

The Road to Emmaus

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[0 : 0 0] Has anybody been to the optician recently? One or two hands. I remember the first time I went to the optician as an adult and I think I was probably in my mid 20s at the time and I went really reluctantly but I prided myself on kind of never I thought I had absolutely perfect vision and in fact I generally did have pretty good eyesight but I kind of admitted that I was struggling a little bit but I so I wasn't that enthusiastic about going so anyway I sat down in the chair as you do and looked at the chart and started to read off and actually I was doing pretty well and then the optician took this you know this device I don't know what they call it but they put it on your head and I thought this is quite cool I feel like I'm in Star Wars and suddenly I found myself looking at this chart and thinking okay so this is what eyesight is meant to be like and then he said okay so that's lens one I'm just going to make a little tip so he pulled something out he said now lens two which is clearer lens one or lens two which is clearer lens one or lens two and one of the things I wanted to make a little bit of a lens and I thought I was going to make a little bit of a lens and I thought oh my goodness this is what eyesight is meant to be like and then went through as an and if you've had an eye test my apologies if you've never actually done this you're going to have to just bear with me for the next few minutes and just use your imagination here but but then he did the thing you know where they put a lens in and then put another one in and says which is clearer lens one or lens two which is clearer lens one or lens two I want you just to hold that image because we're going to come back to it and I share that image with you because and there is so much in this passage this morning but the bit I want us to really kind of focus in on is in verse 31

Jesus who has been walking alongside in his risen form alongside these grieving broken disciples and they've been kept from recognizing him and he's been walking with them sometime listening to them and then explaining the scriptures and then he breaks bread with them and then we're told in verse 31 then their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus all of a sudden it comes into focus all of a sudden they're seeing things through a different lens and all the while they thought they got it all the while they thought actually they had their vision was fine and then it wasn't now they see what it's meant to look like now they see Jesus now they're looking through the right lens so here's a question what was it that kept them from recognizing Jesus up to that point now we're not really explicitly told the answer to that question at least I don't think we are but we can draw so many things out of the narrative which leads up to that point where that lens is flipped round which is clearer lens one or lens two and all comes into focus and they recognize Jesus so what is it then what is it about the lens what was the lens problem what was it that was stopping them from seeing Jesus

I want to suggest there are two things for us to ponder here the first thing they were broken they were utterly devastated there's a slight degree of comedy going on here because they were in that broken state they're walking along and Jesus comes up to them they don't recognize him at this point and says what are you discussing and they turn to Jesus and say are you the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard of the things that have been going on and Jesus of all the responses that he could have made says what things tell me but at this point they're devastated they're broken utterly utterly broken they say in verse 21 we had hoped for being in that situation where you talk about hope in a sense of well it was but it's not now we had hoped that this was the one we had hoped we'd seen all this going on in the life of Jesus but we don't know what to think now hope is relegated to the past tense you ever been in that situation where there's a set of circumstances that's facing you and you cannot see beyond them that your vision is utterly impaired because you cannot see beyond those circumstances maybe maybe you're going through a time of physical pain you're wrapped with pain and you cannot see beyond that pain you can't imagine ever being out of that pain maybe it's a kind of emotional pain something you've been given a blow this isn't just mild disappointment you're utterly utterly devastated and you cannot see beyond it maybe you're wrapped with depression or wrapped with fear or wrapped with anxiety such that you just can't see through that cloud you want to but you can't here's an experiment which is experiment something that is an analogy which is sometimes used actually in a form of cognitive behavioural therapy you can all join in on this in fact if you're listening to this on the podcast later in the week you can do this at home to begin with you might not be able to do this at home if you're listening but if you're sat here right now just look at the cross if you're listening to the sermon just look at it can be anything that is in front of you choose an object but because we have a cross here

I'm going to ask you to look at the cross and now just hold your hand and you're going to need to bear with me and even though you're not going to be able to see very much for the next few moments just trust me on this okay I'm not going to walk out but put your hand pretty much right over your eyes or really close about an inch away so basically you're just looking at your hand you can't really see anything else that's what's going on when you're so keep your hands there while I'm talking because I'm going to ask you to do something else in a moment that's what's going on when you're so caught up with whatever it is that's weighing you down when you're overwhelmed you're consumed by whether it's fear anxiety something that you cannot shake off it dominates all your thinking from the moment you wake up to the moment you hit the pillow you struggle to get to sleep because you can't see anything that's it's right in your face whatever it is that's dominating your thinking now ever so slowly move your hand away from your face till it's about eight inches away just do this slowly do it slowly and gradually you'll notice that your field of vision will expand you'll see a few things my guess is you may or you may not be able to see that cross just yet but keep your hand in that position don't let it go down and just hold that image for a few moments that posture because that's what's going on when we begin to lay hold of some hope and we begin to get some perspective and that issue is still blocking our vision we still can't really live life fully but we begin to see that there is something beyond that thing that would otherwise utterly utterly consume us and now slowly slowly move your hand away from your face until you're holding your arm out straight and now you'll be able to see quite clearly of course you'll still notice that hands in your way and in the same way that when you put your faith in Jesus those problems don't vanish they are there but they don't dominate everything put your hands down everyone please a sigh of relief you see the thing is when you put your faith in Christ it doesn't necessarily mean that everything immediately stops sometimes praise God miracles happen and that experience can be instant but generally speaking most of the time as we're walking through our lives things happen and our lives will be a combination of the good and the bad and the ugly when Jesus is with us and we know he's with us we may know those things are still there they haven't stopped but no longer do they block our vision there's hope there's that wider perspective

