

**Sermon:** Is Jesus in our head or heart?

**Reading:** Luke 24:36-48

**Introduction.**

Experience counts for so much. There is a huge difference between reading about something and then actually experiencing it. When I was in school, I was part of a class which was notorious for bad behaviour, especially in physics. Our teacher at the time would curb the practical experiments and make us read about it instead of actually experiencing it practically. For a visual learner, this made learning physics less enjoyable and much more of a challenge.

The same can be said for the Christian faith, we may have grown up in a Christian family, attended church all our life, we may know the rituals of church services and sing all of the hymns and with this comes many great experiences but there is a big difference in knowing Jesus from what we have read and heard, and knowing Jesus from experiences we have encountered in our faith with Him. It's the difference from knowing about love we read in a book and falling in love, the experience counts for so much more than head knowledge alone.

I heard again this week of another Christian author who has walked away from the Christian faith. Its has been a sad time in recent months with a number of high profile Christian celebrities, authors, worship leaders and apologists who have renounced the faith, or their lifestyles have caught up with them and shown them to be hypocrites. A biblical definition of hypocrite is the one who lives their life in a pretence of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc, which they do not possess.

Having pondered on why there have been a number of celebrities and authors who have turned their backs on the faith for which they became well known, I have realised It's so much easier to turn your back on an idea, a principal or philosophy when it can be replaced with one which aligns much easier with a particular lifestyle choice we now prefer to adopt. My old boss used to tell me how he used to have many heated discussions with his father-in-law. As a young man he was a socialist and his father-in-law was conservative. He said, as I have grown wealthier over the years and i'm approaching retirement, I've found my political views have changed considerably. When our lifestyle choices and preferences change, so can some of our ideals and philosophies.

Its easier to turn our backs on ideologies, philosophies and principals in life when they can be replaced with another. This can offer an explanation why those who once professed the faith can so easily turn away and adopt a different belief system. However it is entirely different to turn your back on a person whom you love. This is not to say that this doesn't happen, for the disciple Peter is a good example of this, but this was out of pressure when he became fearful he hit that awful dilemma of fight or flight option. Peter chose flight and run rather than to make a stand and face the consequences.

The difference between loving a system and loving a person is what we discover in Peter's example, we can change our allegiance to a system for a different one and think it's a better choice for us, because of the benefits it brings to us personally, however to turn our back on someone we love will break our heart and leave us with guilt and shame, as it did with Peter. For those who can change their allegiance to a system do so much easier than someone who has encountered the risen Jesus in their lives. For those who have met Jesus and have been born again, a different heart has been given and nothing is the truly

the same again. Today's reading shows us this playing out in the lives of the disciples and the difference an encounter with the risen Jesus makes to their lives.

### **Context**

We are in the final chapter of Luke's orderly and investigative account about Jesus Christ. The final chapter of Luke reveals one great and glorious truth, Jesus is alive, He is risen, gloriously resurrected.

It's the first day of the week and the text today before us today begins with two followers of Jesus (although not of the twelve), who shared the journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus with the risen Jesus and they didn't know it! Their eyes were kept from recognising Him. It wasn't until they invited this fellow pilgrim into their home for a meal after the journey that their eyes were opened. Once Jesus lifted up the bread and broke it (**Luke 24:30**), they suddenly realised who this person on the road with them actually was! Once they realised, Jesus vanished from their sight (**Luke 24: 31**).

I find it astonishing the first thing Jesus does after His resurrection was to hold an informal bible study on a walk to Emmaus. Cleopas was left uncertain and discouraged after the events that had occurred in Jerusalem over the past couple of days. They shared how they had hoped this Jesus who was crucified would be the Messiah, but having watched Jesus dying on the Roman cross, taken down and laid in a tomb they knew it was all over!!

As they walked along the Emmaus Road, Jesus begins to open up the Scriptures to them, speaking from Moses, the prophets and the Psalms revealing to them all the Scriptures about the Messiah and how He must suffer. It wasn't until the two reflected later in the evening, 'How their hearts burned within them when He opened up the Scriptures to us'.

The Bible study and the Breaking of bread together led them from being despondent, discouraged, disheartened and disbelieving, to having a heart set aflame with a wondrous hope and their eyes were opened. What a difference an encounter with Jesus makes! They wasted no time in wanting to share what they had discovered, for Jesus is risen. They were born again.

Consider the difference it makes when a person is born again compared to being a cultural Christian? Cleopas could have set up a weekend group for Jesus enthusiasts, they could write songs and retell the stories of Jesus. How long do you think this would last before they needed to introduce other elements to make the weekend gathering a bit more exciting? Starting with more time for coffee and biscuits, introduce some new songs and even have a worship band. How about invite the better speakers? This soon wears thin and other activities are then required! How quickly does our motivation and enthusiasm wane when we have no experiences - a little like learning physics from a book. However what a difference it makes when the head knowledge meets up with a heart experience? The lives of the disciples would never be the same again.

This is where we pick up our reading today, Cleopas and colleague have raced back to Jerusalem, excited with their heads buzzing with what they have just discovered. They track the disciples down to a house where the ten are together. Out of breath from the long run but filled with good news, so unbelievable, overjoyed with excitement they are shouting, 'He is risen, we have seen Him'.

### **Jesus appears to the disciples**

It was 'While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you' (**Luke 24:36**).

There is nothing unusual in the disciples responses and reactions when Jesus appears to these ten. We can imagine being shocked and disbelieving what our eyes are seeing. Luke records, 'They were startled and frightened, thinking they had saw a ghost' (**Luke 24:37**). Only someone convinced that a person had truly died would think they were seeing a ghost when they stand before them!

I must admit the next verse always makes me smile each time I read it, Jesus seeing the disciples freeze in fear, as if they were welded to the spot with their jaws dropped open in astonishment, with the colour from their faces fading and Jesus simply says, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?' (**Luke 24: 38**). What an understatement!! Its at this point when our Lord permits the disciples to move from dubious doubting to one of complete acceptance by utilising all their God given senses, to test for themselves and see, Jesus is resurrected.

### **No contradicting senses?**

Jesus tells them to look at the scars, to touch them, place their fingers and hands in His wounds to see, 'It is myself' (**Luke 24:38**). A ghost does not have flesh and bone. This also throws out the notion that the resurrection is a 'spiritual resurrection' not a physical bodily resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is bodily not spiritual and we are promised the same resurrection when we trust in Him.

Even after the disciples had observed with their eyes, heard with their ears, touched Him with their hands, they still couldn't believe their senses, still believing Jesus to be some sort of spiritual apparition, so Jesus offers yet even more proof for them, saying, 'Do you have anything to eat?' (**Luke 24:41**). This is something I find wonderful for a bodily resurrection, we will still be able to enjoy food. Sharing food and enjoying the pleasures of company around the table is a delight and fills me with joy, even more so knowing calories will no longer be problematic! The disbelieving disciples give Jesus a piece of broiled fish which He takes and eats in their presence (**Luke 24:43**). All the senses used and non contradicted, Jesus is alive, beyond any shadow of doubt.

How much more proof does one need to be convinced? In Jesus life He could raise the dead like Lazarus and Tabitha, why is it so hard to believe He would conquer death?

As the disciples used all of their senses to determine Jesus had indeed resurrected we should expect to find things in our faith which are above our normal expectations and above our reason, as the Christian faith is no clever philosophy, ideal or manmade beliefs system but a supernatural awakening and relationship with Almighty God in His creation.

Once the disciples were convinced, what does Jesus do? He organises another Bible study! How important it is to share together in the study of the Scriptures. Preaching and studying the Scriptures are important for every Christian. If we neglect the Scriptures or have such a low view of Scriptural authority we will be blown about with every change of doctrine, led into all kinds of errors and build a man made religion in the name of Jesus, which has no power, no authority and saves no one. Paul dismisses these falsehoods as, doctrines of devils. We are less likely to lose our way with God when we experience the One who rose from the grave, as we become good students of His word.

### **Open our eyes Lord**

We all need our eyes opening from the Spirit of God for, 'The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit' (**1 Cor 2:14**). Love of the world and its ways will bend our wills to its ways along with

our natural inclinations towards for pride which blind us to the things of God and thus misunderstanding His word.

When Jesus begins the Bible study, what does he want to teach them? In fact it's the same things He revealed to Cleopas! The death of Christ was necessary to our salvation. His body which was broken and blood poured out was to be offered in sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. This was the only way to untie the great theological knot which enabled God to be just in dealing with sin, thus maintaining His Holiness and righteousness while being able to justify the sinner declaring them as righteous without being unjust. Being born again makes us a new creation.

Jesus was consistent in His message. We hear the first sermon He preached when returning from the time of testing and temptation in the wilderness with these words, 'Repent and believe for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near' (**Mark 1:15**). Jesus tells them how His life is to be offered as a ransom for many (**Mark 10:45**). Notice the word for 'many', by the very nature of the word 'many' this does not mean everyone!!

Jesus is teaching them, that all of the Scriptures must be fulfilled. We must never be selective in our Scripture reading otherwise it will lead us into some strange theologies like universalism which believes that everyone will be saved in the end!! Jesus dismisses this idea saying His life will be a ransom for 'many.'

Verse 45 says, Jesus opens their minds. Please don't interpret this thinking Jesus is making them broad minded! There are those who are misleading the body of Christ in this way of thinking believing Jesus is teaching us to be broad minded and not narrow in our thinking!! This way of thinking leads us into liberal beliefs and accepting new age philosophies and new sexual relationships and lifestyles! Jesus is not making the disciples broadminded to accept the ways of the world, no this leads to heresy. Jesus is opening the eyes of their heart so they can grasp and comprehend all what Jesus says about Himself in the Scriptures. Jesus is the embodiment of the Scripture, fulfilling what is written about Him and all for our redemption.

Jesus tells the disciples they will now become the witnesses to Jesus resurrection and to share the good news of Jesus in Incarnate one, suffered and died, was laid in a tomb and on the third day rose again conquering sin and death, opening up the Kingdom to all who repent, believe and trust in Him. This is the Good News message of the church.

So many of us hear the purpose of the church is to serve our communities. Our purpose is to serve God. Our communities don't need serving, they need saving. This is what Jesus tells the disciples in verse 47. 'Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations and you are my witnesses to these things and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (**Luke 24:47-49**)

The disciples were given undeniable proof of Jesus resurrection, fulfilling what the Scriptures had written about the Messiah. We are following on in the steps of those who have gone before us, passing on the good news of Jesus. We must ensure we are not just attending a weekend Jesus enthusiasts club filled with head knowledge from a book, but are not truly born again. We know when we are not when we have no desire to fulfil the Great Commission, when we have no fruit of repentance and when we are bored with our 'weekend club'. When the Holy Spirit is missing, we wane and lose focus, like Sardis church in chapter 3 of Revelation. When our eyes are opened and a new heart beats every beat for Jesus we truly have good news to share about our wonderful Jesus. May our eyes be opened, hearts warmed and life dedicated to spreading this good news of Jesus. **Amen**