

# The Most Difficult Thing about the Resurrection



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Perhaps you saw the movie, "*The Passion of the Christ*". You saw His terrible suffering and death. That was not the end of the story. I want to dwell on the rest of the story today. But from a slightly different angle than you might expect. I want to talk to you about what I consider to be the most difficult thing about the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus poses a number of difficulties. One is the very act of resurrection. How hard would it be to reverse the effects of death—whether it is an hour or three days after someone has died? After thousands of years, medicine and science have not been able to reverse death. It is rumored that two high profile people wanted their bodies to be frozen—Walt Disney and Ted Williams—in hope that should someone figure this out, they could be brought back to life. I don't look at the resurrection of Christ as that big of a difficulty. When we talk about God, we are talking about the miraculous! Bringing Jesus back to life was no problem for God.

There is another difficulty about the resurrection—proving it. There has been debate about whether or not Christ actually rose from the dead for centuries, from the body being stolen to the swoon theory to going to the wrong tomb.

There are phenomenal proofs for Christ's resurrection. But that's not where I'm heading today.

There are other difficulties involving the resurrection of Jesus such as the actual location of His tomb to the shroud of Turin. I'm not going in those directions either. This is what I think the most difficult thing about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is—recognizing the risen Lord in our lives. When you read the post-resurrection accounts in the gospels, they have one thing in common. The disciples of Jesus had a hard time recognizing Him. They think He is the gardener, a stranger, or a ghost.

The most extended story about Jesus appearing to some of His disciples after His resurrection is found in Luke 24:13-35. This compelling story happened the very day of Christ's resurrection, the first Easter Sunday. I'm going to tell you the story. And as I tell it, I'll be making some applications about the difficulty of recognizing Jesus after His resurrection.

The story picks up with two people going to Emmaus (verse 13). They were part of thousands of people who had been to Jerusalem for the annual Feast of the Passover. On that Sunday, most of these people were making their way home. These two had a seven-mile

walk. That's like walking from here to Fairview.

We are not told explicitly how these people were connected with Christ. One is named Cleopus (verse 18) and the other is left unnamed. We know that these two people were close friends of Peter and John (cf. verse 12) and of all the remaining disciples because they head back to Jerusalem to find them that very night (verse 33). Some think that Cleopus was the husband of one of the Mary's close to Jesus (John 19:25). I happen to think that this was a husband and wife returning home because they invite Jesus into their home for a meal and overnight accommodations (verse 29-30).

### **Application #1**

Their conversation was typical of everyone's conversation on the way home that day. They were talking about what happened to Jesus; how He came into Jerusalem the Sunday before and most everyone was cheering Him; how by Thursday night, He was arrested. How on Friday He was crucified; how that night He was laid in a tomb.

Those of us saw the movie, "*The Passion of the Christ*" were stunned with what we saw. Afterwards, we talked about our experience. In fact everyone, including the media, kept talking about the brutality that was depicted. These two on the Emmaus Road did not see the movie. They saw the actual event. If you think you were affected by what you saw, they were devastated. It wasn't about processing a movie. Three days later all they could talk about was the real and terrible passion and death of Christ.

While they were talking, a supposed stranger catches up with them on the road (verse 15). He had already begun walking with them when they noticed Him. I can imagine Jesus saying, "Hi

folks. I'm traveling your way. Mind if I join you?" Whether they took a good look at Him or not, they didn't recognize Him (verse 16). Here is Christ alive, visible, physical, talking, and walking with them and they don't even recognize Him. Not only that, He's the one they're talking about and He's right by their side!

The text says that they were prevented from recognizing Him. Maybe God had closed their eyes. Maybe they were so engrossed in their sorrow and conversation they didn't pay any attention to Him. You would think one look and they would recognize Jesus. But they didn't.

Here is the first application to life—we need to look for Jesus when we're not expecting Him.

They were heading home. They were engrossed in conversation. The last thing they expected was for Jesus to join them. Isn't that like life? We're in the car. We're at work. We're talking with friends. We're dealing with some issues. Guess what? Jesus joins us right where we are, in the ordinary places of life. It might be a prompting. It might be an important insight. It might be a sense that something is right or wrong. It may be a person in need.

The amazing thing is that much of the time, we don't recognize it is coming from Jesus. We don't understand that Jesus is right there by our side somehow engaging us. We're just not expecting Jesus on the daily road of life. Please understand, we never travel the road of life without Jesus by our side in some fashion. He has already joined us. Look for Him!

## Application #2

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Apparently they kept talking, engrossed in conversation to the point Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about so intently?" Literally, "What are these words you are tossing back and forth like two people throwing balls (verse 17)?" That question stopped the two of them in their tracks. And sadness was written all over them.

Cleopas responded by asking, "Where have you been? Everyone knows what happened in Jerusalem this week! (verse 18)." Jesus responds, "What things? (verse 19)." I think He is trying to get their attention. Will they recognize Him now? They don't. They are so dialed in to their own hurt and disappointment they never take a good look.

