

WHERE IS JESUS WHEN WE NEED HIM?

Introduction

There is no better way to understand what Easter is all about. Visit a cemetery and ponder how great the miracle was.

Two thousand years ago a man defeated death once and for all. He came out of the grave never to die again.

God reversed the natural process when he raised his Son from the dead.

It is a pure miracle and a mystery beyond all human knowledge.

That it happened we have no doubt.

But we cannot explain it.

And we cannot repeat it.

To come back from the dead - that's the greatest miracle of all. And that's why we're still talking about the resurrection of Jesus twenty centuries later.

The longest walk you'll ever take is the walk away from the grave of someone you love.

It is the longest walk and the saddest day. Every step takes you away from the tombstone of a broken dream.

Scripture Passage in Depth

The story is told in Luke 24.

Two disciples are on the road to Emmaus, a little village about seven miles from Jerusalem. One disciple is named Cleopas. We do not know the name of the other disciple.

They were followers of Jesus, the rabbi from Nazareth, the teacher and miracle worker who claimed to have been sent by God. For a long time they had followed him. As much as anyone could, they truly believed.

But Jesus had been crucified. After his death, he was buried in a tomb. Although they had heard rumors that the tomb had been found empty early that morning, they could not and would not and did not believe any wild stories about a resurrection.

Romans were good at killing people.

They could make it fast or short, easy or horrific, public or private, relatively painless or excruciatingly painful. Crucifixion was the most terrible way to kill a man and only the worst of the worst suffered that fate.

How had it come to this? If he truly was the Son of God, how could this have happened?

It is Sunday. Jesus is dead. And they are going home.

Their question is our question, only slightly rephrased.

Where is Jesus when we need him? Where did he go? Why did he leave us?

As they walked and talked, they did a lot of remembering.

- They must have talked about the time the man on the pallet was lowered through the roof.
- Surely they talked about the time when Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish and fed 5000 men.
- They probably wondered how Jesus could raise Lazarus and then be killed himself a week later. Like anyone who lost a loved one, they tried to make sense out of the tragedy.

Down the road the two men walked, deep in their sorrow and despair.

Suddenly a stranger joins them and walks with them. When he leaves them, they are changed forever.

- First their hearts are burdened.
- Then their hearts are burning.
- Then their hearts are bursting.

Such is the power of the risen Christ.

Because he rose from the dead, Jesus is with us always, everywhere, at all times, in every situation.

I. Sometimes We Can't Recognize Him.

Verse 16 says that "**their eyes were kept from recognizing him.**"

Why didn't they know it was Jesus? After all, they were his disciples.

There are many answers given to that question.

- Some say they didn't expect him so they didn't recognize him.
- Others say that it happened at sunset so they were confused by the fading light. But the text gives us a different time.
- It was a supernatural veiling of their eyesight so that they saw a man but did not know it was Jesus.

Every part of this story is true to human nature as we know it.

There is even a touch of humor in that Jesus is with them and they think he's dead.

As they walked with the stranger, they said, "He used to do this" and "You should have been there" and "He could walk on water!" and "He was so kind" and "We never met anyone like him" and, finally, "I can't believe he's gone."

On they walk, the two men talking, the stranger listening intently.

Finally he breaks in asks, "What are you talking about?"

The question perplexes the two men because everyone in Jerusalem knew about the crucifixion of Jesus. "Are you the only one who hasn't heard?"

And so they tell the story to this inquisitive stranger, their words a combination of love and grief, pride and sorrow, belief and doubt.

Everything they said was in the past tense, which is how we normally speak of the dead.

- They still loved him and still believed in him as best they could, and they clung to every cherished memory.

- Crucifixion could not make them stop loving him.
- But they could not square the events of the past 48 hours with their faith that he was the Son of God.

They were disappointed disciples who felt their faith slipping away with every step on the road to Emmaus.

They had heard the rumors of an empty tomb, but what did that mean? No one had seen Jesus yet, or so they assumed.

