

17th April 2022 – Easter Sunday

Recognizing Jesus

Luke 24:1-12 & 13-35

Have you ever had that experience when you can't see something and it's right in front of you? Nola asks me to get the apple sauce from the fridge, but I can't find it. I move this and that but it's not there! I'm convinced that there is no apple sauce in the fridge. Finally, exasperated by her incompetent helper Nola comes herself to the fridge and in 5 seconds finds the apple sauce!

I think what happened is that when I looked in one part of the fridge, the jar ran to a different part of the fridge. It's frustrating when you can't see something but you're told it's there. My father used to say, "you can't see for looking". In an office scene when I can't find something, then another colleague comes along and finds easily I've been told, "I had a man look"!

Now a jar of apple sauce may enhance our meal, but in the overall scheme of things it's not a big deal. But, does this ever happen to us with the big things in life? Where we're looking for something important but just can't see it?

How about when you look for God but can't sense his presence?

We look for him, and we're told by our more spiritually attuned friends that "he's right there!" but we just can't see him for ourselves. Instead of sensing God you feel like he's gone, or like he'll talk to anyone but you.

When you can't see God or sense Christ's presence what should you do? That's a dark place to be at but it's similar to where some of Jesus' followers found themselves Sunday after his crucifixion. The last time they saw Jesus he was dead. He was gone. They thought he was never coming back. They'd made it through the last couple days, but are sad and depressed.

But now they've heard word from several women who followed Jesus that his body wasn't in the tomb and that angels had appeared to them telling them Jesus is alive. They don't believe and just feel more confusion and darkness. They'd come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast and now it's time for them to go home.

1. Understand the Setting: v13-16

Prior to His arrest, Jesus travelled up and down the strip of land once ruled by David and Solomon, inviting the people of Israel to become a part of His kingdom, promising abundant life. His followers fully expected that He would become their king and that Israel would again be prosperous and free. He was their Messiah. But on one fateful Friday afternoon, as the sun fell behind the horizon, the Son of God hung cold and lifeless on a Roman cross just outside the city walls.

As the sun rose on Sunday morning and the Passover feast came to an end, two of Jesus's followers, disillusioned and resolving to leave their foolish dreams in Jerusalem, left for home. The dejected pair began the 10 kilometre walk to Emmaus even as rumours of resurrection circulated among the ranks of Jesus's disciples (Luke 24:13).

Luke describes the disciples' conversation as bantering ideas back and forth with great emotion in a shared search for answers (24:14-16), it could be more literally translated as "conversing" and "disputing." The disillusioned followers desperately wanted to know why their expectations of the Messiah had come to such a tragic end.

2. A Revealing Question (Luke 24:17-29)

While they were talking and disputing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "*What are these words that you are discussing together as you walk along?*" v14-17

Jesus asked a question designed to engage the men in conversation, but Cleopas' reply reveals a delightful paradox for the reader: "*Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*" v18. Of course, if anyone understood what had happened, it was Jesus! They did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead, so they were left with three faulty perspectives.

First, *their viewpoint lacked a spiritual dimension, leaving them with a human understanding of the events.* Take note of how Cleopas characterized the death of Jesus. They referred to Jesus as a prophet rather than as their Messiah. Don't miss the lack of any divine involvement.

Second, *their own agenda determined their expectations.* Many disciples made the mistake of thinking that the Messiah would merely recapture the glory days of King David. In other words, they hoped Jesus would bring Israel the same power and prosperity she once enjoyed, only magnified and multiplied. Given their exclusive worship of God, this would not be an inappropriate wish. But compared to the reality that lay before them—Roman oppression and a dead Messiah—their hopes for glory seemed to have been utterly destroyed.

Third, *they failed to acknowledge the resurrection.* If these two followers believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, two things would have been true. First, they would have been walking *toward* Jerusalem to see the risen Lord, not away. Second, they would have seen the trials, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus as the fulfillment of all He promised, not as the end of their hopes.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus's life were originally documents intended to be read aloud in Christian gatherings. When the reader reached the part of the story in which Cleopas recounted the events of the past three days, the tension among the listeners must have been unbearable, because the two followers simply did not have the eyes to see what should have been plainly visible v16.

Then Jesus broke His silence to bring a reproof, ask a question, and offer an explanation. In the reproof, *"How foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!"* v25, Jesus demonstrated that the two followers knew the contents of Scripture but did not accept its message as truth. As a result, they failed to see God's sovereign plan. His question, *"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"* pointed to the reason for their unbelief v26. They had confused their own expectations with the hope God was offering, and they had failed to see God's ultimate purpose.

To help the two followers see, Jesus reviewed the entire history of Israel from the time of the Exodus to His own resurrection, highlighting God's plan for the Messiah v27.

