

HOW JESUS OPENS BLIND EYES

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Luke 24:13-49
23 April 2017

INTRODUCTION

After the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Thomas said he would not believe the reports of the others unless he himself saw the Lord standing before him. A week later Christ appeared to the eleven apostles and centered His attention on Thomas, the doubting disciple. "Reach out your hand, Thomas, and put it into the stigmata of my crucifixion. Put your hand in my side where the soldiers pierced my heart. Do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas did just that and worshiped Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus replied, "**Because you have seen me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**" (John 20:26-29)

If we need not see to believe, what foundation is strong enough to undergird our faith for eternal questions? We instinctively feel we are at a distinct disadvantage to the apostles — they saw the resurrected Lord with their own eyes and touched his raised body with their own hands. But if we cannot see Jesus risen from the dead, how may we be confident today that Christ is indeed raised from the dead, and that He is going to return to take believers to be with Himself?

These are important questions for believers for at least two reasons: (1) they shape our own level of confidence, and (2) they determine how we are going to speak to others about the Christian faith.

I. SCENE 1: ON THE ROAD TOWARD EMMAUS (24:13-32)

The action we read about in Luke 24 takes place one week before Thomas is confronted by the risen Christ. Two of the disciples (maybe two men, or perhaps a man and woman couple, we are not sure) are walking from Jerusalem toward Emmaus (in Hebrew probably *chamat*, "warm springs"), an outlying town about sixty stadia away (twelve kilometers). This town has not been definitively identified by biblical archeology. The crusaders, who invaded Israel about a thousand years later, guessed at its identity . . . and they were probably wrong.

Dr. Luke assumes we understand his account concerns real historical events. His reference to an obscure village anchors the action in reality, not in fantasy, just like his references to Caesar Augustus (2:2), Quirinius (2:2), Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Phillip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene (3:1), Nazareth (4:16), Capernaum (4:31), the sea of Galilee (8:22), the country of the Gerasenes (8:37), Jerusalem (9:53), Samaria (17:11), or Jericho (19:1). The Bible presents itself as a historical document; it is dishonest to treat it as an extended myth or allegory. It is one thing to say that we do not believe the record; it is quite another to morph it into what it does not claim to be.

A. BLINDNESS (24:13-24)

The opening section portrays our two anonymous walkers in deep discussion. The two verbs describe their interaction: "conversing" (*homilein*, talking) and "discussing" (*suzétein*, debating). This was more than aimless chatter about the recent winner of the chariot races at the Jerusalem hippodrome, or other everyday occurrences. They were discussing the brutal crucifixion of Jesus just days earlier.

As they walk along the dusty path on this first day of the week, a man comes up behind them and matches their footsteps. He begins to travel side-by-side with them as they trudge along the road, engaging them in conversation. From their perspective he could be anyone at all who wants to leave the heart of Jerusalem, now that the Passover is over and the bloody weekend of injustice done to Jesus of Nazareth is left behind. Luke tells us that "their eyes were prevented (*ekratounto*, "restrained") from recognizing Him".

This raises a question, doesn't it? If they had known Jesus, why didn't they recognize Him on the spot? Why didn't they stop in their tracks and exclaim, "Jesus, what are you doing here? I thought you were buried!" We will find some answers as we move along, but let me summarize them quickly:

1. **Preconceived ideas.** This is certainly one of the factors, as we will see in 24:21. These people hoped that Jesus would redeem the Jews from Rome and bring in the Messianic kingdom. They had their fixed ideas about the circumstances under which the Messiah must come into His reign over Israel and the Gentile nations. As far as they were concerned, the crucifixion and burial were a defeat. They did not believe the Messiah would be executed, and certainly not by his own people. Similarly today, people can be blind to the identity of Jesus because they come to the Gospel message with all kinds of assumptions:
 - a. Jesus went to India and learned Hindu or New Age principles;
 - b. Jesus was only a man and never claimed to be God;
 - c. The Bible contains many historical errors so we cannot know much about the historical Jesus at all;
 - d. All religions are true at their roots, and Jesus was just one of many mouthpieces for the one God who

transcends them all.

If we come to the Bible's message unwilling to set aside our preconceived notions, we will not allow it to speak freely. Instead we are trying to gag God. We will remain as blind to Jesus' identity as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were at first.

2. **Satanic blindness.** In some cases the enemy of our souls, who is no figment of human imagination, blinds the minds of the lost so that they cannot see the truth of the Word of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). That veil of blindness is removed when a person turns to the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:16). We cannot say if the devil had his hand in these disciples' inability to see the risen Lord, but be assured that this happens all the time today. No amount of human argument can lift the veil. The problem is not simply intellectual, but spiritual.
3. **God's hidden purposes.** Sometimes God hardens hearts. Sometimes He hides His purposes temporarily from sight. The timing for full revelation is in His own hands. He may allow a lasting judicial or temporary blinding upon people who resist Him. When we decide we *will* not believe because we demand answers to all our questions before we trust our Maker and His ways, He may justly leave us stewing in our own juices.

You have the mental picture of the setting. The resurrected Lord, appearing to two people leaving the capital city, asks them what they are talking about so intensely. The text says that at Jesus' question they stopped walking and stood still, perhaps because they are overcome with grief. Their faces droop in gloom (*skuthropoi*, used in Matthew 6:16 "depressed faces" of the fasting religious leaders). Now one of them springs from his anonymity—his name is Cleopas—and states his incredulity. How could the mysterious man visiting Jerusalem for the Passover feast not know what has been on the lips of every pilgrim and citizen? "The things that have happened here these days" haven't been done in a corner; they are known to all. But Jesus wants to pull it out of them, so he baits them with His own question—"What things?" And then their burden spills over the brim.

First they review what Jesus had been in His public ministry: "a prophet mighty in deed and word". He had the witness of God in heaven and people who observed and listened. What Jesus had done and said was a matter of public record. He had presented visible proofs of His deity and authority. Was Jesus merely a prophet for these two disciples? He was indeed the prophet who was to come to replace Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18-20). But Jesus was more than a prophet, wasn't He? He will address that issue in a few moments.

Secondly, Cleopas and his friend review how the chief priests and rulers of the people of Israel had delivered Jesus of Nazareth over to the Roman governor Pilate to be sentenced to death and be crucified—the death of traitors, brigands and enemies of the state. These events were just as much a matter of public record as the miracles and teaching of Christ. And now was the third day since all this had happened. How could their interlocutor have missed it all?

Ah, but there's yet another element in this tragedy. For the two on the road to Emmaus, some new elements in the story remain a mystery. They explain: some of the women among the disciples who had been at the tomb early that morning startled the others by reporting what they had seen. They had found no body, but had seen angels who explained to them that Jesus was alive. And indeed some of the other disciples had gone to the tomb to confirm this report—or to disprove the obvious folly of silly women, whose testimony would never be allowed in a Jewish court! But wouldn't you know it—they had found that the women's report was indeed true. The tomb **was** empty! But no trace of Jesus.

B. EXPOSITION OF THE SCRIPTURES (24:25-27)

What would you expect at this juncture? I'd assume that right here Jesus would remove a hood from His head (if He had one) or make a rather spectacular gesture or comment. "Look at me . . . don't you recognize me? Ta-da, it is I, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and buried! I've come back to life! Every traveler on the road, listen to me! You who called out for my execution, realize that death has not conquered me!"

But no, that's not what happens at all. Jesus does not point them first of all to His material risen body, but to the Scriptures! This is stunning, unexpected! He calls them *anoétoi*, "senseless, mindless" and *bradeis té kardiai*, "slow of heart". Their problem is not that they do not trust the women's testimony, but that they do not trust the record of the Scriptures, which have been around for centuries and have stood the test of time. All that the prophets have said to the Jews since Moses almost 1500 years earlier has pointed to a single truth: the Messiah—the anointed one of Israel—would have to suffer mockery, hostility, death by crucifixion and burial in a rich man's tomb. Really? Yes! Let me review just a few examples of texts Jesus could have mentioned as He explained these things:

1. **Exodus 12:1-11.** The system of sacrificing lambs, ordained by Moses at the first Passover, prefigures Jesus the Lamb of God. The Passover lamb must be an unblemished male. It will be killed and his blood shed and applied to the lintel and doorposts of the house. This pointed toward the need for a perfect sacrifice to rescue the people from the bondage of their sin, not just from slavery in Egypt. God's lamb would be a perfect man who would die in the place of sinners. His blood would be shed.

2. **Deuteronomy 18:18ff.** Jesus pointed them to the fact the prophet who would come would come from the Jews (“countrymen” lit. “brothers”). Although great, his authority would be contested. And those who resisted His authority would have to contend with the Father Himself!
3. **Psalm 22:1-21.** His enemies sneer at him, “Let God deliver Him, if He delights in Him”. His bones are out of joint. People cast lots for his clothing. His hands and feet are torn as by the piercing claws of a lion. Although crucifixion was not yet known in the days of king David, we can easily see this prophecy literally fulfilled in his greater Son.
4. **Psalm 69:20-21.** The enemies of David’s Son gave him gall for food and vinegar to drink. This is literally what was offered to Jesus at the cross.
5. **Isaiah 52:13-53:12.** The “servant of the Lord” will be the sacrificial lamb. His physical appearance would be marred. He would be despised by people, yet he would bear the sins of Israel. He would not protest his innocence or try to defend himself. He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb, but would prolong his days.
6. **Zechariah 12:10.** The people of Israel at a yet future time will look on Him “whom they have pierced” and will mourn for Him.

Don’t you find this surprising? The Scriptures themselves get first mention! Jesus proves the death and resurrection of the Messiah from prophecy! They are the final court of appeal for the resurrected Jesus, because if people do not believe the written Word of God, they will not believe visible evidence! Get this firmly in mind, because if you desire to see your loved ones and friends come to faith, the Bible will also be your final court of appeal. Don’t think that miracles or fancy apologetic arguments in themselves will convert hardened hearts. Opened eyes are the work of the Holy Spirit through the written Word that will change people’s minds and pierce their unbelief.

McGee comments in this vein (4:358): *“The Lord, in speaking about His resurrection, did not show them the prints of the nails in His hands to prove it. He referred them to the Scriptures rather than to the nail prints. He told them, ‘You should have believed what the prophets said.’ It is well to note the Lord’s attitude toward the Bible. The day in which we live is a day of doubt. There are people who are actually saying that you cannot be intelligent and believe the Bible. Many people are afraid that they will not be considered intelligent; so they don’t come out flat-footed and say whether they believe the Bible or not. I suppose it is the most subtle and satanic trap of our day to discount the inerrancy and integrity of the Word of God. Christ says a man is a fool not to believe it. He gave a unanimous and wholehearted acceptance of the Bible’s statements, with no ifs, ands, or buts”.*

C. **EVIDENCE (24:28-30)**

We hasten on now with the story. The three men approach Emmaus. Jesus seems to intend to go further, but the two others urge Him to join them for a meal. The day is passing quickly. So Jesus comes into the home where they are staying. When they recline to eat, He takes the bread, blesses it and breaks it. Normally this would be the function of the host, I suppose, but Jesus’ action reminds the two others of what Jesus had done in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and of the Passover meal in the upper room a few days earlier.

D. **SIGHT (24:31)**

Perhaps they see the marks of the crucifixion — the text is not explicit. Luke says “their eyes were opened”. Something here is happening that we cannot see. But they recognize Jesus, and He immediately disappears. This is the fulcrum point of the account from which everything changes for the two people. Watch how the direction and mood are transformed through the remainder of the text.

E. **DECLARATION (24:32-35)**

What do the two people conclude? They exclaim to one another that their hearts “burned” within them as Jesus opened the Scriptures. Luke 12:35 uses the same term for keeping a lamp “alight”. I cannot say exactly what this means, but the two were expressing an inner response to the testimony of Scripture, even before they saw the visible evidence of the resurrection.

The day will certainly come when every person will see the risen Christ. If you believe in His name this morning, you will see Him as your Savior and rescuer at the Bema when your works are tested. If you have not believed in His name, you will see Him as your judge and bow the knee before Him. Even before that personal encounter we may be stirred in our conscience and experience the inner conviction that the Bible is true.

The two immediately return to Jerusalem and meet the other apostles (Thomas is absent) and other disciples gathered with them in the upper room. They are electrified to hear the others exclaim — following up, no doubt, on the testimony of the women earlier in the day — “The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon”. So they relate their own experience in Emmaus, how they had recognized Jesus at the breaking of the bread.

When something like this happens, there’s no way you can keep your mouth shut! Declaration inevitably follows a life-changing encounter with the Scriptures, impressed upon the heart by the ministry of Jesus Himself. When He “turns on the lights”, we know it. We see it. And we talk about it!

II. SCENE 2: IN THE UPPER ROOM (24:33-49)

The order of things is slightly different when we come to the conclusion of the section. This is important because we might be tempted to think that the resurrection account is “true” because the disciples wanted it to be true — simply a lingering romantic memory of their dead champion. But Luke is careful to explain that the apostles and the other disciples with them, who had not yet encountered the risen Christ themselves, were brought face-to-face with Jesus, and then taught by Him. On the road to Emmaus, we find exposition, then evidence. Here it’s evidence and then exposition.

A. EVIDENCE (24:36-43)

While the disciples are comparing notes, Jesus appears in their midst even though the doors are shut (John 20:19). They are not only caught flat-footed, but are scared silly, convinced they are seeing a spirit. But Jesus shows them His hands and feet, apparently still carrying the stigmata of the cross. He invites them to actually touch him, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as He has. His resurrected body is tangible, yet somehow different from the one He had before. He speaks to them all at the same time and they all hear the same words. He invites them to look and touch Him. Many years later the apostle John will be able to write about this in his introduction to his first general letter (1 John 1:1-3). He even eats a piece of broiled fish before them (some copies also include a reference to wild honey). The disciples are brought face-to-face with incontrovertible evidence. Jesus forces their hands, and they respond with joyful wonderment and marveling.

B. EXPOSITION OF THE SCRIPTURES (24:44-47)

But Jesus does not leave things here. He insists on the importance of the Scriptures (24:44). When He had been with them before the crucifixion, He had insisted that all things written about Him in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. So by giving them the Spirit in a new way (John 20:22), He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. With Jesus physically absent today, the Spirit whom He sent to minister in His place is still fulfilling this ministry. This is what we often call the ministry of “illumination”, by which He allows us, blind as we are, to finally “see it” and be convinced of its truth.

C. DECLARATION (24:48-49)

Not only were Christ’s death and resurrection predicted in the Old Testament. The proclamation of repentance and the opportunity for forgiveness of sin for all the nations was as well. Where, do you think? Look at Isaiah 49:5-7. **“And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him (for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength), He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’” Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, ‘Kings shall see and arise, princes shall also bow down; because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You’ ”.** Because the disciples are eye witnesses of the resurrection, their mission will be to declare Him to the nations once Jesus sends the promise of the Spirit upon them.

CONCLUSION

You may be tempted to conclude that this was all pretty handy for the first Christians — they had the testimony of both the Scriptures and first-hand evidence. For the moment, we are limited to the former. Is the evidence of Scripture enough for us to be confident in the Gospel message?

Yes, indeed! And we may have this confidence not simply because we complete an exercise in human reason and logic. We need the ministry of God’s Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent to do for all the nations what He did for the two people on the road to Emmaus. Jesus had first opened (*diénoígen*) the Scriptures to them (24:32) and so their eyes were opened (*diénoichthésan*) (24:31). And He opened (*diénoixen*) the minds of the eleven and the others in the upper room so that they would understand the Scriptures (24:45).

Blind people this morning need that gracious ministry of the **Holy Spirit**. Ritual, culture, education and religion cannot cure spiritual blindness. Blind people need to hear the witness of the **Scriptures** to who Jesus is. These two truths will shape our testimony to the Gospel. We will place our confidence in the sufficiency of the Bible’s message — not our human reasoning or arguments — to bring people to faith in Christ. And we will pray for the Holy Spirit to do His work. That’s all God expects of us. It’s up to Him to do His work and up to others to respond.

Are you blind this morning? If you are spiritually sightless, there’s hope for you! You may come to Christ, whom you have never met (yet) and ask Him to open your eyes. Tell Him your doubts. Leave your questions with Him. And then read the only book He ever wrote and seek Him with your whole heart. If you knock, He will open to you.

Do you see? Then spread the light! Give the Scriptures. Invite people to read the Bible with you. And ask God to do what only He can do, so that people will be convinced and changed. That way Jesus can use **you** to open blind eyes!