There comes a time in life when you have to face the facts and deal with reality.

What can discouragement do to us?

1. Discouragement can cause us to walk away from fellowship v.14-16
2. Discouragement can cause us to live in the past v.17-24
3. Discouragement can cause us to doubt and question the care & promises of God v.25-33

They believed in Jesus, and he let them down. The third day was almost gone and Jesus was nowhere to be found. Bring down the curtain, it's all over now.

This is what Good Friday looks like without Easter.

- Without the resurrection, the cross is nothing but a tragedy,
- a story without a moral,
- a drama that ends before the final act.

II. Sometimes We Are Slow to Believe.

As the two disciples pour out their confusion and despair, Jesus listens patiently. When they are finished telling of their broken dreams and dashed hopes, he begins to speak.

He calls them fools, which simply means they were slow to apply the truth they already knew.

And he says they are "slow of heart" to believe what the prophets had said.

He rebukes them for one thing and only one thing--for failing to understand and apply the Scriptures.

He doesn't upbraid them for leaving Jerusalem and walking back home.

He doesn't criticize their doubt nor condemn their confusion.

All of that was perfectly understandable, given the circumstances and the fragmentary information they had received.

But he tells them they should have known and believed what God had said.

He tells them plainly that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and die on the cross.

What seemed like the ultimate miscarriage of justice turns out to be the Father's plan to glorify his Son.

- Christ was no victim being led against his will to the cross.
- No one took his life.
- He laid it down.
- ***The cross was not an accident. It was part of God's plan from the beginning.***

That's why the prophets and the poets wrote about it. There are clues throughout the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer and then would enter his glory.

Genesis 3	Psalm 118
Genesis 22	Isaiah 7
2 Samuel 7	Isaiah 9
Psalm 16	Isaiah 53
Psalm 22	Zechariah 12
Psalm 69	Zechariah 13
Psalm 110	Zechariah 14

Don't miss the point.

The whole Bible testifies to Christ.

The Old Testament is full of Christ. He is on every page.

He is the true theme of the Old Testament by type, teaching, sacrifice and prophecy.

- He is the prophet greater than Moses.
- He is the priest greater than Aaron.
- He is the king greater than David.
- He is the captain greater than Joshua.
- He is the seed of the woman,
- He is the fulfillment of the brass serpent,
- He is the goal of all the sacrifices,
- He is the true meaning of the tabernacle.
- He is the Kinsman Redeemer,
- He is the Scapegoat and the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.
- He is the great high priest who lives forever to intercede for us.
- He is the lion of the tribe of Judah and
- He is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

If you want to find Jesus, just open your Bible because the whole book is about him.

If you want to understand the Bible, look for Jesus. He's there on every page.

The whole purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus. He's the theme of every book from Genesis to Revelation.

Where is Jesus when we need him?

He is with us even when we are slow to believe.

Psalms 139

III. Sometimes He Seems to Leave Us.

Verses 28-32 paint a touching picture of Jesus eating supper with Cleopas and the other disciple.

Remember, they still don't know who he is.

There is one little phrase in verse 28 that we should not overlook. Jesus "**acted as if he were going farther.**"

The word "acted" means "pretended."

What a thought that is!

- Was Jesus trying to deceive his own disciples? No, that can't be right.
- Was Jesus planning on leaving his disciples alone on the road of doubt? No, but he makes them think he is going to leave them behind so that they will invite him to stay.
- Think about that for a moment. *Our Lord sometimes seems to leave us so that we will ask him to stay.*
- He seems to leave us behind so that we will seek him all the more.
- Those days when we feel alone and confused are part of God's plan to wean us away from the things of the world and bring us to a place where we say, "O Lord, it is you and you alone that I seek."

Note what happens next:

- 1) Jesus comes in when he is invited.
- 2) He eats with them.
- 3) He vanishes as soon as he is recognized.

Note this carefully. *Jesus disappears, but not until his disciples recognize him.*

Think about it this way:

- 1) He came in because they asked him.
- 2) He broke bread that he might have fellowship with them.
- 3) He left because they no longer needed his personal presence.

Why did he leave so suddenly?

The answer is, he didn't leave them at all. *He simply became invisible.*

Leaving implies a change of geography, but it's not as if Jesus moved to a different location.

He appeared to them on the road but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Even when he taught them the Scriptures, he still did not reveal himself to them.

Only in the course of sharing a meal together did Cleopas and his friend recognize who he was. And then he vanished.

That doesn't mean he left them. It simply means they could no longer visibly see him. *This is the point of the whole story.*

- Just because you don't see Jesus doesn't mean he isn't there.
- Just because you can't feel him doesn't mean he has left you.
- Just because you think you are alone doesn't mean he is no longer by your side.

Once you know that Jesus is alive, you have certainty in your heart.

There is no need for him to stay longer.

He stays long enough for them to believe but no longer.

There are times when we all say, "Lord Jesus, it would be wonderful if you would stay a while longer." And the Lord answers back, "My child, I am with you even though you think I'm gone."

Where is Jesus when we need him?

He is with us even though he seems to leave us.

This is the profound insight of the text.

Because Jesus is alive, he is with us even when we don't know it.

He is with us when we think we are walking alone through the dark valleys of life.

And even when we have given up all hope, we discover that he was with us when we needed him most.

When you come to the conviction that Jesus is alive, everything changes!

Back to Jerusalem

That's why the two disciples couldn't wait to get back to Jerusalem.

Even though it was late in the evening, they had to go back and tell the others what they had seen and heard.

Once you encounter Christ, nothing will ever be the same again.

If Jesus is alive, there's no time to waste.

If Jesus is alive, everything we believe is true.

If Jesus is alive, then death has been defeated.

If Jesus is alive, then heaven is more than a dream.

If Jesus is alive, then our sins are really forgiven.

If Jesus is alive, then all his promises are true.

If Jesus is alive, then we can never truly be alone again.

Conclusion

Where is Jesus when we need him most?

He is with us because he is risen from the dead.

Let's look at the simple outline of this passage:

Two men.

Three men.

Two men.

It is a picture of life after the resurrection.

There are two men alone in their despair.

Jesus comes and gives them hope.

Jesus leaves but the men are changed forever.

You say, "He's been gone for 2000 years." But that's not quite right.

He is gone in terms of his physical presence on the earth, but he's more with us now than he was when he was here.

How do we know this is true?

Because of the last verse of Matthew's gospel: "**I am with you ALWAYS, to the end of the age**"(28:20).

He is with us always . . .

even though we do not recognize him.

even though we can't find him.

even though we are slow to believe.

even though he seems to leave us.

All of this is true because Christ is risen from the dead!

He is gone from our sight that he may be seen by our faith.

It's Saturday but Sunday's Coming.

The problem is, Saturday seems so long. It feels like Sunday will never get here.

Thank God, we're not moving back toward the crucifixion.

It may be Saturday but we're moving toward Easter. Sunday's coming.

All we've got to do is hold on a little while longer and Sunday will soon be here.

We all live somewhere between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

We are on the long Emmaus Road journey together.

There are times when we feel alone and overwhelmed and doubts creep in and our heart gives way and we feel like we can't go on.

Then Jesus comes to us and says, "You are not alone. You never were alone. Even when you thought were alone, I was with you every step of the way."

We still make that long walk from the grave.

We still weep and remember and wonder why.

But everything is changed now.

It may be Saturday for many of us, but thank God, Easter has already dawned across the universe.

A bright light shines from the garden tomb.

The light slowly chases the darkness away until one day, the darkness will be gone forever.

Child of God, behold the risen Christ! You can never be alone again.

It's Saturday, but Sunday's coming.

KeralaBeats Page 11; 8/6/2009; The tomb is empty.

Jesus is alive.

We are not alone.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.