

Luke 24:35

Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Recently I had quite an interesting conversation with a man

- We found we had quite a lot in common
- We had both been to college a couple of times
- Both been brought up in Plymouth but had several years away
- We were both interested in sports – though he was more Albion than Argyle
- But although he was obviously open to spirituality and religious experience
- He told me plainly that he had never been involved with formal religion
- Which led me to think that though I don't think of myself as formally religious
- He concluded that he was not formally religious but that I was

Although we live in a society that is not, for the most part, formally religious

- There is little doubt that a considerable number of people are open to spiritual things
- But these often seem to be expressed outside of a religious tradition

For Christians this must give rise to a number of important questions

- Is there a divine being, an objective reality, that we may legitimately call 'God'?
- If there is a God can we know or experience him in a personal way?
- If God can be known and experienced in a personal way
- In what way would we anticipate that would normally happen?

Some years ago I was at a meeting in London regarding Billy Graham Missions

- On discovering that I was a Methodist minister, one of the ministers there said
- Wasn't it your founder John Wesley who said he felt a warm glow inside?
- I replied, "He said he felt his heart strangely warmed"
- "That's it!" He said, "Most odd thing to say."
- To which I replied "You might think so but it is entirely New Testament Christianity"

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on
the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

(Luke 24:32)

Apart from the hymns of the Wesleys

- Undoubtedly Methodism's great contribution to the wider church
- Has been a rightful emphasis on Christian or evangelical experience
- John Wesley was concerned that formal religion should not usurp vibrant faith
- The theory of religion was not enough, it needed to be a living experience
- Experience was not an emotional feeling
- But a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as mediated by the Holy Spirit
- And at no time was experience at odds with the Holy Scriptures

It is fundamental to the Christian faith that there is a divine being that we call God

- And that God can be known and experienced in a personal way
- And that being the case we must be clear how that would normally happen
- And in the story commonly called 'The Walk to Emmaus' I think we have it

The story begins on the first Easter Day and is unique to Luke's gospel

- That same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus
- The precise location of Emmaus is lost in the mists of time
- And we are even uncertain about the identity of the two walkers
- 'two of them' is a vague description that seems to refer back to v. 9
- which mentions 'the Eleven and all the others'
- from which we conclude that these two were others from the wider circle of followers
- but the fact that there were two is important as the Jews required two witnesses
- for a valid testimony to be given

No clue is given as to why these two men were kept from recognising Jesus

- though if they had been allowed to recognise him immediately
- they would have missed out on what might be termed the greatest sermon of all time
- the grammar suggests that it is God who keeps them from recognising Jesus

The theme of walking (or the journey) is very important in the writings of Luke

- and we find such travels not only in the gospel but also the sequel, the book of Acts
- but when Jesus asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along'
- they stood still, their faces downcast

It is part of the missionary method of Jesus to establish common ground with the listeners

- when he met the Galilean fishermen he said he would make them fishers of men
- when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well he offered her living water
- the name of one of the followers, Cleopas, was probably known to Luke's readers
- the other was not known or was less significant
- In any event when Cleopas asks with some irony
- If the stranger is only a visitor to Jerusalem who does not know what has happened
- Jesus gives him opportunity to give his summary of events and review of the situation

In actual fact the report that Cleopas gives to Jesus is not in accurate

- He gives a right estimation of Jesus of Nazareth
- a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people
- He gives a right analysis of the death of Jesus
- The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death
- And the crucified him
- He gives a summary of the hope of many of the disciples
- We had hoped that he was the one who was going to Redeem Israel
- Reference to the third day implies that they knew Jesus had said about the third day
- They had even heard the testimony of the women concerning the empty tomb
- And the vision of angels who proclaimed Jesus was alive
- The empty tomb had been confirmed by the other disciples
- But that was as far as they got

Between the lines of the dialogue, Luke shows their sense of bewilderment

- They had been present in Jerusalem, the venue for the most momentous event ever
- But when it came to understanding, interpreting and applying it
- They were left disappointed and confused – Jesus responded with:

I SCRIPTURAL EXPOSITION

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

(Luke 24:25-27)

Today many people are looking to short-circuit Christian or evangelical experience

