

When Jesus Interrupts **Luke 24:13-34**

We're looking today at this remarkable encounter on the road to Emmaus, that Mel read to us. And we're doing this for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the two people who took this walk that Jesus gatecrashed, weren't superstar apostles. I mean, Luke only tells us the name of one of them, Cleopas. So maybe the other was Mrs Cleopas, or a friend of Cleopas. Whoever it was, here are two ordinary, run-of-the-mill followers of Jesus. And they've probably been in Jerusalem for the weekend for Passover and are now heading home - when this stranger joins them.

But the second reason for looking at this is that, of all the encounters with the risen Jesus Luke could have picked, he chooses this one to help bring his gospel to a close. And that's because it's not just about the fact of the resurrection - it's about how the resurrection can totally change the way normal people like Cleopas and his friend, and you and me, see life. That when you know that Christ is risen, it can turn sorrow to joy and confusion to certainty, and fear to faith, and redirect your expectations of life in such a way that your heart burns with hope.

When You Don't See Jesus

Now, a number of commentators say that this couple walking to Emmaus, were walking slowly. And at least one gives as a possible reason that walking beside Cleopas, was Mrs Cleopas, his wife. And obviously a woman couldn't possibly walk as fast as a man! All I can say to that is that they have clearly never been for a walk with Mrs Slack.

But Luke doesn't say they were walking slowly, though I suspect they were. He says that when this stranger approached and questioned them, v17, 'they stood still, looking sad.' Have you ever experienced that feeling when life goes into slow motion, and seems to come to a stop? When like them you're sad, or confused, or doubt is like a cloud hanging over you, or hopes and dreams lie shattered at your feet.

You see, they think Jesus' death has brought everything to an end. And when you think like that, when you think that death is the end of hopes and dreams; when you think there's nothing beyond death, when life is going nowhere except to end in death, that this life is all there is and that ultimately there's a meaninglessness to life; then life's sufferings, or broken dreams, will get the better of you. And like these two, sadness will settle over you like a fog, bringing you to a stand-still. And because death is the end, death will be something you fear.

But then Jesus drew near, and he begins to challenge the way they see the world. And he asks them, v17, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?"

And in response, Cleopas gives him a great summary of Jesus' life and death and the evidence for his resurrection. It's the gospel according to Cleopas! In fact, so obvious was all this, so high were the hopes, so public were the miracles, and the trial, and the crucifixion, that Cleopas is stunned that this stranger doesn't know all this already: v18, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" I mean, what planet are you from? From what backwoods have you emerged, stranger, that you don't have a clue why we're sad?

But what we know, that Cleopas didn't, was that it was him, Cleopas, who didn't get it. You see, you can know the facts of Jesus' life and death, you can even give a great account of the evidence

for his resurrection, and still not have the truth of his resurrection transform the way you see life and death and everything in between.

Like Cleopas and his friend, you can be living under a cloud of sadness, or confusion, or fear; you can be living with the pieces of broken dreams and dashed hopes lying around you, and not realise that standing right in front of you, walking right beside you, is the answer to your despair, and the source of your joy in sadness.

You can be that close, you can be staring it in the face, you can be talking about it, and still not see that it's Christ, risen from the dead, who can turn your heart from sadness, or confusion, or despair to burning joy.

So, why didn't they see it? Why didn't they see who this stranger was? Well, look at v16, 'Their eyes were *kept* from recognising him.' So this was a spiritual blindness. And what Cleopas says to Jesus gives us a clue why.

When What You Really Need is Something Else

And Cleopas tells this Stranger about how Jesus was a prophet, mighty in deed and word, and how v20, "our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him." And then look what he says, v21,

Now what does it mean to *redeem* something? Today, if you've got a voucher for some product, we talk about redeeming it, don't we. You hand over the voucher, and the thing it's good for is handed over to you. This voucher makes this other thing yours. To redeem something is to take ownership of it. And back in Jesus day, the idea of redeeming something came from the slave market. And when you redeemed a slave you paid the slave price for him, and then set him free.

And Cleopas wanted to see Israel redeemed, bought out of slavery to the Romans. They wanted freedom - the right to self-determination. And they wanted a king, a political leader, a revolutionary fighter, a great liberating general to come and redeem Israel. And Cleopas, and others with him, thought Jesus was that redeemer. But his death had brought all those dreams crashing to the ground. 'We *had* hoped, BUT.'

And for these two, Jesus' death was a tragedy, a disaster, an event that called into question, that brought to a stand-still everything they hoped God was doing in their day.

But can you see how ironic that *but* is there in v21? Because it was precisely through his death that Jesus *was* bringing about the redemption of Israel. Just not from the slavery they imagined.

You see, their confusion, their sadness and despondency, their inability to see what was before their eyes, was because of a failure to see what they really needed to be set free from; what was really enslaving them.

And just like them, we can think that what we need is for God to come and sort out the issues of our lives. We want him to give us back, or give us for the first time, the kind of life we want, where I can be and do what I want to be and do. The freedom of self-determination. Cleopas wanted freedom for Israel, from the Romans telling them what to do; we want freedom from difficulties, or circumstances, or people that seem to tell us what to do, that order our lives around or squeeze us

into a corner. Cleopas wanted economic freedom for Israel; we want the freedom that comes with that job we're after. Cleopas wanted the dignity that comes with being a free people; we want that sense of being able to hold our heads up, that comes with status, or marriage, or having a great family.

And if only God would give us those things, then we'd be happy, then the cloud would lift. But if he doesn't, when it seems like God doesn't show up, or what we want him to do is being thwarted, then we're left confused or despondent.

But Christ came to redeem Israel, and Cleopas, and you and me, from a very different slavery. In fact, the stuff we think will make us happy, if we could only have it, is often the stuff that we need freeing from. And Christ came to redeem not just Israel, but all of us, from a slavery to sin, from a slavery to those things that control us and dominate us; from a slavery to others' opinion of us; from a slavery to success, or comfort, or image, or respect - all the things that rob us of the real life he would have us experience. And ultimately, he came to free us from a slavery to the fear of death when we think this life is all there is. And Christ's crucifixion doesn't frustrate that mission, it achieves it.

But Cleopas, and you and I, can only see that when Christ's death and resurrection redefines and re-orders what we're most hoping for; what we think will satisfy us. Cleopas, and all of us, will only know joy in the face of dashed hopes and broken plans, when our hopes and plans are tied, not to the circumstances of life, but to Christ.

Have the wrong idea of what you need, of what will bring you real happiness, and the *real* source of that happiness can be standing right next to you, you can be staring it in the face, and you won't see it. Your heart won't be alight with joy.

But understand what you really need, that it's God, that it's him who can give you a peace that rises above the highs and lows of life; that in him you can find total acceptance; that in him you can know freedom from sin and guilt and the constant need to prove yourself to yourself or others; that in him you can find the forgiveness and grace to start every day anew; that in him you'll find a self-worth that career or marriage or family or the respect of others can never give you; that in him and in his resurrection you'll know that death is not the end, that this life is not meaningless and is not all there is, and you'll know a lightness and a joy in your heart, even when stuff seems to go wrong.

So, how can you get there? How can the death and resurrection of Christ redefine your hopes and expectations? How can the resurrection become the thing that shapes the way you see life and death and everything in between? How can you move from a heart that's overcast by the circumstances of life, to one that's alight with resurrection joy?

When You're in the Scriptures and in Community

You see, there are two things that do it for Cleopas and his friend. Firstly, look at v25-27, In other words, Jesus takes them through the Bible and shows them how the whole story of the Bible, all the prophecies, all the promises, all the practices, and all the people were ultimately all about him. Think the Bible's about you, or about ethics or about morality, or about a self-help manual to help you live a balanced life, and your heart will never burn with resurrection joy.

But begin to see that it's all about Christ, and his work to rescue you from slavery to sin and death, and all of life is for his glory, and you'll begin to see him as the source of your joy even when everything else seems broken.

That all the **prophecies** and **promises**, from Genesis 3 and the promise that the seed of woman will crush the serpent's head, to Isaiah 53, and the Servant suffering in our place, for our transgressions, are all pointing to him.

That all the **practices** - from the bronze serpent lifted up in the desert, so all who look to it could be healed; to the daily sacrifices for sin, and the laws for cleansing from impurity, to the Passover lamb rescuing from death, to the scapegoat that becomes the substitute on the Day of Atonement, to the temple where heaven and earth, and God and man meet - that they're all pointing to him.

That all the **people**, from the first Adam who fails, to Abraham through whom a seed will come that will bless the world, to Joseph who was falsely accused and yet God used it for the saving of many, to all the judges who deliver Israel from her enemies, to David who fought as their representative and slayed the giant of their enemy, and who's victory was counted to them, who reigned as the model king of justice, to the high priest and every priest, who mediated between God and the people, to the prophets who spoke God's word; they were all pointing to a Man, a Ruler, a Judge, A King, A Deliverer, A Priest, A Prophet, who would never fail, who would never let us down. To One who would come and be a second Adam, an unfailing deliverer, a righteous king, a representative warrior, a perfect high priest, and *the* Word of God spoken to us.

And Jesus opened the Bible and showed them, 'look, this is all about me. This is all about how I will rescue you and deliver you from slavery to the bad, and to the good, and set you free to live for and worship and glory in the ultimate Good. And that's where you'll find true joy and happiness, regardless of the circumstances of life. That's where you'll find a hope that breaks the fear of death, that tells you this life is not all there is; that the way of God is suffering, then glory.'

And look at the impact it had on them. Verse 32, 'They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"'

You see, their hearts weren't kindled into a flame by some mystical experience, by Jesus appearing to them and going, 'yoo-hoo! I'm here!' Their hearts weren't set on fire by using the Bible as a dartboard: 'O, I'll just open the Bible and stick my finger in it.' Their hearts weren't set alight by thinking this was all about them. Their hearts were set alight by seeing it's all about Jesus.

John Wesley, the 18th Century preacher and founder of Methodism, went through a period of deep despair. But that ended on May 24th, 1738 when he was invited to go to a meeting where the preface to a commentary that Martin Luther had written on Paul's letter to the Romans was being read. And Wesley, because he was depressed, only reluctantly agreed to go. But listen to what he wrote in his journal that night: "while he [the speaker] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

It was Wesley's Emmaus moment - when he realised, through the Scriptures, that Christ had redeemed him from sin and death, that he was saved, and his heart was strangely warmed. And his life was never the same again and because of that a whole nation was never the same again.

So, if you want a joy and stability that doesn't come crashing to the ground when life is not going the way you want, don't look for it in the things of life, look for it in Christ and allow him to form you through his word. See that throughout all history, God has been working out his purposes in Christ, and he knows what he's doing in your life, and it's all for the glory of Christ. And death is not the end of it.

But secondly, look at v30, So it was in sharing a meal with Jesus, that they realised who he was. Now, we're not told how or why they realised. Maybe it was as he handed them the bread that they saw the nail marks in his hands, and they looked at him and he smiled at them. Whatever it was, the penny drops as they share a meal together with Christ. And when they get it back to Jerusalem, listen to what they say to the others: v35, 'They told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.'

JC Ryle, the Bishop of Liverpool, says of this, and who could not agree with a man with a hipster beard like that, 'Let us learn a lesson from the two travellers to Emmaus...' - and talk about Christ together, and share life together, for, 'If we do this, we will often have One with us whom our eyes will not see but who will make our hearts burn within us by blessing the conversation.'

You and I are not made for a life of isolation. It's in shared life together, centred on the word of God, that the truth of Christ's death and resurrection will increasingly shape and refocus our lives. It maybe hard at the moment, but do whatever you can, over Zoom, on the phone, in a virtual home group, by writing a letter or sending an email, to fan the flame of faith together.

And we will see Christ on every page, and your heart will be alight with resurrection joy, and the fear of death will be broken, you'll know that this life is not all there is, and then we'll live for a glory much greater than the circumstances or the stuff of life can ever give you.