

On the Road to Emmaus

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In what appears to be an increasingly hostile, divided, and hate-filled world, even we Christians can be tempted to disrespect, despise, or otherwise be hurtful to others—sometimes even our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Something that I think can help turn us back to love and respect is the report of an incident that took place on the day of Jesus' Resurrection. We find it in Luke 24. It happened as two disciples were walking along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a distance of about seven miles. I want to point out some things about this story that I hope will improve our understanding of the occurrence and will cause us to more highly esteem our brethren.

They Communed

Let's start in Luke 24:13-14: "Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. They talked with each other about all of these things which had happened." The things which had happened means, of course, the things concerning Jesus' death and burial, and, as we will see, His reported Resurrection.

The word "talked" here is *homileō*. It is not the normal New Testament word for talked. It means to commune, the old sense of commune being to have a close discussion. *Homileō* is the origin of our English word, "homily," but this shows how much the word became corrupted in the church over time. A homily is a religious speech, a sermon, given by one person, but *homileō* referred to two or more people talking together. As should be the case in meetings of God's assembly, these two disciples were talking about and questioning one another about Jesus.

They Are Joined by Jesus

Now, let's look at Luke 24:15: "It happened, while they talked and questioned together, that Jesus himself came near, and went with them." In this verse, to express what these disciples were doing, Luke not only uses *homileō*, but also *suzēteō*. It means to jointly question and reason. This was not a hostile argument, but it also was not two people casually chatting as they walked. They sincerely wanted to

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know what had happened to Jesus. As we will see, they lacked faith, but they sincerely wanted to know about Jesus.

The two disciples didn't realize it, but in this intense discussion about Jesus, they were "two...gathered together in [His] name." In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." Demonstrating this, as these two disciples spoke purposefully about Jesus, trying to understand what had happened, "Jesus himself came near, and went with them." The way the Greek expresses this is that Jesus was already journeying together in an assembly with them when they came to realize it. Don't lightly dismiss this. As we will see, Christians have made the mistake of not discerning Jesus amongst them. Luke 24:16 then tells us, "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." Although they now saw that there was a person walking with them as they discussed Jesus, they didn't recognize that the person was Jesus. They needed God to open their eyes.

Jesus then speaks to them: "He said to them, 'What are you talking about as you walk, and are sad?'" (Luke 24:17). Only a strictly literal rendering catches the flavor of Jesus' words: "He said to them, 'What are these words that you are bandying back and forth while walking and looking sullen?'" Although Jesus fully understood that they needed God to miraculously open their minds before they could understand, as we will see, He wanted them to realize their dull-wittedness. He wasn't pleased by their faithlessness (see Hebrews 11:6).

The Third Day

Then, "One of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things which have happened there in these days?'" (Luke 24:18). Possibly to clarify the record, Jesus then asks him to name the things: "He said to them, 'What things?' They said to him, 'The things concerning Jesus, the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him'" (Luke 24:19-20). So, their statement begins with a general identification of Jesus (but revealing their weak understanding in leaving out the fact that He is the Son of God) and ending with His Crucifixion.

They go no further than this in recounting events. They then say, "But we were hoping that it was he who would redeem Israel" (verse 21a). Why do they say this? Because they see a connection between the

events they've related—their confusion and being sad, the things that happened up to Jesus' crucifixion, their hope in Jesus' redeeming Israel—and what they say next: "Yes, and besides all this [literally, "with all this"], it is now the third day since these things happened" (verse 21b).

What is significant about the third day? Of course, it is because Jesus many times said He would rise the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19, and so forth). They were sad because, it was now the third day since He had been crucified, but, as far as they knew, He had not risen.

Of course, there was evidence of the Resurrection if they only had the eyes to see it. Even though they now speak of this evidence, its significance is lost on them: "Also, certain women of our company amazed us, having arrived early at the tomb; and when they didn't find his body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of us went to the tomb, and found it just like the women had said, but they didn't see him" (Luke 24:22-24).

Resurrected on Sunday

Before going on, I want to point out something here for those who believe in a Wednesday Crucifixion and Saturday Resurrection. As we have seen, the walk to Emmaus took place on the very same day that Luke 24:1 tells us about: "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they and some others came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.... Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus..." (Luke 24:1, 13). This was the day that the women went to the tomb, found it empty, spoke to the angels, and told the apostles. This day, the first day of the week, Sunday, is the day that the disciples going to Emmaus tell Jesus is the third day since He had been crucified (Luke 24:21). Clearly, they were disturbed because they knew that the day they were walking, Sunday, was the third day since the Crucifixion and they knew from Jesus' own words that He should have been resurrected on the third day. Of course, true to His words, Jesus had been resurrected on the third day following His crucifixion—Sunday—but, despite the empty tomb, because they hadn't seen Him (as far as they knew), they didn't believe. (For more information on the question of the days between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, read, "3 Days + 3 Nights = 1 False Doctrine") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/3days.htm>).

A Chastening from the Lord

Jesus then severely upbraids them: "He said to them, 'Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?'" (Luke 24:25-26). They should have known from the writings of the Old Testament prophets, but they were *anoētos*—unthinking, mindless—and "slow in heart to trust" (*Apostolic Bible Polyglot*). By their own admission, they knew that the tomb was empty and that angels had told the women Jesus was alive. But they still didn't believe! Jesus then taught them about Himself from the Old Testament: "Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (verse 27). But they still didn't believe that Jesus had been resurrected and didn't realize that the man speaking to them was Jesus.

The Body of Christ

We might find it hard to understand how they couldn't believe based upon this evidence. We were all like that, however, until God performed the miracle of rebirth in our minds.

The next thing that happens is, "They came near to the village, where they were going, and he acted like he would go further" (Luke 24:28). "Acted like he would go further" is not the best way to translate this because it complicates it into something that sounds deceptive. All of those words are translated from the Greek word *prospoieomai*. It simply means he "made forward." They began turning in at the house they were going to, and Jesus kept walking. If they had not asked Him to stay, He would have gone on. Although Jesus came to them, He was looking for them to want Him to stay. This is true for all of us. We don't initiate the relationship, but we do have to make that decision to want Jesus to stay and sup with us: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him, and will dine [*deipneō*—"sup"] with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

So, "They urged him, saying, 'Stay [*menō*—"abide"] with us, for it is almost evening, and the day is almost over.' He went in to stay [*menō*] with them" (Luke 24:29). Jesus will not refuse such an invitation.

Discerning the Body

What happens next teaches us an important lesson. "It happened, that when he had sat down at the table with them, he took the bread and gave thanks. Breaking it, he gave to them" (Luke 24:30). Notice the nearly identical wording in the accounts of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:26 and Mark 14:22. It lacks the explicit statement, "Take, eat: this is my body," but I am convinced that Jesus was blessing this bread as the symbol of his body. Why do I say this? Because of this: "Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:31). As soon as they took the bread, they discerned His body.

1 Corinthians 11:29

Paul links the practice of eating the bread in the Lord's Supper and the concept of discerning the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11. The assembly in Corinth had strayed into several bad practices. Some of these involved the way they were eating the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:29, as part of instructions on how the Lord's Supper is to be eaten, Paul taught them, "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy way eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he doesn't discern the Lord's body." What is eating and drinking in an unworthy way? Many people make a fuss over this and come up with all kinds of self examinations and making sure they have no unconfessed sins and so on, but the context, if you read it, is plain and simple.

The problem was that, at the gatherings for the Lord's Supper, these people were eating the bread and drinking the wine while not waiting for others, not sharing their food, and becoming drunk (verse 21). Now, if they saw Jesus Christ sitting at that table, they wouldn't have done that. Paul's point, however, is that Jesus Christ *was* sitting at that table, but they weren't discerning Him. They didn't understand that they and their brethren are the body of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:30). They were treating the body of the Lord with disrespect, and, therefore, they were eating and drinking the symbols of the body and blood in an unworthy manner, irreverently, and were bringing chastening judgment on themselves (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

This doesn't mean that the Lord's Supper is supposed to be a sombre time. It can be joyous, but it is to be a love feast where we treat each other lovingly and with the respect each should have as members of the body of Christ.

Treating the Body with Respect

So, the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, when they ate the bread Christ gave them, were able to discern the body of Christ—the resurrected body of Christ—right there with them. Their eyes were opened. Before that, He was just another person. After that, he was the body of Christ. Jesus, as always, was teaching us a crucial lesson. We are to treat each believer, not as just another person, but as a member of body of Christ, which he or she is; we are to give him or her the love and respect we would give the Lord. And this is especially so as we eat the Lord's Supper, remembering His death, and, as we look around at our brethren, seeing His resurrected body.

With their spiritual eyes now opened, the two disciples recognized the connection they were making in their minds with what Jesus was saying; that is, how it rang true in their hearts. "They said one to another, 'Weren't our hearts burning within us, while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:32).

We might wonder why Jesus immediately disappeared when they recognized Him. I want to clarify here that Jesus vanished from their sight, became invisible, but the Bible doesn't say that He left them. They asked Him to abide, and He agreed. I believe He disappeared because He had accomplished what He wanted, and the two disciples now needed to return to the body of Christ in Jerusalem, who had also come to believe the Resurrection. "They rose up that very hour, returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' They related the things that happened along the way, and how he was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:33-35). Notice again the emphasis on "how he was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread."

From then on, especially after His ascension, the way the believers were to see Christ was to see Him in each other, especially when eating the Lord's Supper. Christ's body was broken for me and for the brothers and sisters sitting with me at the table. Christ's blood was shed for me and for the brothers and sister sitting with me at the table. Christ isn't in the bread and the wine (transubstantiation). They are just symbols. Christ isn't under the bread and wine (consubstantiation). Again, they are symbols to remind us of what He has done for us. Christ is in the brethren taking the bread and the wine.

We are all on our life's journey, but let's not forget that when we are together with our brethren and reading and discussing God's Word in Christ's name, He is there in the midst of us. Where? We should discern the answer when we eat the bread with our brethren, the fellow members of the body of the Lord. And so, let us treat them for who they are, with the respect we would give to Jesus Christ. The world appears to be in a contest to see who can throw the most and the biggest stones. Please, let's not be a part of it, especially against our own brethren.