They start telling Jesus about the week they had just lived. They said that Jesus was a mighty prophet in the eyes of God and the people (verse 19). They said that their own chief priests and rulers delivered Him over to be crucified (verse 20). Mel Gibson did not invent the matter of the Jews being partially responsible for the death of Christ. It's a fundamental fact of the Bible.

Then they went into their great devastation. They had their hopes pinned on Jesus. They thought that He would be the great deliverer from Rome and oppression. But now He lay dead for three days in a tomb (verse 21). And so did their dreams. They did not realize that the only hope they really had was His death!

Then they said, "Some of our women friends messed with our minds (verse 22)." The word "amaze" in verse 22 means "to drive out of one's senses." They said, "These women went to the tomb and found it empty. They said they saw some angels who said that

Jesus was alive. So we went to see what is going on. The tomb was empty but no one had seen Jesus." I think they were feeling that this thing had gotten out of hand. They had no clue that Jesus was alive!

Here they are, looking at Jesus, telling Him what had happened and how crushed they are and they don't recognize Him!

Here is the second application to life—we need to look for Jesus when difficulties and disappointments overtake us. That's when it may be most difficult to recognize Him.

These two were overcome with disappointment and grief. They couldn't see any hope. They were so focused on their problems they didn't recognize that Jesus was walking beside them. Sometimes things look so bad all we can see is the problem. Perhaps for a second we thought we saw a way out. It didn't happen. And we feel worse off than ever. Our pain and our problems often blind our eyes. We can't see anything else. We are consumed. And if we are disappointed in Jesus, having expected that He would do something for us and He didn't, those expectations will prevent us from seeing Him.

We are good at seeing the problems. We are not so good at seeing Jesus. But I can guarantee you, Jesus is always with us in the storm. He is always with us in the fire. We have to stop looking at the waves and the rising temperature in order to see Him. It's just like the well-known poem called "Footprints." The person in trouble protested to Jesus, "Why did you leave me when I needed you most? That's when there was just one set of footprints in the sand." Jesus said, "I never left you. That's when I carried you."

If we focus and become preoccupied with our problems and pain, we will not

recognize Jesus. We must get our eyes off the circumstances and start looking for Jesus! He's there!

### Application #3

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After they finish their “really bad week” story, Jesus responds to them. I think He must have wanted to say, “Take a good look. Who do you think you are looking at?!” But He takes them down another track. He wants them to see a huge piece they were missing.

So here is this supposed stranger who supposedly didn't know anything about the passion of Christ saying, “You are dull of mind and slow of heart (verse 25). Where have you been? The prophets for centuries have been saying that the Christ had to suffer these things to enter His glory (verse 26). What happened this week should not have been a surprise to you.” It was a sincere admonition for not understanding what they should have grasped.

Before they could say a word, Jesus began to explain to them all the things the Scriptures had said about Him beginning with Moses and all the prophets (verse 27). That must have been some sermon! Yet here was Jesus Himself explaining what the Scriptures said about Him at length and they still didn't recognize Him! They still were dull of mind and slow of heart. They didn't get it.

Here's the third application to life—we need to be quick to believe *all* the Scriptures say about Jesus in order to recognize Him.

Here was the problem. They didn't believe all that the prophets had said about Him (verse 25). They had picked up on the portions of prophecy that spoke about the glory of the Christ and

completely missed the explicit Scriptures that spoke about His sufferings. It was all equally there. The suffering had to come before the glory. Yet they had missed it.

A common problem for many of us is that we embrace the Scriptures selectively. There are some things in the Bible that bless us more than other sections so we tend to pick up on the sections that bless us and miss the harder truths of Scripture. Suffering is not part of our make-up. We try to avoid suffering and trials. But the Scriptures tell us that these things will be part of our lives and we should not think of them as surprising or strange. We tend to overlook these portions of the Bible. Yet Christ is reflected in these sections of the Bible equally as well.

Here's a little piece of advice. When you read the Bible, look for Jesus on every page. The Scriptures are about Jesus. He is the fulfillment of Scripture. They speak of Him. He is there when things are bad and He is there when things are good.

When you are discouraged and depressed, when you are in pain and despair, get into the pages of the Bible. Look for Jesus there. He wants to reveal Himself to us through His holy Word. But we must not be selective in what we are looking for. It's all about Him. We need to quickly believe all that is written in order to recognize Him.

### Application #4

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Nightfall was approaching when they reached Emmaus. Two of them were home. Jesus acted as though He would continue on. Traveling at night was dangerous so in those days, you invited people into your home as overnight

guests. They urged Jesus to stay the night with them (verse 29). I think Jesus wanted them to invite Him home. He accepted.

In a little while, a meal was prepared. When they got around the table, something really unusual happened. Jesus, the guest, took the place of host at the table. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them to eat. As Jesus did that, their eyes were opened (verse 31). They recognized their guest as none other than Jesus, the risen Lord! It took a walk, a talk, a Scripture lesson, and a meal over the span of several hours. But it wasn't until He handled the bread that they recognized Him. As soon as they knew who He was and that He indeed was risen, Jesus vanished from their sight (*literally, He became invisible*, verse 31). What was the trigger?