I want to suggest to you that perhaps the first thing the biggest thing that experiential thing for those disciples was that they just could not see beyond their own devastation that's the reality of what it is to be a human being life throws all sorts of things at us and our challenge is how do we actually live with those realities Christ makes all the difference when you know that you are not on your own that he is alive that he is with you I said that there are two things going on here and the other thing the second thing that I want to suggest that we see here is that these followers of Jesus the lens that they were looking through was such that they couldn't grasp the reality the fullness of God because their understanding their concept and their leaning towards

[11 : 26] God itself was distorted so Jesus had to go through the scriptures with them and unpack the scriptures to them gradually setting out before them who God really is as he is revealed to us in scripture and I want to suggest that this is in some ways a lifelong progress because we're still always on that journey of learning more and more and more about him but that doesn't mean to say we can't see him at all I think it was D.A.

Carson that said something that just because we can't see God fully doesn't mean to say we can't know him truly it was A.W.

Tozer that said what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us God's not just an abstract idea he's not just a philosophy he's not just a set of theological propositions the way that we hold that picture of who God is what God's character is like will in turn shape and form our character when you think about God it's the most important thing about you because it will shape and determine it will define the way in which you interact with the world it will determine your values your decision making processes your character your very being God our lives as individuals as a church and as society will be either limited or liberated by the way we see

God to our history will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion and our spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God so here's a question. Is your God too small? Because it would seem to the disciples on their journey, walking alongside Jesus, their understanding of who God is, their understanding the bits that they had taken from scripture, or rather the bits that they hadn't taken from scripture, was such that when it came to the notion that Jesus could have been raised from the dead, it just wasn't there.

It wasn't in their thinking. And how impoverished our lives become when we don't grasp the height and the depth of who God is, really is. Here's a story that will make you chuckle, it may be chuckle anyway. It was a couple of years ago, the BBC reported a story about an airline that keeps mistaking a 101 year old woman who continues to fly. They keep mistaking her for a baby.

[15 : 17] American Airlines has a booking system, it seems, that only allows for the last two digits of the year of your date of birth. Yeah? So when she was booking flights, and this has happened quite a lot, it would seem, that she puts in her date of birth, which was 1922, but it only shows up as 22.

So she arrives at the airport, or she arrives at the gate, and they're expecting a baby that was born in 2022, and they're saying, where's the baby? You can't come on this flight, madam. Well, it is me. Well, you can't be. You weren't born last year. I know I wasn't. I was born 101 years ago.

And apparently she's got herself into all kinds of trouble over and over and over again with this. She's been stopped and held at the gate and questioned, holding everybody else up many, many times.

So you have a picture in your mind as to what this person's going to be, and then they appear, and then you realise you totally got it wrong. You have completely a false idea of who this person was, how old they were.

To a sense, in a sense, throughout our whole lives, we're coming to terms with the reality of who God is. Yeah, when we come to faith in Jesus, that can be a very sudden and dramatic explosion, whereby suddenly we see things in a new way. But let's not think it stops there, because it goes on throughout our whole lives. This side of eternity, we're in this process of that vision being more and more and more and more finely tuned.

[16 : 58] Just when we think we've got it, then we realise, no, we haven't. No, we haven't. And for these disciples, walking alongside Jesus in his risen form, you know, God can't have raised Jesus from the dead, because that doesn't happen.

God's not like that, is he? I love the way that the disciples actually, again, at this point, they haven't recognised Jesus, but they turn to Jesus and they say to Jesus, they say this to Jesus, some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they didn't see Jesus.

So again, let me ask you that question. How big is your God? Let's go back into that optician's examination room.

See yourself in the chair. Which lens are you looking through? Lens one or lens two? The lens of your own human perceptions.

The lens of your own human concept of God and the limitations that you would impose on him. The lens that sees things through your own human brokenness, and that's all of us.

[18 : 35] Or looking through the lens of Christ. The God of resurrection. The God who defeats and walks away from death itself.

We're going to pray in just a moment, and we're going to spend a few moments holding that question in prayer. So we hold that before God. But before we do, just one last thought, and in fact, I think it's my favourite part of this story, and it's as simple as it is powerful.

All this while, the disciples don't recognise Jesus. He's walking alongside them.

They just didn't realise. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for the resurrection.

And thank you for this story. Lord, thank you for the appearance of the risen Jesus on that road to Emmaus.

[19 : 50] As we reflect on this story now, Lord, we think of our own vision or lack of. And we think of those lenses through which we look at our lives.

In the stillness of this moment, let's just hold on to that question. Which lens are you looking through? Hold before God that lens.

Hold before God those realities of fear or anxiety or brokenness or whatever it may be that you find preoccupies your thinking so often.

Just spend a few moments asking God to break through those things and to give you a different lens for those things not to dominate your vision but to see those things through the lens of the risen Jesus.

Take a few moments now to hold back the full blood. Now still holding that posture before God.

[21 : 13] Ask what limitations perhaps you have in that lens that you look at things through. And just ask God now in the silence of this moment in the power of his spirit to open things up to expand your view of who he is.

To know more of his character. To know him as the one who not only raises Jesus from the dead but raises you too.

Lord in the power of his spirit help us to see things through your lens through the lens of resurrection hope.

Lord may we know that you are always with us. That you are alongside us even when we haven't been aware of that presence. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit now and in the time to come.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.