

Emmaus

Luke 24.

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How varied are the conditions of soul in which the disciples were found on the resurrection morning. Peter was a backslider; Thomas a doubter; Mary Magdalene was desolate, and the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, were disappointed. Moreover, it is blessed to see with what divine skill and perfect grace the Lord adapts Himself to those varying states of soul. He has a restoring word for backsliders, a reproving yet encouraging word for doubters, a comforting word for the desolate, and an arousing word to touch the heart and reach the conscience of the disappointed.

The two disciples journeying to Emmaus may well be described as disappointed saints. Like other believers, driven by their need and drawn by His grace, they had been attracted to Jesus. They had seen His mighty acts of power, listened to His words of grace, and followed His holy pathway of love. They were convinced that He was indeed the long promised Messiah, and confidently expected that the Roman yoke was about to be broken, and Israel redeemed by power from all their enemies. But alas! the chief priests and rulers had delivered their Messiah to death. Instead of taking His throne as King of kings, He had been nailed to a cross between two malefactors. Instead of making His enemies His footstool, His enemies had trodden underfoot the Son of God. All their hopes were thus rudely dashed to the ground. They were deeply disappointed saints.

The result of this disappointment is soon made manifest. They turn their backs on the little company of believers at Jerusalem and, without hesitation, they went "the same day" to their home at Emmaus; and as these two wandered on their way they 'reasoned' (15); and as they reasoned they were 'sad' (17).

So to-day are there not many disheartened and disappointed saints who, in like manner, turn their backs on the company of the Lord's people and wander off into a solitary path? And as such pursue their lonely way, are they not full of reasonings and sadness?

But, we may enquire, what was the root of the disappointment of the Emmaus disciples? This — they were occupied with their own thoughts about Christ rather than God's thoughts. And with minds possessed by human thoughts they were unable to grasp divine thoughts — they were "slow of heart to believe" all that the prophets have spoken. Unbelief was at the back of their disappointment. Unbelief turned their feet away from the Lord's people; unbelief set their tongues reasoning, filled their hearts with sadness, and held their eyes fast closed so that they could not discern the Lord. And what was the unbelieving thought that possessed their minds? Simply that *they thought to bring Christ back into their circumstances for their temporal glory, and their earthly ease and blessing.*

Are we not often like these disciples? Is it not a common thought with many Christians that Christ came into the world to make it a better and a happier place? Do we not at times still try to bring Christ back into our circumstances for our temporal comfort and earthly glory? And with such thoughts in our minds do we not fall into great disappointment when we find our circumstances difficult, and that identification with the Lord's people throws us into the company of the poor and despised of this world, involves contempt and reproach, and, it may be, even loss and suffering?

And yet how graciously the Lord pursues His wandering and disappointed saints. How blessed the way He takes to restore and hearten up these sad and downcast disciples on the way to Emmaus. First He "draws near" and it is "Jesus Himself" draws near.

No messenger is sent to recall to His presence these erring saints. When all goes well with His people, angels, apostles, prophets and others may carry out His behests, as well we know in many a fine scene recorded in the Word. But is there a wandering sheep — dejected and disappointed — behold, "JESUS HIMSELF" will draw near to restore. There is work to be done between a wandering saint and "Jesus Himself" with which no stranger can intermeddle. "The Lord hath risen indeed and *hath appeared to Simon*" tells the same blessed tale of a secret and personal interview between a broken-hearted backslider and "Jesus Himself". How different, alas, the way we often take with one another. Does a brother wander away from us, how apt we are to draw away from him. But in the day that the Emmaus saints drew away, Jesus Himself drew near. What a Saviour! when we were far away He came near, and when we draw away He draws near.

Having drawn near, how gracious the way He takes. *He discovers to us all that is in our hearts.* With divine wisdom and infinite tenderness He drew out all the difficulties of the two disciples, and disclosed the root of unbelief that was behind their disappointment. They were "slow to believe".

Nor does He stop there, for the discovery of what is in our hearts, however important in the work of restoration, is not sufficient to restore. We need indeed true thoughts of our hearts to learn how we wander into a wrong path; but we must have true thoughts of His heart that our feet may be restored to a right path. And this is the way the Lord takes with the two disciples. Having exposed all that was in their hearts, He reveals all that is in His heart. And revealing what is in His heart turns their "slow hearts" into "burning hearts" (25, 32). He sets their hearts ablaze with love to Himself by revealing the love that is in His heart.

To reveal the love of His heart He expounds "to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself". And as He expounds He passes before them the touching story of His sufferings and His glories (26). The disciples, with their poor human thoughts, would have spared Him the sufferings, and so withheld from Him His glories. We know He must needs suffer "to enter into His glory".

What in all the Scriptures concerning Himself so touches the heart as the sufferings and the glories of Christ. And when we find the sufferings, we are not far from the glories. Ps. 22 speaks of His sufferings, Ps. 24 of His glories. Again the story of the sufferings is taken up in Ps. 69, to be followed by the glories in Ps. 72. So in like manner the sufferings of Christ in Ps. 109 are followed by the glories of Christ in Ps. 110. As we look back to His sufferings and on to His glories, our hearts may well burn as we think of the love that led Him to the cross that He might lead us into the glory.

The two disciples had been thinking of the things concerning themselves, the Lord leads them to "the things concerning Himself". Their desire was to bring Christ into their circumstances. He would lead them into His, and to know Him as the Risen One outside this present evil world.

The Lord had exposed their hearts and revealed His heart, but to what end? Clearly to lead them to desire His company above all else. Now He will test them to see if the "end of the Lord" is reached. So it came to pass having arrived at the village, whither they went, "He made as though He would have gone further". He had drawn near to win their hearts, He will now draw away to lead out their hearts in longing desire after Him. And very blessedly they respond to the testing of the Lord. "They constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." He wants them — had endured the sufferings of the cross to possess them — but He has so dealt with them that at last *they want Him.*

Have we so learnt the evil of our hearts in the presence of the love of His heart that we can say we desire His company above all else? Search throughout the length and breadth of God's great universe and where shall I find another who knows me through and through, and yet loves me. This it

is that makes us more at home in His presence than in the presence of the nearest and dearest on earth.

And such is His love that we can have as much of Christ and His company as we desire. Thus the disciples found when they "constrained Him" and the Lord loves to be constrained — for do we not read, "He went in to tarry with them"?

Thus at last the Lord does come for a brief moment into their circumstances, but only to lead them out of their circumstances into His. For having made Himself known He vanishes out of their sight. How touching also the way by which He makes Himself known. " He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. " Would it not at once recall that other scene, when in the upper room " He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it and gave unto them saying, This is My body which is given for you"? The whole act proclaimed who He was, and recalled His dying love. Little wonder that " their eyes were opened and they knew Him". Yes! but how did they know Him? Not as in the days before the cross, in their circumstances, but as the One who was dead but is alive for evermore. Immediately He vanishes out of their sight. For if we know Him as the Risen One, it can only be by faith while yet we are in this scene. The disappointment that had possessed the disciples when they lost Him on earth, was changed to delight when they found Him in resurrection.

The immediate result is, they are recalled from their wanderings. In spite of having walked eight or nine miles, and though the day was far spent, and the night fast drawing on, they at once retrace their steps in their earnest desire to join the little company of the Lord's people gathered together at Jerusalem. And having reached their own company they find, to their great delight, they are in the company of the Risen Lord, and in His company there is no room for dissatisfied or disappointed hearts. There all reasonings and all sadness give place to "wonder", "worship", and "great joy" (41, 52).