We are not told what the “aha” moment was. Maybe they were getting some sense about this all along the way. They remarked about sensing something burning in their hearts when Jesus was explaining the Scriptures to them (verse 32). Perhaps it was the nail prints in His hands when He handled the bread. Or maybe it was because in the past, they had been with Jesus at meals. What about the many meals in various homes or the time He multiplied the bread and the fish for the five thousand and then the four thousand. They saw how He would take the bread, bless it, break it, and give it.

I tend to think this is what opened their eyes. What happened at their table was uniquely Jesus when they ate with Him before. He did something they only ever saw Jesus do and they finally recognized Him!

Here's the fourth application to life—We recognize Jesus when, in His presence, He does something familiar.

Hopefully we all have had precious and personal encounters in the past with Jesus when things were tough. We were terribly disappointed. We were in turmoil. We were facing an incredible situation. We didn't know if we would make it. We felt very hurt. We were wondering, “How could things be so bad? Why doesn't Jesus do anything about what I'm going through?”

Then a word of Scripture came to us and gave us hope. A settled peace came across us that we couldn't explain—an answer to prayer happened that we knew could not be a coincidence. A song we sang at church or heard on the radio touched our spirit deeply. Someone encouraged us when we weren't expecting it. And somehow we knew it was Jesus. We recognized His presence.

And now, once again, we find ourselves in a place where we have been with Jesus in the past—feeling discouraged—feeling alone—feeling hopeless—feeling like our world is falling apart. A Scripture comes to life, we sense a peace that passes understanding, an impossible prayer is answered, a song arrests our spirit, someone touches our life at a crucial moment. And we have this familiar sense within again—Jesus has just touched me—just like He did before. And we are certain that we have had a glimpse of Him because we know what He did when we were in His presence like that before.

That is such a powerful moment! The realization that we have just recognized Jesus! Something good begins to take us over. We gain strength. We gain hope. We feel optimistic. Sure it would have been nice if Jesus would have stayed. But just the assurance that the living Christ has intersected our lives is enough!

## Application #5

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They were incredulous. Jesus had been with them for hours. When they finally recognized Him, they knew it was the best thing that had ever happened to them. They were so excited that even though they had just come back from Jerusalem that day and night had fallen, they went right back to Jerusalem to find the eleven remaining disciples and the larger group that was with them (verse 33). When they found them, they told the group, “We have seen the risen Lord! And Peter was right (cf. I Corinthians 15:5). When he said he saw Jesus, he did! (verse 34).” And they told them all about what happened from the time Jesus joined them on the road until they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread (verse 35).

Now the fifth and last application to life—when we finally recognize Jesus for who He is, we cannot contain ourselves!

There wasn’t going to be anything to keep these two down. This same Jesus who was brutally beaten and crucified was completely alive and well! That was all they needed. They left immediately to tell others what had just happened. They couldn’t keep it to themselves!

The same thing happens to us. The immediate reaction to recognizing the living Christ when we are in the valley of despair is to tell others. We can’t keep it to ourselves. We want others to know that Jesus is alive, that He has touched us, and that nobody, not even the forces of hell, can change that. We want others to know that we’re doing better and that Jesus can touch them too.

Did seeing Christ change the circumstances? No. Jesus was forever changed and would not return to life as they knew Him before the cross. Did

Jesus bring in the kingdom as they wanted and deliver them from Rome? No. They had yet to learn that it was not yet the time. What they did understand though was that since Jesus was alive, eventually *all* of prophecy would be fulfilled and they would be on the winning side in the end. For them a living Jesus and a living hope was enough to make them so happy they couldn’t contain themselves.

You see, the greatest message of Easter does not come from logic, persuasive words, and facts. It comes from people who have had an encounter with the living Christ and are so overcome, they can’t stop telling others.

Friends, Jesus is alive today. You may be down, depressed, discouraged, and totally focused on your hurts and disappointments. What has to happen to you is the most difficult thing about the resurrection—you need to recognize the living Jesus in your life. At the moment of recognition, nothing may change but your perspective. But you will be so incredibly joyful about that awesome recognition that all the duct tape in the world cannot bind you and shut your mouth.

By the way, the first time you recognize Jesus needs to be as your Savior. You need to realize that you cannot save yourself or work your way to Heaven. Jesus lived and died to secure the eternal well-being of His followers. He is the only way to be reconciled to God. Without Jesus, our chances of spiritual survival are non-existent. Once you recognize that Jesus is Savior and that He is by your side, no matter how bad things may be, you’ll be one of the biggest advertisements there is about Jesus.

Recognizing the risen Lord in our lives is not all that easy. We are often dull of

mind and slow of heart. Let it be one of our major goals—to look for and expect the Lord on our daily road of life. That's how things go from the sad and mundane to a life of incredible purpose and joy. Jesus is by your side right now. Can you recognize Him?

## Scripture References

- **Luke 24:13-35**
- **John 19:25**
- **I Corinthians 15:5**

Notes: