

1 Peter 1:17-23

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;

16 but they were kept from recognising him.

17 He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'

They stood still, their faces downcast.

18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?'

19 'What things?' he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.'

20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;

21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning

23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.

24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.'

25 He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further.

29 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.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together

34 and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.'

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

The Road to Emmaus 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

This is Luke's extraordinary account of something which happened on the road out of Jerusalem on afternoon of the first Easter day. Like a lot of the gospels it's irritating (to me!) in what it leaves out. I don't know about you but my inquisitive mind would love to know who both these disciples were, but we're told only that one of them is Cleopas. Traditionally they're always assumed to both be men. However, John in his gospel, tells us that Mary, the wife of Cleopas was stood watching when Jesus was crucified, which places her in Jerusalem at the same time, so some people have felt safe to assume that the disciples are Cleopas and Mary, husband and wife, returning home. More on that in a minute.

I don't generally go into a lot of detail about a particular passage, but there's so much to look at in this story, and it's so important to understand, starting where it says that Jesus came alongside them but *they were kept from recognising him*. Now if these were disciples they would obviously been very familiar with him, so it seems odd that they thought he was a stranger. But it's the resurrected Jesus, and on other occasions after the resurrection, most notably with Mary Magdalene in the garden, he seems to all the witnesses somehow, indescribably, *different*. It appears that he does have a body, but one which doesn't conform to the laws of nature.

Now if you look closely at his life and teaching, it's impossible to avoid the fact that Jesus had a real sense of humour, and so along with teaching them stuff I think he's also having a bit of fun here with the fact that they don't recognise him.

Cleopas asks him, '*Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened there?*' This is heavily ironic, as he's probably the only one who does understand! *What things?* he asks, obtusely, as if he hasn't a clue what they're on about! So while he has the opportunity, he draws out of Cleopas what they really think about everything that's happened. Has anything he told them sunk in? We know it's a pattern of behaviour with the disciples that they invariably don't seem to listen. Cleopas starts by saying *Jesus was a prophet, powerful in word and deed* but then this: *They crucified him; but we'd hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.* He was supposed to defeat his enemies, not die at their hands. They're devastated. And they're still fixated on him being a Messiah who would rescue Israel from the Roman occupation. I found some helpful insights on this in Bishop Tom Wright's commentary, he says this:

'..... like everybody else in Israel, [they] had been reading the bible through the wrong end of the telescope. They had been seeing it as the long story of how God would redeem Israel **from** suffering, but it was instead the story of how God would redeem Israel **through** suffering'

And Jesus explains all this to them, *but* going back to the very start. You notice it says *he explained it beginning with Moses and the prophets*, because the Hebrew bible put the prophets early on, after Genesis and Moses' other books, and ended with Chronicles, unlike our present day Old Testament. So he's not cherry picking odd prophecies to prove their accuracy, but he's painting the whole picture: how our relationship with God was broken because of our disobedience and rebellion; why God wanted to put that right. Why God would save the world by suffering himself. Why the Messiah had to die. The 'suffering servant' spoken of at length, in Isaiah 53, roughly 800 years before Jesus was born, **was Jesus, was God**. Read that chapter again to see how accurate a description it is of the passion of Jesus. But the focus of Jesus explanation was himself. The whole of history to that point focussed in on him.

Just as an aside here, going back to what I said about Mary being Cleopas's wife. If you look, in all the gospel accounts she's also repeatedly referred to as Mary the mother of James and Joseph, *and* she's described as being at the tomb on Easter morning with Mary Magdalene. And the angel spaid to both of them, 'Jesus is not here'. So I also think that the discussion before Jesus turned up was probably along the lines of Mary trying to persuade Cleopas that Jesus must have risen from the dead, that it was all true. In fact, given that earlier in this chapter (v11) Luke describes the disciples' opinion of this "conspiracy theory" as *nonsense*, they were probably arguing about it! People don't rise from the dead! Do they?

The women are so *central* to the resurrection being believed. And untangling what happened is not helped by the fact that so many of them seem to be called Mary. It's confusing!

The men on the other hand have a pretty poor record here, until they can't escape the obvious fact that Jesus is alive by having him actually cook them a fried breakfast!

It's a great pity some sections of the church have tried to suppress the witness of women, and still do.

Anyway the very fact of anyone rising from the dead is quite a burden to bear if you're a witness, because let's face it, who is going to believe you if they don't experience it for themselves!

Anyway we still haven't really got to the heart of all this.

At this point remember that Cleopas and Mary still have no idea who this person is. But they want him to stay and tell them more, because he's making a lot of sense.

And so he agrees and they eat together. This passage has been interpreted as being specifically about communion and its significance to us, and of course that is certainly part of it, but Luke on the whole is not so interested in this as the other gospel writers. I think this is more about who Jesus is.

And how this is revealed to anyone, including you and me, who are (to quote Luke) *kept from recognising him*.

Any number of artists have tried to express the drama of this scene, the most famous is probably Caravaggio. His painting has four men, but there are one or two who portray the second disciple as a woman.

The fact is that they've spent probably several hours with this person without apparently even knowing his name, and then in an instant, as he breaks the bread, they realise who He is.

Considering their previous confusion and grief, this must have been a monumental shock and joy all at once.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Why is it they (and we) struggle to recognise Jesus, to see who He really is? Tom Wright suggests that this goes hand in hand with not recognising the significance of the events that surrounded him.

At one and the same time it's a physical opening of their eyes, and a spiritual revelation of who He is, a spiritual opening of their eyes.

Look at the language:

First: *They were kept from recognising him* Then: *Their eyes were opened*. For something to be opened it has first to be closed.

The key thing here is recognising who Jesus is. They've spent *three years* with him. They've gone through all the miracles and all the teaching and all the terrible events in Jerusalem. Then hours on the road having the scriptures explained. But only in that single moment does it become clear to them who He really is. I would suggest that for all of us, however long we've been following Jesus, or having faith, going to church, however you describe it, there *has to be* an element of supernatural revelation, of God revealing himself to us.

Not of me grasping the truth, but of God revealing it to me.
I can't explain any other way how these people spent all that time
with Jesus himself, in the flesh, yet still didn't understand.

Didn't see.

That there were some, probably many, who just walked away.

One who betrayed him, for cash.

The key which unlocks our understanding is a desire in the heart to
believe.

*32 They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while
he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'*

Only as he broke the bread were their eyes opened and they saw.

But physically he had gone in that moment...

But it wasn't a problem, because now they saw, now they knew.

What's the first thing they do? It's now evening after several hours
on the road. But they rush back 7 miles to Jerusalem to share what
they've discovered.

He really is alive.

He really is God come to save us,

He really is risen.

Hallelujah!