It's not that every word is about Jesus but that they tell us about our sins and so our need for Jesus and a coming Saviour. Many passages even prefigure Christ—they tell us about him without telling us exactly. for example:

- The opening chapters of Genesis talk about the descent of Eve who is going to crush the serpent. (Gen 3:15)
- Abraham's son Isaac carries firewood (a tree) up a mountain so he can be a sacrifice just like Christ carries the cross.
- Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and Jesus was betrayed by his disciples.
- Moses was almost killed by an evil king at his birth and so was Jesus.
- The whole sacrificial system of sheep and cows points to the need for a lasting sacrifice.

And the list goes on and on and on as we think about all the ways the Scriptures point to Christ Jesus. He is the fulfillment of it all. So, what's the application here? *When you can't see Jesus, look to the Scriptures.* When you can't see what Jesus is doing in your life or can't hear him speaking to you, look to the Scriptures. Go to your Bible. See him there. Hear him there.

3. A Fascinating Dinner (Luke 24:30-35)

In keeping with ancient Near Eastern rules of hospitality, the two followers then invited the "stranger" to stay the night. Jesus accepted their offer, yet maintained His cover in order to complete the lesson He had begun teaching them just outside Jerusalem.

According to v16 their eyes were prevented from recognizing Jesus. He revealed His identity only after taking great pains to explain to them *"the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures"* v27. Luke concludes this story with another bit of irony. The disciples had been staring into the face of the risen Jesus, yet they were prevented from seeing Him until they buried their faulty expectations.

Then, a careful review of the Scriptures gave them a divine perspective on what they once saw as dismal circumstances.

Once their eyes were opened to the reality and implications of the resurrection, Jesus became visible to their physical eyes. *“They recognized Him”*. This action was more than a mere recognition of His features. They came to recognize Jesus in all His significance as the Messiah, the Son of God, and their risen Lord!

Then Jesus literally became “invisible” meaning that He suddenly disappeared, He vanished from their midst once their eyes were open.

Now, their new, resurrected hope carried them back to Jerusalem to bear the good news to others v33-35.

Application:

As Luke tells the story of the two despondent disciples on the road to Emmaus, we cannot help but identify with their pain. We, too, are pilgrims on a journey through life. We, too, despair of life’s circumstances from time to time. We, too, lose heart when our expectations come to a tragic end. But remember, every trial is an opportunity to discover what God wants us to see.

As in the case of the two followers on the road to Emmaus, we must allow God to open our eyes. While this is something He must do on our behalf, we can nonetheless make the process less difficult in four specific ways.

a) Surrender your expectations.

Release your expectations to God, and humbly ask God to accomplish His will in whatever manner He sees fit, and in whatever time he considers appropriate.

b) Seek God’s perspective.

To help the two disciples see their circumstances from God’s perspective, Jesus explained the Scriptures. And we have the same opportunity to share God’s vantage point by reading our only completely reliable source of truth, the sixty-six books of the Bible.

It’s all about him. It’s all pointing to our need for him. It’s all about this coming saviour who is going to pay the ultimate sacrifice. It’s all about Jesus, his suffering, his death, and his life-giving resurrection so that anyone who repents of their sins and puts their faith and trust in him will one day rise again too. And when we’re frustrated and discouraged and can’t sense God’s presence that’s exactly what we need to focus on—the Bible and how he rose again from the dead. *When you can’t see Jesus, look to the Scriptures and to his resurrection.*

c) Trust God’s timing.

God, in His perfect discernment, did not allow the two disciples to recognize Jesus until the time was right. He didn’t allow them to suffer in grief a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, yet He didn’t end their discomfort too soon. Spiritual maturity rarely occurs instantaneously. Growth usually requires a journey, and journeys take time. Submit to God’s will and trust His timing. He is faithful.

The two followers on the road to Emmaus undoubtedly felt utterly alone as they mourned the death of their dreams. During their suffering, God was indeed nearby, and He allowed their pain to continue until their own desires no longer held them captive.

Like the two on the road to Emmaus, you do not travel alone. God is with you. Are you willing to see Him?

d) Invite God into your life:

Have you invited the Lord into your life? Cleopas and his companion listened intently to the Voice of truth and invited Him into their home. If you haven’t begun a relationship with God, you will continue to struggle in vain.

In his great love, God sent His Son Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself, and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust in him.

He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice and that God’s wrath against us had been exhausted.

He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God."

Brothers and sisters, if you desire God's forgiveness and free gift of eternal life just ask Him today in faith, through a simple prayer like this, sometimes called the sinners prayer:

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Saviour. Amen

Brothers & sisters this is so important, the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof that He is Lord! We cannot be saved unless we believe in the resurrection. Romans 10:9-10

"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved".