

♪ Worship Notes ♪

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THEME: Worship and Experience

The Road to Understanding An Easter Meditation (Luke 24:13-35)

Introduction

How *small* and *distant* God can seem when we're discouraged! Two of Jesus' disciples faced that kind of disappointment and discouragement as they wearily made their way from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus on the Sunday afternoon after their Master had undergone a horrible execution on a Roman cross as related to us in Luke 24.

The Walk

Two disciples—apparently not two of the 12 disciples, but two of the larger group mentioned, for example, in 24:9—had left the gathering of disciples; they had seemingly given up hope and were returning home. They were “unemployed disciples,” so to speak; as one writer puts it, they were “walking home from a funeral.” As they go, they are discussing the recent events in Jerusalem, and it is clear from the narrative that they are disheartened and discouraged (see 24:14,18-21).

But then Jesus overtakes them and walks with them. They don't recognize at this point

that it is Jesus who is walking with them. Various and sometimes fanciful theories have been advanced for this lack of recognition: he was unrecognizable from the beatings and the crucifixion; he looked so different in His resurrected body (but later they would indeed recognize him); the two were so upset they didn't look up; they were walking west and the sun was in their eyes!

But verse 16 in fact *tells* us why they didn't recognize Jesus: “their eyes *were prevented* from recognizing Him.” This is most likely an instance of what is termed in biblical studies a “*divine passive*”—where a passive verb is used without attribution to show that it is God who is acting. And certainly seems to be the case here: God is supernaturally keeping them from realizing until later who is speaking to them as they walk down the road to Emmaus.

Their eyes
were pre-
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from rec-
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him

The Lesson

In 25-27 we have an account of *the greatest Bible lesson ever given!* As Jesus relates to the disciples what they should have known and understood about the necessity of Christ's death and glorification from the Old Testament Scriptures. Undoubtedly he covered many areas of prophecy, types, and foreshadowings of his person and ministry in the sacrificial system and other parts of the Old Testament. What an amazing privilege to hear the Old Testament expounded by the One whom it foretold!

The disciples invite him to stay with them, and then at table prevail upon him to say the blessing, probably in recognition of his status as a teacher, which they had just experienced. And we read: “their eyes were *opened*” (31). Here again is the *divine passive*: God had prevented their eyes from recognizing Jesus, and *now* he *opens* their eyes. He closed their eyes, and now He opens them. And then and only then, when God decides to make it possible again, do the disciples recognize Him. But Jesus immediately vanishes from their sight.

Excitedly they ask each other: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he *opened* to us the Scriptures?” (32)

And so the two disciples hurry back to Jerusalem, to learn that Jesus has appeared to Simon (Peter) also; they tell their story as well (33-35).

“A Solemn One-Way Trip Becomes a Joyous Round-Trip”

The Significance

Luke is probably writing sometime after around A.D. 60, long after the Ascension and the ceasing of Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearances. He is writing to a generation that no longer has the opportunity to physically see the resurrected Christ. His readers are just “ordinary” disciples, not apostles or eyewitnesses. Ordinary disciples, like us, who live by faith in a risen Lord whom we have not seen, but which we believe we one day will see in all His glory.

Even though the two disciples do get to see the risen Christ, actually the most significant and lasting thing happens to them *before* they realize who is talking. This may well be why Luke (and the Holy Spirit through Luke) is relating this incident to us.

To see this point, let us consider the obvious structure of the passage; there are two contrasting parts, characterized by contrasting directions, atmospheres, attitudes and moods. One writer has recognized this fact by entitling the story: as one writer has titled this account, “A Solemn One-Way Trip Becomes a Joyous Round-Trip.” The two halves look like this:

Part 1

1. the disciples are going from Jerusalem to Emmaus, slowly and sadly
2. Jesus appears
3. their eyes are prevented from recognizing Him

Part 2 (the reverse)

1. their eyes are opened and they do recognize Him
2. Jesus disappears
3. the disciples rush back from Emmaus to Jerusalem, quickly and joyfully

The centerpiece and pivot of the account is of course the Bible lesson that Jesus gives to the disciples. And it is crucial to see that God does not allow them to recognize Jesus until *after* they have received his instruction in the Scriptures about himself. Their eyes, having been *closed*, are not *opened* until the *Scriptures* have been *opened* to them (the same Greek word is used in verses 31 and 32 of these two “openings”).

