

On the road to seeing Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's pray before we begin. Heavenly Father, at the beginning of this service, we were reminded that it is your spirit of wisdom and revelation that helps us to see you better.

And that is our prayer this morning. Please may you, by your spirit, help us to see Jesus more and more as you open the eyes of our hearts and to know the hope and the power and the greatness and the graciousness of the one that we worship.

So we just commit this time into your hands. Open our eyes. All this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen. Now, I can't quite remember if I have shared this story from the pulpit before, but anyway, let me tell you about a time when I was young.

Quite a few of you will know my brother and you will know that we actually look quite alike to the point that sometimes people think we are twins, even though he is five years older than me. And there was once when I was probably about early primary school age and I was out somewhere with my mum. And an auntie came along and said, oh, how nice to see you. And wow, your son so big already.

[1 : 21] And where is your other son? Your younger one? And my mum, of course, replied, oh, no, no, no, no, no. This is the youngest one. This is Brian.

But the auntie was insistent. No, of course not. You have another one. Smaller one. I have seen him before. And my mum, a little bemused, replied, no, no, no, no, no, really? This is Brian. He has gone already.

But then this auntie went, no! And this back and forth went on for probably another minute or so. And when she left, I think she was still not satisfied. I was me.

Now, you would have thought that mother knows best, right? But apparently even that couldn't convince this auntie. And I have often wondered, what would it have taken for this auntie to see that this was really the real Brian?

And that is what we are exploring today. What would it take for people to see the real Jesus and not just one they imagine?

[2 : 37] This isn't just a question for the non-Christian. It is for believers too. You see, I think I can safely say that there is probably not a single Christian in this hall today who has actually met the living Jesus in the flesh.

The first apostles might have seen him with their own eyes and touched him with their own hands. But we haven't. So what will it take for us then to see the real Jesus?

To begin answering this question, Luke introduces us to two men. And at the beginning of this story, they are in the same boat as us.

They know Jesus has been crucified, as do we. And they have heard reports that the tomb is empty, as do we.

After all, this ancient book right in front of us reports to us that Jesus is alive. But like us, they haven't actually seen him.

[3 : 47] At least, not yet. As a result, God wants to take them on a journey. We know, of course, that they are literally on one as they walk the seven miles from Jerusalem to a little village called Emmaus.

But actually, they are also on a spiritual journey. For notice how, at the beginning of this story, they are downcast. They are sorrowful.

They are confused and uncertain. How could they not be, given what has just happened? But by the end, they are filled with enthusiasm as they hurry back to Jerusalem to eagerly share the good news, Jesus is risen.

And so they have moved from doubt to sight, from confusion to clarity, from despair to joy. All because they have seen the real Jesus.

And Luke wants to show us how to take that same journey ourselves. So let us walk this road together. And as we do remember that question, what will it take to truly see and encounter the real Jesus?

[5 : 07] That's what Luke wants us to ask. And as he unfolds the story, he begins by showing us what doesn't open our eyes.

First of all, it's not simply about knowing the facts. It is not simply about knowing the facts. As we join these two men on the road, it becomes obvious that there is only one subject on their minds. Christ's death. It's stressed repeatedly in the text. Verse 14, they were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

Or verse 15, they talk and discuss these things with each other. The sense is that they're not simply filling the time with small talk.

No, they are deeply engaged, discussing, debating, and working through every angle of what has happened. And certainly the eloquent answer they give later in verses 19 to 21 suggests that they have given this a lot of thought.

[6 : 18] And as they talk, verse 15, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. I mean, wow!

Here you are, deep in conversation about someone who died, when out of nowhere, that dead guy shows up and goes, hey, what's all the chatter about?

You would have gotten an extremely big shock, wouldn't you? But they don't. Why not?

Is Jesus so badly beaten and bruised, he now looks completely different? Or are they as clueless as I was in university when I didn't realise that the woman in the sari next to me was the world expert on post-colonialism?

Well, verse 16 tells us the reason. It's because they were kept from recognising him. That's the reason. It is intentional on God's part.

[7 : 27] And of course, we want to ask, why? Why does God do this? Well, let's keep that question at the back of our minds for now and just see how the conversation unfolds.

So Jesus asked them, well, tell me guys, I'm curious. What's got you both so deeply engrossed in conversation? And they turned to him in shock.

My goodness! Who is this katak di bawah tempurong? Does this guy know nothing? Or as one of them, Cleopas, puts it, verse 18, are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there in these days?

Can you hear the irony? What they don't realise is that this stranger walking with them knows these events more intimately than anyone else in this world.

I imagine Luke must have written this with a big white grin on his face. And Jesus, well, he's really got the spiritual fruit of self-control, doesn't he?

