

The After-Easter Encounter • Luke 24:13-35

Most biographies end with death: the story is over, the life is finished and there's nothing more to say. But Jesus' biography was anything but over. Chapter 24 of Luke's biography of Jesus began with his resurrection, but Easter wasn't over. Starting at verse 13 Luke wrote:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, 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?"

"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. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but 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. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the

Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

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

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and

has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

It was feast time in Jerusalem and the historical record tells us that

there were tens of thousands of tourists there. There wasn't room for everyone to stay. Most had to camp out or stay in the suburbs. That's probably why two men were walking the seven miles west from Jerusalem back to their home town of Emmaus.

As they walked they were full of the current events that filled the evening news report, much as we would discuss some terrorist bombing or the latest change in the stock market or some new miracle drug on the market. They shared facts, gave analysis and argued their differing opinions.

Jesus the Messiah came to live and die and live again in order to redeem the people of Israel and the rest of the human race. Everything had happened exactly the way God said it would happen.

As they walked along another man caught up with them. He was Jesus, although they did not recognize him. Jesus asked what they were talking about. They couldn't believe he didn't already know. One of the original two, Cleopas, asked, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened in these days?"

It was impossible for them to imagine that anyone could be walking out of Jerusalem and not know about the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. By that time the whole city was buzzing with stories and rumors about his body being missing. This guy had to be from out of town.

The truth was that Jesus did know. He knew far more than anyone else did, but he didn't let on. Instead he asked them, "What things have happened in these days?" This was and is absolutely consistent with Jesus' style. He has always started where the other person is at. Story after story in Jesus' biography reports him asking first about the other person, beginning with their questions or starting with their needs. He was a marvelous listener.

When Jesus asked they blurted out the whole story about what had happened:

1. There was a prophet from God named Jesus of Nazareth.
2. He was a powerful speaker and a miracle worker.
3. The religious leaders had him crucified.
4. Lots of people (including these two) had high hopes that Jesus would be the Messiah to redeem the nation of Israel from political oppression.
5. All this was three days ago (and you would think it would be over).
6. Some women went to visit his tomb, discovered the body gone and reported seeing angels. Since a lot of men didn't believe women in those days, they added that some men also went to the tomb and verified the women's report.

That was the news and it needed some interpretation, for although we like to say that news should be absolutely objective, the reality is that when something happens it is difficult to not give it some spin or understanding. So Jesus explained:

"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And be-

ginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

This was neither a tragedy nor a mistake. Jesus was no less the Messiah because he was crucified and died. To the contrary, this was the plan of God and the teaching of the Bible. Jesus quoted the Bible from Moses at the beginning of the Old Testament to the prophets at the end of the Old Testament. Story after story, teaching after teaching, quote after quote all predicted exactly what happened. Jesus the Messiah came to live and die and live again in order to redeem the people of Israel and the rest of the human race. Everything had happened exactly the way God said it would happen. It was amazing the way he fit all the pieces into this beautiful picture that explained the news of the day.

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

This, too, was typically Jesus. He was so gracious and courteous; he did not impose himself upon them. He wouldn't come to their table or into their home unless he was invited to do so. That's how he is. Even today Jesus does not force himself upon us. If we don't want to take him home, we don't have to. The invitation is up to us just as the invitation was up to them.

They were fascinated by this man whom they did not recognize. They loved the way he told them about the Bible. They enjoyed his presence. They wanted him to stay, so they invited him for dinner and to be their guest overnight.

But why didn't they recognize him? They said they were his followers. The truth is that sometimes we just don't recognize people when we should.

One Sunday after the morning service at Wooddale Church I stood by the door at the end of the center aisle. A woman walked up to me and asked me how to find the person who had been talking up front that morning because she wanted to talk to him. I honestly didn't know what to say. How could someone sit fifty feet away, look and listen for half an hour and then ask ME where to find me? When I explained to her that I was the

guy who had been talking up front she said, “Oh, well you look different standing here.” She said it in a way that made it seem as if I had done something wrong, like it was my fault that I was unrecognizable.

But let me tell you about a more serious case. Some years ago a news story told about parents who received a telephone call from the police that their college-aged daughter had been killed in an automobile crash. They were asked to go to the morgue to identify her body. They went, saw the body and identified it as their daughter. It was the worst experience of their lives.

Several days later they received a phone call from their daughter. They thought it was a cruel prank, but it wasn't. She was alive! It turned out that another coed of similar size and hair color had borrowed their daughter's car for the weekend while their daughter had gone home with her roommate. It wasn't until their daughter returned to campus that she heard what had happened and called home.

How could you possibly misidentify your own daughter? Well, if you were absolutely convinced she was dead maybe any of us could make a similar mistake.