- This is something that can be introduced quite subtly
- And in the atmosphere of a building or music or film or multi-media presentation
- People can have a particular feeling – maybe even a feeling about Jesus
- But I do not think that it is enough
- It is possible for example to have feelings in a great Cathedral singing evening prayer
- Or in an auditorium singing contemporary worship songs
- I would like to think that both have their place
- The danger is that people have emotional feelings
- And equate that with Christian or evangelical experience
- The situation worsens when they reject any type of event or venue
- That is not the place where they had their emotional feelings
- And things reach a crisis when the emotional feelings are not regularly replicated
- So the person who enjoys a full Cathedral, great organ and magnificent choir
- And feels moved by it (who wouldn't?) is soon discontent with the local parish
- And the person who enjoys a full theatre, with loud band and good soloists
- And feels moved by it (who wouldn't?) is soon discontent with the local fellowship
- The Cathedral buff says, ‘if only we could get the liturgy and music right ...
- We would all feel blessed’
- And the person who likes worship bands says, ‘if only we had that band at our church
- ... then we would all feel blessed’
- but in the Bible we find a different pattern of Christian experience
- Perhaps I should make it clear that I am not knocking emotional feelings
- As long as people do not mistake them for Christian experience

When Jesus wanted to prepare the disciples for his own self-revelation to them

- He did so by opening and expounding the scriptures to them
- In Acts, we find Peter, Stephen and Paul doing the same
- Jesus begins with the sufferings of the Messiah (the Christ)
- And shows that he had to endure these things before entering his glory
- Undoubtedly the unexpected element in Christ's messiahship was suffering
- but Jesus shows that suffering (even death on a cross) was necessary

Jesus drew on all the scriptures, the Law (Gen-Deut) and the Prophets

- but the central subject of his exposition was himself
- it is an important reminder that all the scriptures are important
- and that the New Testament writers used the Old Testament writings
- in the same way that Jesus had done – it is this that leads to:

II SCRIPTURAL EXPERIENCE

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.

(Luke 24:28-31)

The invitation for Jesus to stay with the two follows the ancient custom of hospitality

- the stranger would need food and lodging
- out of politeness and not deception, Jesus ‘acted as if’ he were going to journey on
- but Cleopas and his companion urged him strongly to stay
- I think we have to recognise in this more than a spirit of generous hospitality
- They had been not only on a physical journey but also on a spiritual journey

At the beginning of their travels together

- The two disciples had felt that the cross meant the end of the hope Jesus brought
- Even the news of the empty tomb did not change that
- But as Jesus opened expounded the scriptures to them things began to change

It is foolish to speculate in too much detail as to what Jesus said about himself

- But by unfolding the scriptures to them, surely they would have seen
- He was a prophet like Moses but greater
- A king like David, but greater
- The suffering servant of whom the prophet Isaiah had spoken
- The Son of Man of whom Daniel had spoken
- All wrapped together in one person
- His ministry involved both suffering and victory
- And the bridge between the two was the resurrection
- The character of the person they would recognise was the crucified and risen Lord

Inside the house, Jesus took the quite exceptional step of taking the roll of host

- Taking the bread and giving thanks
- To the reader, this might evoke the Last Supper
- But it was unlikely to do so with the two disciples who would not have been there
- Whether or not they remembered the feeding of the 5,000, we cannot say

Just as the fact that their eyes were kept from recognising him implied divine action

- Now the moment of truth when they recognised him implies divine action also
- Only Jesus himself, appearing to them in his restored existence, changed their minds
- Jesus was and is the author of the resurrection faith
- When his scriptural exposition and given a full picture of him
- The disciples were ready to see him, crucified and glorified
- And this was the basis of their:

III SCRIPTURAL EVANGELISM

Their meeting with Jesus ended abruptly as Jesus disappeared

- But left them asking each other

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

(Luke 24:32)

This vital text points to the importance both of scriptural exposition and scriptural experience

- The loss of the former will leave people bouncing along in an emotional bubble
- Which sooner or later will burst – leaving people dejected and confused
- The loss of the latter will leave people with an arid theology of the mind
- That never seems to warm the heart – this was Wesley before Aldersgate Street

Together, scriptural exposition and scriptural experience, move into scriptural evangelism

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

(Luke 24:33-35)

The transformation in the two disciples is plain to see

- Before Jesus opened the scriptures to them and they saw him for who he is
- Their best response had been to stand still, looking sad
- Now they get up at once and return to Jerusalem
- No doubt their journey back to the city was quicker than their journey home

Interestingly, Luke records that, for the first time since the Garden of Gethsemane

- The disciples refer to Jesus as ‘the Lord’
- It is the resurrection that seals his Lordship
- For by that resurrection Jesus now sits at the right hand of God (Rom. 1:3-4)
- he rules along with the Father (Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13–14)
- he intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:2)
- he mediates the blessings that God gives his children (Hebrews 5–10)
- he bestows the many blessings of grace that God gives his children (1 Peter 1:3-6)
- including forgiveness of sins, the promised Holy Spirit and eternal life

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans:

If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

(Romans 10:9)

Here we first find the disciples confessing Jesus as Lord and risen Saviour

- by scriptural exposition, through scriptural experience and by scriptural evangelism