

The Road to Emmaus

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Introduction

There are eight recorded resurrection appearances in the Gospels, and of those, the incident on the Road to Emmaus is one of the best known.

As Luke has recorded the story, we have two people, disciples, not Apostles, walking along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus discussing the recent events surrounding the death of Jesus, and understandably they were downcast. Then a stranger (whom they fail to recognise as Jesus) comes alongside, and asks them what they are talking about. They tell Him, explaining what had happened over the last three days. However, Jesus responds with what might seem like a rather harsh reply:

“How foolish you are, and how slow... to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things, and then enter his glory?”

Why did Jesus feel it necessary to rebuke them in this way, telling them they were: ‘foolish and slow to believe’.

To our ears, these words sound rather hard. These men had recently witnessed their master crucified, and were now being told of rumours that he had risen from the dead. So they were probably more than just a little confused, and were simply responding to the events in the way any normal person would. So why did Jesus rebuke them, especially while they were so downhearted?

It may be because they still clung to the idea that the Christ would make Himself an earthly King and free Israel from the Roman yoke. “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel,” they said.

Like many others in Israel at that time, their hope was that the Messiah would become a powerful political figure, leading Israel into a new golden era. They had found it easy to believe the OT prophecies about the glory of the Messiah, but the other prophecies, those that about the suffering Messiah (cf. Isaiah 53) had failed to register.

Set in Our Ways

It's a trap we can still fall into today. Most of us have fairly fixed ideas about what is and isn't acceptable, both in the church and the world. As a result we can easily become closed to God's voice, or even resist His Word and Work, if it doesn't fit neatly into our ideas of what we believe God should be doing and saying.

Indeed, despite the fact that Jesus had prophesied His resurrection on three separate occasions - when He did rise from the dead after three days, just as He said He would, they were slow to believe. Clearly Jesus expects His followers to believe Him, to trust what He tells them and to take Him at His word. Jesus has little time for sceptics and doubters, as we heard last week (see John 20:19-31).

The Lord can often give us quite the surprise by doing something new, something unexpected. He walks alongside these two disciples yet they didn't recognise Him because they were unsure about what to believe; what to make of the events that had just occurred. They just hadn't understood who Jesus really was, or what it meant for Him to be the Messiah.

So Jesus opens up the Scriptures for them, showing them how the Christ had to die and rise again. Luke doesn't record any specific passages unfortunately, but the point clear enough - throughout the OT, a consistent, divine purpose is worked out. And that purpose reaches its climax in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. It's all there in the Scriptures and Jesus brings those texts alive for the two disciples.

A Rewarding Experience

As they approach their house, Jesus acts as if He were about to pass them by. Now the two men could have let Him go, but they insist He join them. And what an amazing experience they would have missed had they let Jesus walk on by. Because it was as He broke bread in their home that they finally realised who He was, and their hearts and minds were opened. Doubt was replaced by a new and living faith. Their earlier, gloomy attitude, transformed into one of great joy and excitement.

A lesson for us then: it can be all too easy to just let Jesus just walk on by, because we don't recognise Him or because we don't like or understand what He's doing, or because are not prepared to take Jesus at His Word – or worse still, we just don't like what His Word says or teaches. Consequently we will remain as we are, comfortable, unchallenged, but also un-renewed.

Jesus didn't invite Himself into the disciples' house, He waited for the two men to offer Him hospitality, and only then did He enter their home. If we want to experience the Risen Christ renewing our lives then we need to be prepared to make a response, to take a risk, and invite Jesus in. If we do that with a believing and faithful heart, the rewards will be great indeed. Amen.