held Him to be a prophet powerful in word and deed. They recognized that He somehow stood before God and the people, and it had been a very long time since there had been a prophet in the land. John the Baptist had appeared on

the scene raising Messianic hopes, but he had come to a bad end, and now so had Jesus. Then they came to the crunch in verse 21. They had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel. That is the crunch question which they were now downcast about.

They go on and tell of the reports of the empty tomb, a vision of an angel and a claim that He was alive. However, these were rational men, and to have a hope of redemption and to see Jesus crucified, it was a bit like grasping at straws to think of him alive.

Verse 25 tells us that Jesus began to explain the Scriptures. This is always the solution, to be taught the truth by Christ, and to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

It was only when Jesus gave thanks and broke the bread that their eyes were opened, and they had an experience of God that needed neither defense nor proof. Then Jesus goes! People cannot believe until God opens their eyes. Think of Lydia, Acts 16v14, 'The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.' I don't know how many times I have spoken of this over the past 50 years, but the Church still does not get it! It is not programs that save people, it is God. It is not intellectual instruction that builds us up, but the Word illuminated by the Holy Spirit. If it was a message alone or a strategy alone, all we would need to do is learn of a script of Billy Graham and preach it, or else all we need to do is do an ALPHA or Christianity Explored, and everyone who does it would be saved. That is not how it happens, yet we still so often think that if only we do this or that, all will be fine. God is the evangelist. Our task is to so position ourselves with Him that we are available to work for Him and with Him. This means growing in Christ-likeness. Christ is known spiritually by faith, encountered by faith, and faith grows as we pursue godliness.

The two disciples on the road knew some things, but their spiritual vision was poor, and their expectations were not quite right, which made them, in a sense totally wrong!

Part 2

The heart of the matter.

Verse 21 tells us that they were hoping that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel. This was a noble hope, although it may have not been the exact version of the hope of redemption spoken of by Anna and Simeon. Even they had a different take on what redemption might mean.

The eleven disciples were not clear on what the scope of Jesus work was. In Acts 1 verse 6, we find them asking Jesus if He is now going to restore the kingdom to Israel. This was before Pentecost, and they are still very much thinking in carnal and earthly terms. They are wrong because they are thinking of a physical earthly kingdom. However, Christ has died for a new Kingdom, a spiritual Kingdom, an eternal Kingdom and a Kingdom which will call people from all the world in all the remaining ages to

enter, and a Kingdom which will last forever! They were way too small in their understanding and thinking, a bit like us.

All across the world, over the ages, the church has fallen back into rationalism and carnal thinking. This manifests itself in different ways. Most often, a new teaching is championed, which if we knew our Church History, we would soon recognize as centuries old error repackaged and reheated. In other words, left overs presented as three star Michelin dining!

There are many such things abroad today, and some coming our way very soon! The major issue in our own denomination regards the place of Scripture. This is a question that has trundled on for decades, but we find ourselves in a position today where the Scriptures are discarded or twisted if they do not fit with the particular outlook of society. We want to be nice and supportive in the Church don't we? Read the OT and the Gospels and see how that goes down!

Others think that the Church exists for us. The idea is that if we can attract people in with music and dance and food and events and being nice, God will get them. Sounds Ok, but how is it that the early Church grew by preaching and witness? Why is it that in the places where revivals are burning the people are instructed in the Scriptures for three hours twice a week, and are hungry for truth?

The Health and wealth and well-being has been about for some time now. This has become popular in the USA, Asia and Africa for obvious reasons. However it is often only the people at the top of the pyramid that fly Leer jets and live in fancy houses. Nothing of Jesus here, who had nowhere to lay His head!

Then there is the subtle idea that God exists to make our lives happy, that all we have to do is ask, and He will come running to give us all we want. Not so. God is utterly committed to our happiness, but that is the path of Holiness! We exist and the Church exists for the glory of God, not the other way about.

Now note this. In Jesus encounter with these disciples, and also the Eleven, there is no anger or blame, but instruction and the opening of their spiritual eyes. Read Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1 verses 17 forward. He prays that they be given 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better... that you might know the hope to which you have been called,' and so on. This is a prayer that the unseen truth and reality of God's actions may be seen in part, and ever increasing degree to us.

This is why the men were downcast. Their hope was dashed because it was not what God was doing in Christ. It has been my observation over many years, and I have come across it in the literature time and time again, that people have left the Church, or turned from faith, because they feel that God has let them down. Either something has happened which they thought faith would make impossible, an accident, an illness, some other major setback or trial. Other times some blessing claimed, prayed for,

confessed, fasted for, and Bible proof texts supplied does not come about. Think of Joseph. Brothers and parents were going to bow to him. What happens? He ends up sold, in prison on a false charge, forgotten, but in the end, God does something beyond his wildest imagination.

How are we to guard against flights of fancy or our big dreams which turn out to be from our flesh or if of some spiritual content, just not big enough?

What did Jesus do for the two travelers? He opened the Scriptures to them, and by that and the breaking of bread, their eyes were opened. To avoid the errors that come down the pike on a regular basis, we need to be much in the Scriptures. Reading, but most importantly meditating, digesting them. Praying for the Holy Spirit to open them to our hearts and heads. Seeing what they mean and what our response to them should be. We need to be in fellowship, as it is often lone sheep that become lone wolves.

Look at these two men again. I think of them walking quite slowly towards Emmaus, sad, confused, limbs weary with sadness. Then they encounter Jesus and what happens? Verse 33 says they got up at once and returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples of their encounter. I think the language here is of speed, joy, tiredness gone and a skip in their step and perhaps laughter and a song on their lips. Hearts full and light, what a difference enlightened eyes make!

Truth is precious, vital. It is not found easily. Proverbs compares it to treasure seeking and mining. Proverbs 2.1-5. Does the work seem hard when the diamond is found? What does the sweat and difficulty matter when the vein of silver or gold is struck? It is this way with Biblical meditation. Sometimes we think we are getting nowhere, until we look back and see the shore much further away than expected and we realise we have moved on in our journey.