

A Meal at Emmaus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'll start with a story this morning, and this story is about, it's a true story, and it's about former US President Bill Clinton. And it's about former US President Bill Clinton! And a friend of mine called Bob. Bob is a lawyer like me. And a while ago, quite a long while ago, maybe 15, 20 years ago, he was at a big event, and President Clinton was also there. And while he was there, he was introduced to President Clinton, and he told him that his name was Bob, and that he's a lawyer. The conversation lasted about a minute, and Bob thought no more about it. You know, he'd met President Clinton and told him what he did.

And then about three years later, I think it was about three years later, Bob went to another event where President Clinton was present. And President Clinton saw Bob across the room, and went over to Bob and said, Hello, Bob, how's the practice of law going?

And now, I don't know how many people President Clinton met or meets now in the course of his work. Many, many thousands. But he remembered Bob's name, and he remembered something about Bob.

That is an ability which I would love to have. I forget somebody's name within about 30 seconds of having been told it. And I suspect a lot of us are like that. We all wish we could remember people and remember their names in that way. And I'm sure that for President Clinton, this has been, you know, a fantastic thing in his political life, to be able to remember people in that way. And I know the story is true, because I've heard similar stories from other people who've met Bill Clinton. Now, that wasn't the problem the two disciples in this story had. It wasn't that they couldn't remember Jesus' name.

But actually, what we're told in verse 16 is that they were kept from recognizing him. Something stopped them from recognizing Jesus. And, you know, we can speculate about what that was.

[2 : 2 3] Many of us have had the experience of seeing somebody maybe after a long time and not recognizing them. Happens to me all the time. People recognize me, and they say, you know, I met you 10 years ago, and I have no idea who it is at all. Maybe they've just got a bit older. Maybe they've shaved their beards off. I don't know what it might be. But anyway, I think Luke is talking about something a bit deeper here. I think it wasn't just that these two people didn't recognize Jesus by his appearance on this road. It was that they didn't recognize Jesus for who he really is, what he was really there to do, what was really going to happen. And you can sort of see that as you look at the passage. As you look at the passage, you can see that they had an idea about Jesus, but it wasn't necessarily the right idea.

Particularly look at verse 19 through to verse 24. What they're trying to do there, these two disciples, is to explain to this stranger, who doesn't seem to know anything about Jesus at all, what Jesus is all about. And they call Jesus a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

And, you know, that's the sort of language, if you were a Jewish person at that time, that's the sort of language you might have used about Moses, maybe, the great liberator of the people of Israel.

And you can sort of see that language in verse 21 as well. We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. They thought Jesus was going to be the next Moses, the new Moses, the one who was going to deliver Israel, just as Moses had delivered Israel from Egypt. This was going to be the person who would deliver Israel from the occupation by the hated Romans, give them their land back.

So, they couldn't understand, they couldn't get it, why Jesus had to suffer and die, why he was handed over to be crucified, and even less, they couldn't get their minds around the idea that Jesus might have risen from the dead. This was just too much for them. The meaning of what was going on was hidden from them.

[5 : 02] They didn't see it. They didn't recognise the true facts about Jesus. Now, by the end of this story, and thank you very much for reading it to us, by the end of this story, these two disciples are in a very different place. They're very excited. You can see something happening to them. They do something which is really extraordinary, actually. They've gone all the way to Emmaus. We're told that's about seven miles away from Jerusalem. No one quite knows where Emmaus is, by the way, but about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they turn round and go all the way back again to Jerusalem in the middle of the night. That wasn't something you did very often. You know, there weren't any streetlights. There wasn't a, you couldn't get a taxi. You know, you just had to get going and walk. But there they are. They're turning all the way back. They're not trudging wearily to Emmaus, disappointed. They're excited. They're rushing back to Jerusalem. Huge change in their lives. It's made a big difference to them. So I want to just look a little bit more at what made that difference to them. And it's no coincidence that all this happens in the course of a journey.

I know you've had a series on meals, but there are a lot of journeys, particularly in Luke's gospel. Luke's gospel is all about journeys. Right from the beginning, there are journeys. And all the way through Luke's gospel, there are journeys. And this is a round-trip journey, Jerusalem to Emmaus and back again.

And by the end of this particular journey, Jerusalem has changed. Jerusalem is no longer the place of disappointment, the place of defeat, the place where things had gone badly wrong for the followers of Jesus. It's the place of victory. It's the place of a new hope. It's the place where they wanted to be with the others. And these two disciples, Cleopas and the other one who isn't named, some people think it might have been Cleopas's wife, actually. So don't assume they were both men.

They've become completely different people. They recognized Jesus in the course of the journey. Let's just hold on to that. Two things happened in the course of this journey that led to the recognition. And the first thing that happened is that Jesus explained the Old Testament scriptures to them. And we're told in verse 27, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. This, for me, is one of the most frustrating verses in the entire Bible, because I want to know what the explanation was.

I want to know what he said, but Luke doesn't tell us. Very annoying. Particularly, I want to know how he got to grips with some of the more difficult bits of the Old Testament. But anyway, one day, maybe, I'll know. But presumably, one of the things Jesus explained was how the Old Testament shows that the Messiah had to suffer. He went into those passages in the book of Isaiah, for example, about the suffering servant, and how that suffering would lead to the ultimate victory, the victory over sin and death that we were singing about in the song just now.

