

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from Bible Journeys: Christ's ministry - Jerusalem to Bethany (Emmaus) - Luke 24:13-35

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*.

We begin a new four week series called "Lessons from Bible journeys". Today the title is: "Christ's ministry" - Jerusalem to Bethany (Emmaus). In the following weeks we will look at:

- "Philip's call" - Samaria to Gaza;
- "Saul's conversion" - Jerusalem to Damascus; and finally
- "Peter's commission" - Joppa to Caesarea.

Each of these journeys was arranged by God. They were special journeys, dramatic journeys and in every case life changing. There are many people in the Bible who made journeys for many different reasons. But the journey we are considering today has got to be one of the best known and loved amongst Christians. Two people, sad and confused, were returning from the world changing events in Jerusalem to the quiet town of Emmaus. They were joined by the risen Christ who walked and talked with them on the road before making Himself known to them in their house. Can you imagine being on that journey?

Journeys can be lonely, boring, sad, long, hot, cold, noisy, uncomfortable and even sometimes dangerous. On the other hand, journeys can be fun, enjoyable, scenic, exciting, exhilarating and memorable. A lot depends on your own attitude to the journey, the people you are travelling with or what you do on a particular journey that makes it a good journey or a bad journey. Sometimes it's where you are travelling to or the reason for your journey that makes the journey much more interesting and memorable.

Over the years we have been privileged as a family to have made lots of journeys in various modes of transport. When the children were young after five minutes into a four hour car journey a little voice would come from the back: "Are we nearly there?" I am sure all parents have heard that cry and given a polite answer back! Over the years as the children have grown up we have enjoyed each other's company as we travelled together seeing new places, understanding different cultures, dealing with delays, accepting disappointments and having a good laugh.

As I reflect on some of the journeys I have made over the years, some I would like to forget, some I would like to make again but with a different attitude and some I know would not be as good the next time. There are journeys I will never ever forget for various reasons. I am not really a good traveller when there is any sort of motion so I have to be careful what I do when I'm travelling. But when things are calm I often spend the time preparing radio talks like this one, sometimes I will sleep (my family would say most of the time!); often I will read a book. On other occasions, I just can't take my eyes off the beautiful scenery around. Most journeys over the years were made special because of the people I travelled with.

The details of the journey before us today can be found in Luke 24:13-35. The journey was from Jerusalem to Emmaus which was a distance of about seven miles. Two people were on foot returning from a large city in turmoil to their quiet home in a small village in the country. They were returning home after the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. The road would have been quite rough and the terrain quite hilly. They would have made this journey many times, so they would know the road well. But this time their journey would prove to be very different.

Who were the two people? The Bible tells us that Cleopas was one but we are not told who was with him. Some have speculated who the other person could have been. Could it have been Nathanael? Or could it have been Simon Peter? It seems that Simon Peter could possibly have had a private meeting with the Lord as we read in Luke 24:34. Or maybe it was Luke, the one who wrote the Gospel? It has also been suggested that it was his wife, mainly because of the statement in Luke 24:32, "*Did not our heart burn within us...?*" It is good to think of a man and wife having one heart united and joined together. They also invited the Lord to "*Abide with them*" which was an invitation into a house, possibly their house. None of these thoughts are conclusive and we must accept that there must be a reason why the Bible does not tell us.

The two people were sad because of what had happened while they were in Jerusalem (Luke 24:18). They had a lot to talk about; in fact they were in deep discussion as they reflected and reasoned about the events that had taken place in Jerusalem. Their conversation was about the Lord Jesus, His rejection, His suffering, His death, His burial and the report of the women that His tomb was empty and that He was alive (Luke 24:14-15). I reckon they were so taken up in their discussion that the journey would just be a blur, not even noticing things around them, almost walking in remote control. I am sure we all have experienced journeys like this that have just flown by.

But the journey was soon to take another twist. A fellow traveller was walking alongside them; He had come alongside without their even noticing (Luke 24:15). It would seem that they just carried on their conversation. Who was this man they wondered? They did not recognise Him because their eyes were held from seeing that it was the Lord Himself! (Luke 24:16). It was actually Jesus of Nazareth, Who was at the centre of their thoughts and the topic of their discussion and they never knew Him! Luke 24:15 is lovely: "*Jesus Himself drew near*" - not an angel, not a prophet, not a messenger but Jesus Himself. The words "*drew near*" would indicate that that He overtook them on the way and came close to them, close enough that He could hear their conversation.

Jesus was the first to speak by asking them what they were talking about and why they were sad (Luke 24:17). Cleopas and his friend stopped in their tracks. They questioned the integrity of the man and asked Him if he was just a stranger in Jerusalem (Luke 24:18). They could not believe that He had not heard about the things that had taken place over the last three days. They began to explain to the stranger that it was all about Jesus of Nazareth who had been condemned to death by their rulers and the chief priests, who had had Him crucified (Luke 24:19-20). They did not blame the Romans: they put the blame of the atrocity firmly on their own people, the Jews (Luke 24:20). Jesus, although He was first to speak, never answered their question. How gracious Jesus was as He listened to their view on the events that had taken place!

Cleopas and his friend believed (they were hoping) that Jesus had come to redeem Israel; this is why they were so sad (Luke 24:21). They went on to explain that it was three days since Jesus was crucified (Luke 24:21). Yet today certain women went to the tomb early and they discovered that the body was not there. Angels also testified to them that Jesus was alive (Luke 24:22). Others that were with them did not believe the women and they themselves went to the tomb to find that the body had gone (Luke 24:23-24). The two seemed very confused and they were struggling to come to terms with what had happened.

The Stranger listens patiently then He speaks. He rebukes them but not with any hardness or ill feeling but with tender love and compassion (Luke 24:25-26). He knew that they knew the writings of the prophets well. He knew that they should have understood and believed what the prophets had said about how Christ would suffer. The Stranger then begins to explain to them "*in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself*" (Luke 24:27)

Cleopas and his friend were nearly home. The village of Emmaus was near, the journey had been so quick, (well so it seemed). They had met a Stranger who had come quietly alongside them and walked with them every step of the way, quietly listening to their reasoning. They had been amazed and enthralled as they listened to the Stranger explaining the reason for the events of the last few days from the Scriptures of old that they knew so well. Oh, how they had enjoyed hearing from the Word of God about the things concerning Christ. Still they never knew who the Stranger was.

Their journey was almost over; the Stranger made out that He would have gone further (Luke 24:28). But they did not want this Stranger to leave as He had made such an impression on them. They wanted this man's company for a bit longer. So they invited Him into their house (Luke 24:29). In fact they constrained Him and asked Him: "*Abide with us*", making the excuse it was late (Luke 24:29). The Stranger came into their house and stayed with them (Luke 24:29).

What a scene we have in this house! Cleopas, his friend and a Stranger sitting around the table ready to eat. The Stranger takes the bread which was not unusual for the visitor to do, normally the bread was taken early in the meal. He blesses it and then breaks it and gives it to them (Luke 24:30). At this point the risen Christ was revealed to them. Luke 24:31 says that: "*their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.*" Their eyes that had been divinely held from recognising the Lord were suddenly opened. They knew the Lord very well before He died on the cross. But there was something different about Him. Did they recognise His face which bore the scars of His suffering on the cross? Did they see the marks of the nails clearly on His hands as He broke the bread? Did they see the marks of the nails on His feet? We are not told but we are told that when they looked on Jesus "*they knew Him*". They not only knew Him but they understood Him. Jesus had made everything clear as He taught them on the journey the reasons why He had to die so that God could raise Him up and give Him glory. They knew Him because of the time they had spent with Him. They knew Him better than ever before.

He was gone - just as soon as they recognised Jesus, He was gone (Luke 24:31). They could hardly believe what had just happened. What a journey it had been that night from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Not just the same old journey they

had made many times before. This was a journey they would never forget! They recalled how they had felt as they had walked listening to the Lord Himself make the scriptures real and clear to them. Luke 24:32 tells us that their *"hearts were burning"* when Jesus was talking to them on the way. Jesus Himself had taken time to come right to where they were and walk with them and talk to them. He gave them understanding, peace and joy which filled and thrilled their hearts.

Luke 24:33 tells us that they *"rose up that same hour and returned to Jerusalem."* We are not told about the journey on the way back to Jerusalem. Was it still that evening? If it was, it would have been getting dark and the road would have been dangerous to travel on. But they probably never even considered that! I reckon they almost ran all the way there! They were bursting to tell the eleven disciples what had happened and whom they had met. They had travelled home very sad but they travelled back to Jerusalem with a joy in their hearts that only walking with Christ could bring.

We have thought about the relatively short journeys we make but in the light of the passage we have been studying I would like you to consider your journey through life. What can we learn from this journey that would help us on our path of life? I would like to bring four points to your notice to challenge your hearts.

1. The need to study the Scriptures.

In Acts 17:11 we read of the Bereans that they *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."* Why do we need to study the Scriptures you may ask me? Knowledge is not everything, I know, but how are we going to learn more of Christ without the study of the Scriptures? How are we going to understand the feelings of His heart toward us? How are we going to learn His will in our lives? How are we going to be in the joy of the spiritual blessings which we have been brought into through Christ? Cleopas and his friend knew the Scriptures of old but they had *"slow hearts"*; they needed the Lord Himself to draw near and teach them. This is the work of the Holy Spirit today, to open the Scriptures and teach us of Christ as we spend time in His presence quietly reading our Bibles.

2. What are you as a believer interested in as you travel on your life's journey?

Are you engaged with Christ like Cleopas and his friend? Or are you wasting your time with things that don't really matter? Are you like Cleopas and his friend who had *"sad hearts"*? You may read your Bible but you find it dry, unappealing, difficult to understand. And because of this you find it difficult to have the joy of the Lord. You know that you are a Christian but you don't know Christ very well. He does not really live in you. You have not made room for Him in your house that is your life; you have not invited Him in to *"abide with you."* Revelation 3:20 says; *"Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me."* The Lord wants to have room in your heart; he wants to draw near to you. The turning point for Cleopas and his friend was when they invited the Lord in to their house. Their eyes that could not see were opened as He revealed himself to them. Oh that each one of us would desire a closer walk with Jesus throughout our lives!

3. Do you know Jesus well enough that you would recognise Him?

Cleopas and his friend had the most wonderful time as they sat with the risen Christ, the One who was once a stranger to them as they walked. As they take the bread from the nail pierced hands of the Lord, their eyes are opened and they recognise who this Stranger is. *"They knew Him"* Did they see the nail pierced hands? Did they recognise His face? We are not told but we are told that *"they knew Him."* How will we know the Lord when we see Him for the first time?

Many years ago an old friend of mine used to sing a lovely old hymn:

*"When my life's work is ended and I've crossed the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
For His smile will be the first to welcome me.*

*I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
When redeemed by His side I shall stand,
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the prints of the nails in His hand."*

The lady who wrote this remarkable hymn was Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) who was blind for her entire life. It's quite remarkable that the first person she will ever see is her beloved Saviour!

4. Do you take part in the Lord's Supper?

Luke 22:19-20 speak about the Lord: *"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."* Have you ever remembered the Lord before in the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup? Some groups of Christians would call this taking communion. The company of believers I gather with make a point of breaking bread together every week. We believe that as the disciples gathered on the first day of the week to break bread so should we. The Lord does not make many requests of us but He does ask us to remember Him. Remember what? Remember the death of the Lord Jesus and consider the sufferings He had to go through to redeem us by His blood. It is a simple occasion with just a normal loaf and a cup of wine which are symbols of the Lord's body broken in death and blood that was shed at the cross. The Bible also tells us in Matthew 18:20 *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* What a wonderful privilege and responsibility it is to gather together and respond to this loving request of the Saviour!

Each one of us is on a journey through life. We will all face different things as we turn each corner. There will be times of joy and times of sorrow. The journey sometimes will be very difficult. But the key is to allow the Lord to walk with us and talk with us. If we invite Him to "abide", which means to dwell, with us we will also know His joy and His peace throughout our lives as we travel through even the most difficult circumstances. If you look back on your life's journey, how much of that pathway had two sets of footprints, yours and the Lord's? Let's look forward and make sure from now on that we have two sets of footprints in the sands of time until we meet our Saviour face to face.

I trust that what has been said today may be both an encouragement and challenge to you. May God bless you all, Amen.

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