That's what those two men on the road to Emmaus did. They were convinced that Jesus was dead. When you are already convinced you see—or don't see—what best fits your convictions. And it's the same way with people today. Some people are convinced that Jesus is not the Messiah, that he is not the Son of God, that he didn't rise from the dead, that he can't transform a person's life. Even when Jesus comes up close and talks out loud they still don't recognize and still don't believe.

When Jesus went into the house they did recognize him. “*When he was at the table with them he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.*”

It was an ordinary meal. They came in from the highway and they were enamored with this stranger. Increasingly they honored him as special. He had

spiritual and biblical insights that touched their hearts, so even though he was the guest they let him lead the meal as if he were the host. The staple food was bread. He picked up the bread and blessed it, broke it and handed it to each one. It was simply a shared meal with a new friend, but suddenly everything changed. In an instant they recognized him to be Jesus of Nazareth. He was alive!

But why did they recognize Jesus now and not before? Perhaps it was the way he prayed. He talked to God and asked for God's blessing in a way that was unique. Perhaps it was the way he broke bread. Maybe they had been there when he fed 5000 with just a few loaves. Perhaps they saw the nail scars on his hands for the first time. Perhaps it was none of these. Perhaps it was all of these and more.

What took place is called by social scientists a “psychological conversion.” Have you ever stared at a brick wall and seen nothing but blocks in lines and stacks with mortar in between? And then you see a pattern that

looks like a house or a person or a geometric shape. You never noticed it before, but now looking at that wall you can't NOT see that geometric design. Or on a lovely summer day you're outside with friends and as you look up at the billowy clouds your friend asks what you see in the shape of the cloud. You say that you see nothing but a billowy white cloud, but your friend sees Barney the dinosaur. You look and look but there's no Barney up there. Then suddenly Barney appears. You see the same cloud in a different way. It's a psychological conversion.

But there was more going on here. It wasn't just that they saw Jesus differently. It was that God had opened their eyes and now they recognized him. The Spirit of God did something in their hearts and heads that changed the way they saw everything. Did they do it? Did they make a choice? Yes. Did God do it? Yes. That's the way conversion works. God touches our lives and we change our minds and conversion takes place. We see and hear Jesus as more than a character walking with us in a conversation about history. We see him as our personal Savior and Lord of life. In an instant, conver-

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sion takes place. It is a wonderful and transforming experience. It was for them and it is for us.

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.” Please don’t think that Jesus disappeared the instant they recognized him. That would be to totally miss the point. Instead, we need to understand something very special about the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead in the same body that was crucified and died. It was the same but different in that he could now move instantly from place to place. In John’s biography of Jesus (20:19, 26) he tells about Jesus going through locked doors into rooms full of people. He could instantly move from earth to heaven. Can we fully understand and explain this? Probably not, but we’ll experience it. The Bible teaches that as Christians we will some day have resurrection bodies like the body of Jesus and we will be able to do the same things!

I love what they said right after Jesus disappeared. *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”* That is one of the distinctive marks of a converted person; he or she has a heart burning with Jesus! There is a lingering fire from being with him and a lasting love for the Bible and its words. Those who have not personally experienced Jesus simply do not understand this. Their hearts are cold and the Bible is dull. But for those whose lives have been transformed by the risen Christ, the soul is on fire and the Bible is a wonder to learn and understand.

What happened next could not wait till morning. Even though the evening meal was over and it was time to call it a day and go to bed . . .

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The natural, normal, inevitable response to a personal encounter with Jesus is to share that experience with others. You can’t be transformed by God and keep quiet about it. One of the greatest proofs that a person is a Christian is that she tells someone else. It is the rest of the Eas-

ter story: the women at the empty tomb, Simon Peter and now the two from Emmaus.

Recently I received a letter from a man who lives in Chicago. I had written to him about a business matter relating to a book. In his reply he told about sitting next to a stranger on a recent flight from Boston to Chicago. She shared with him her Christian faith. He didn’t remember her name but he did remember that she was from Wooddale Church. I loved the story, not just because she was from Wooddale, but most of all because she experienced Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord and shares her experience with those she meets in her travels.

It doesn’t matter whether it was a long time ago on a seven mile journey between Jerusalem and Emmaus or on a modern thousand mile flight between Boston and Chicago. It is the same now as it was then, that those who have experienced Jesus Christ tell others about him.

I invite to you to your own after-Easter encounter with the risen Christ. Review the story. Encounter the truth. Recognize Jesus. Be converted so that you see him in a completely new way. Be transformed by him. Share the experience with everyone who will listen.

Come Lord Jesus. Teach us as you taught those along that road to Emmaus. Come into our homes. Sit at our tables. Change the way we see you. Make our hearts burn with your truth. Fill our hearts until we gladly and joyfully share you with others. We pray to you, our risen Christ. Amen

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