Jesus wants their faith in him and his resurrection to rest upon the Scriptures’ witness to himself, not upon a fleeting experience of his risen presence. His gentle upbraiding of them leading up to his lesson revolves around their failure to understand what the prophets had taught in the Old Testament (25); and it was this deficiency that his explanation was intended to address (26). They were discouraged because they were “foolish” and “slow of heart to believe” that what had transpired in the last few days had all been part of God’s

plan (“it was *necessary* that the Christ should suffer,” 26), and that events had not spun out of his control.

This is what he wants them to understand, so that they then might stand firmly on God’s Word as a firmer foundation for future faith than an exhilarating, but ephemeral, experience with him. Their experience would then serve to reconfirm the truth of Scripture—not the other way around. They have only a split second of experience with the risen Christ once their eyes were opened and they recognized him—he vanishes immediately. But their hearts are now full of God’s predictions and promises concerning His Messiah. They were beginning to understand the need for, and the sense of, Jesus’ death and resurrection—and they understood that from the *Scriptures*.

Seeing the risen Christ was an important witness to His victory over death, but more importantly it was an affirmation and confirmation of the truth of God’s promises—we see this later at the very end of Luke 24 again: Jesus appears to all the disciples and

“opened their minds to understand the *Scriptures*” (45-46; same Greek verb again). The *Scriptures* were to serve as the foundation for their faith and their ministry (47-48).

Paul’s preaching likewise was founded in the *Scriptures*. He says in 1 Corinthians 15, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you. . . . For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*. . . .” (3-4) God has provided a sure and steady foundation for faith in the witness of the *Scriptures*: the Old Testament, and now the New Testament as well.

And this is the significance of the passage for Luke’s readers as well. Hardly any of them

would have seen Christ in the flesh, before or after the resurrection. Luke was writing in a time when there were no more resurrection appearances. Their relationship with Christ could not be built on an experience of seeing him. The significance of Luke’s account here is that there is a foundation for faith which is even more important than seeing the risen Christ, and this foundation is still available for believers: the foundation of God’s revelation in the *Scriptures*. As Jesus said to Thomas in John 20:29: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And this faith comes through the *Scriptures*.

We need to acknowledge the *secondary* role of experience. Our spiritual experience is important, but must always be informed and guided and channeled by the Word. It’s because of the testimony of Scripture that we understand who Christ is and what He has done and how we can join the family of God through faith in him.

The two disciples in this account got to physically see the risen Christ and have all their doubts, fears, and disappointment instantly swept away by the glory of His resurrected presence. But that not likely to occur in our situation; the normal pattern for ordinary disciples (like you and me) is to build our faith on the witness of the *Scriptures*, whose testimony to God’s sovereign control over all things is the cure for discouragement.

Lesson for Our Worship

There is a clear implication for our worship as well. We must strive to “let the Word of Christ richly dwell in us” (Colossian 3:16) by making sure that our worship times are based on, structured around, saturated with and enriched by the *Scriptures* (see *Worship Notes* [1.5](#) and [1.6](#)). That will ensure a true and deep *experience* of God in both our private and our corporate worship.

He opened
the
Scriptures
to them
before he
opened
their eyes

QUOTABLES

Worship and Experience

“More important than our experience of Christ is the Christ of our experience.”
(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 34)

“So let us listen to the Gospel as though the Lord himself were present. And do not let us say: ‘How fortunate were those who could see him!’ For many of those who saw him also killed him, while many of us who have not seen him have also believed in him. The precious things that came from the mouth of the Lord were written down for us and kept for us and read aloud for us, and will be read by our children too, until the end of the world. The Lord is above, but the Lord of truth is here. The Lord’s body in which he rose from the dead can be in one place only; but his truth is everywhere.”
(Augustine, *In Jo. ev.*, tract. 30, 1, PL 35, 1632)

“Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full (or half-full) of artificial admirers. . . . On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.”
(John Piper, *Desiring God*)

“Worship that substitutes safe simulations of joy for the awesome experience of the Bible’s God finds many fans, but it offers them little sustenance.”
(Daniel Frankforter, *Stones for Bread*, 140)

“The focus of worship is not human experience, not a lecture, not entertainment, but Jesus Christ: His life, death, and resurrection. Worship is a verb. It is not something done to us or for us, but by us.

(Robert Webber, *Worship is a Verb*)

“Emotionally expressive worship has a strangely addictive quality for many. This may lead some to worship their worship experience, rather than worship God.”
(Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening*, 150)

“Flesh retains a powerful propensity to worship that which is not God. Even the aged John, unquestionably mature in his faith, nearly succumbed to the temptation to drop his focus from God to a lesser one—and this at the climax of visions of the glory of God such as no man had ever seen! [Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9] It was not because he mistook the angel for God, but because he was moved by his powerful visions and the impressive presence of the angel. The point is that even in the midst of the worship experience, it is possible to lose focus on God Himself and begin to worship the experience, the messenger of God.”
(Garry D. Nation, “The Essentials of Worship: Toward a Biblical Theology of Worship,” *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 5.3 & 4 [Winter-Spring 1997] :8)

“While we must not base our theology on experience, neither must we debase our theology by divorcing it from experience.”
(Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, 24)

“Tradition hands on from one generation to another those things found useful. Tradition doesn’t attempt to suppress new experience or insight. Tradition is a treasury of experience from which we may draw for our benefit. Traditionalism, on the other hand, is rigid and exclusive, insisting on conformity even when no one any longer remembers what value a practice is meant to represent. Tradition is a gift of earlier generations. Traditionalism is narrow and oppressive—not a gift, but an imposition. People’s negative associations with tradition may be based on their revulsion against traditionalism. Traditionalism gives tradition a bad name—unfairly, and unfortunately. Scorn for traditionalism may encourage indifference to precious things we might learn to value from tradition.”

(Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship*, 20)

“The Christian communities depicted in the New Testament were first and foremost worshipping communities. Worship was not just an aspect of their corporate lives, it was the essence of their new life in Christ, for their experience of salvation in him was a doxological experience.”

(Christopher Cocksworth, *Holy, Holy Holy: Worshipping the Trinitarian God*, 38)

“If a personal encounter and its psychic benefit are premier reasons for participating in worship, then the church becomes less and less a community of faith in Christ, and more and more a gathering of individuals who think a joint experience of worship gets them a better personal buzz.”

(Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today*, 135)

“The essential, vital, indispensable, defining heart of worship is the experience of being satisfied with God.”

(John Piper)

“Biblical Christianity is concerned with what happened outside us, two thousand years ago, outside the city of Jerusalem. It is an ‘over there’ religion, not an ‘in here’ religion. It is centered on what happened externally, not on what happens internally. . . . Anything that has to do with me and my works or my experience securing victory and intimacy with God is sure to lead to despair. It is bad news, not good. And, by the way, this is not to in any way detract from the importance of the new birth or the subjective dimension of Christian experience. It is simply to say that nothing that happens within me is the gospel. (John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense*, 91)

“If there is no wonder, no experience of mystery, our efforts to worship will be futile.”

(A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?* 85)

O Thou who this mysterious bread
didst in Emmaus break,
return, herewith our souls to feed,
and to thy followers speak.

Unseal the volume of thy grace,
apply the gospel word;
open our eyes to see thy face,
our hearts to know the Lord.

Of thee communing still,
we mourn till thou the veil remove
talk with us, and our hearts shall burn
with flames of fervent love.

Enkindle now the heavenly zeal,
and make thy mercy known,
and give our pardoned souls to feel
that God and love are one.

(Charles Wesley)

UPCOMING WORSHIP EVENTS

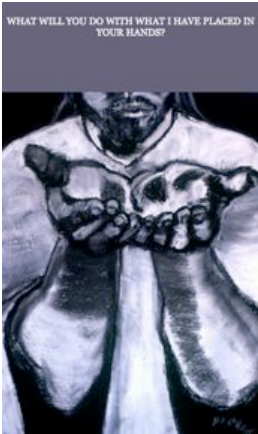


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