[8 : 44] And there's a hint of this in verse 26, where Jesus says to them, did not the Christ have to suffer all these things and then enter his glory? This was part of the plan. So that's presumably part of the explanation that Jesus gave. So that's the first thing that happened, the explanation of the scriptures.

The second thing that happened was that Jesus broke bread with them. Very simple, very standard thing that happened in every meal at that particular time. Somebody broke the bread, probably a large flat thing. If you've been to the Middle East, you know what they're like, into little pieces. And this is not just about eating. Eating is great. And, you know, sounds like you have church meals here. We do too at my church. Always a great thing to do. Wonderful to have fellowship in that way. But this is not just about eating together, good though that is. This is the way Luke always talks about the communion. It's where he talks about the particular type of way of remembering Jesus through the communion. And he uses it all the way through his writing. If you read the book of Acts, he often talks about the disciples breaking bread together, by which he means they had a communion service. So this might not have been a very formal sort of communion service like you probably have here. But it clearly, something about what Jesus did made the disciples, that something clicked with these two disciples. They saw what was going on. And they just told them about the scriptures. They realized that Jesus was talking about his own broken body, about his blood poured out for them. And that's where the turning point happens. As the passage says, their eyes were opened. We prayed in the song earlier on, open the eyes of our hearts. And that was the point where it happened to them. And, you know, they turned around, they went straight back to Jerusalem. It doesn't seem to have bothered them very much that Jesus somehow vanished as soon as they'd had this moment of revelation. They were enthusiastic, they wanted to share the good news.

And they wanted to share the good news, particularly that Jesus was alive. I mean, this is a great story. I think somebody said to me when I was talking about this story, it's their favorite one of all the resurrection appearances. It's certainly my favorite of all the resurrection experiences. It's so intimate. But you can also see this change that happens in these two disciples. They were on a journey. During that journey, they recognized Jesus in the scriptures, in the Old Testament scriptures, and in the breaking of the bread. And I'd like to suggest it's the same for us. How do we recognize Jesus as he really is? How do we get to know what he's really like?

Just like these two disciples, we need to be on that journey with him. We do this, of course, as he accompanies us. He walks with us on our journey through the ups and downs of life, through all the various stages of life. And during that journey, we need to hear what he's saying. And we need to hear what he's saying through the scriptures, through the word of God. And this, of course, is not about, you know, becoming a theological expert. This is not about getting a degree from Spurgeon's College or wherever else you want to get a degree from. This isn't actually just about diligent study of the Bible. Though, of course, if you're able to study the Bible diligently, of course, you should be doing that. But it's about hearing what Jesus is saying through the Bible. It's about hearing what Jesus is saying. The Bible points to Jesus. The Bible is all about Jesus from start to finish.

So we need to be listening to his voice. And we also need to meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Now, I'm not saying that the communion service is some sort of magic thing, you know, that somehow or other you eat a piece of bread and drink a few drops of wine and suddenly you become a new person.

[13 : 20] If it was magic like that, then everybody would be doing it. It's not. It doesn't work that way. But there is something important about doing it. And the important thing for me is that we are obeying Jesus' command. We're obeying his command to remember him in that way. And we're obeying his command to proclaim him, to proclaim what he's done in that way. And as we do that, he comes to meet us.

And he comes to meet us in that situation, in that ceremony, in that process, in a way which he doesn't meet us anywhere else. And I think it's quite important to say that. Of course, you know, this is a Protestant church.

My church is a Protestant church. We don't believe in, you know, that the bread and the wine are anything other than bread and wine. But we do believe that as we obey Jesus' command to proclaim him, to remember him, that he meets us.

Just as he met those two disciples on the road in Emmaus. And I'd just also like to say that I think it's important that none of the people in this story is on their own. This is not a solitary experience of Jesus.

Some people have those. Wouldn't want to knock that. But more often, we meet Jesus when we're together. Two disciples on the road. Creapas and another person, possibly his wife. Three people at the meal in Emmaus.

[15 : 13] It's as we journey in fellowship with others that we recognize Jesus as he really is. So those church meals are important. Doing things together are important. Studying the Bible together is important.

Having communion together is important. One last thing I want to say. If we want to recognize Jesus as he really is, as these disciples did, we can't just have one of these things.

Some people emphasize one over another. They say, right, I'm going to study the Bible. I'm going to study the Bible. I'm going to do nothing but studying the Bible. And that's going to mean that I will really understand who Jesus is.

That's not enough on its own. Other people say, I'm going to immerse myself in the fellowship. I'm going to be with believers all the time. I'm going to take communion whenever I can.

That way I will meet Jesus as he is. We need all of these things together. We need to meet Jesus on the journey. We need to meet him in the scriptures.

[16 : 23] We need to meet him in fellowship and in the breaking of the bread. All of those things. And each of us will find their own balance as to how those things work together.

But that's what happened to these disciples. They were on a journey. They met Jesus in the scriptures. They met him in the breaking of the bread. And their lives were transformed. And I pray it will be the same for all of us.

Amen. Amen.