[8 : 45] He doesn't straight out laugh in their face. Instead, he innocently plays along, verse 19. Oh, what things? He asked.

And so in verses 19 to 21, they recount the facts. And notice, as you look through those verses, they have gotten the bare facts exactly right.

Is Jesus from Nazareth? Yes. And is he a prophet? Powerful in word and deed? It is certainly not wrong to describe Jesus in this way.

Think, for instance, of the repeated times in Luke, he has foretold his own death and resurrection. Or think of his words before Pilate in John 18, verse 37, where he says, the reason he was born is to testify to the truth.

In other words, he is fulfilling a prophetic role. It is not wrong to call Jesus a prophet. And furthermore, Jesus did die in exactly the way they describe.

[9 : 57] In fact, they have even described the fact of the resurrection accurately. It is now the third day, verse 21. It is a fact that the tomb is empty and the body isn't there, verse 23.

And it is a fact the angels declared Jesus is alive, verse 23 again. In fact, these facts have been verified by some of the apostles, verse 24.

All the facts are there. Except, it is still not enough for them to truly see Jesus.

For I am sure that as Cleopas recounted the facts, he didn't do so matter of factly. He lightly spoke them with sadness.

His voice unsteady, eyes tearing up a little, maybe. Because, look at what conclusion he draws out from these facts.

[11:05] Verse 21. We had hope that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. We had hope.

In other words, they thought he would be their redeemer, that was certainly what they longed for. But now, all that is in the past.

He died, and their hopes died with him. As far as they can see, they were wrong. He's not the redeemer after all.

It was a false dawn. Do you see what's happening? they have the facts, they've discussed them at length, but they still can't connect the dots.

They can't reach the correct conclusion. They can't piece the picture together. So they can't see Jesus.

[12:12] And it is not for lack of evidence. Isn't the tomb empty? haven't they heard eyewitness reports, ones that have been confirmed?

Doesn't it all match what Jesus himself said? But even so, it's not enough. These facts alone don't open their eyes.

And so, they don't experience the joy of knowing that the risen Jesus is right now walking with them. You see, if we want to know Jesus, really know him, really see him, and walk with him, bare facts alone won't get us there.

Many of us have been around church long enough to know the basic story of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, haven't we? We know verses 19 to 24.

Even our local newspapers report on it. Last weekend, when they were reporting on Good Friday services around the country, it was not uncommon to read a quote from a pastor or a priest saying, oh, today we celebrate the fact that Christ Jesus died for our sins.

[13:34] And sometimes we think that's all it takes to see Jesus. Just know the facts. but we have confused knowing about Jesus with actually knowing him.

We have mistaken knowing the facts of the gospel for grasping its truth in our hearts. And as these disciples show us, you can know all the facts but still miss him entirely.

Certainly, I saw this firsthand when I was doing ministry in KL. Once, I was asked to meet with a particular young adult who had grown up in the church and whose mother held a leadership position to go through the basics of the faith with him.

And as I met with him over a few months, it soon became clear he was extremely well-versed in the Christian lingo. He knew all the right answers and how to say it in the right way.

He would do well in any Bible knowledge quiz. But as I got to know him more, it became abundantly clear that he really had zero interest or affection for Jesus.

[14:58] Listing down the facts, no problem for him. But loving Jesus, living for Jesus, of no importance to him.

To be honest, it was one of the most frustrating one-to-one Bible studies I've ever had. And so, if we want to truly see Jesus, we cannot be satisfied with mere trivia.

We cannot be satisfied with just connecting words and phrases and clauses in Bible study. We cannot be satisfied with surface exposure to common slogans, even those expressing true facts like Christ Jesus died for our sins.

The bare facts on their own don't give us spiritual sight and they certainly don't prevent us from sinning against God.

Don't the religious leaders show us that? many of them know the words of Scripture but they failed to see the truth of Scripture.

[16:09] That's why when they saw Jesus, they tried to kill him. Facts can inform your mind but they can't change your heart. So, if knowing the bare facts isn't enough to see the real Jesus and we transform, what does it take then?

Well, perhaps an experience is the key, we think. We need something more tangible, something we can feel. It is an appealing thought.

After all, who hasn't longed for a moment when we feel like we have encountered the supernatural? But Luke gently pushes back on that too.

that can't help us truly see either. It's not simply about having a supernatural encounter either. And that's the second thing to point out.

It is not simply about having a supernatural encounter. I'm sure many of us have at one point or another wish that God would just make himself unmistakably clear, send an angel, conjure up a vision, something dramatic.

[17 : 32] And here is the thing. Isn't that exactly what happens to the women at the tomb? Angels appear and declare, Jesus is alive.

If anything could convince someone, surely that would. and yet when they share this astonishing news with the other disciples, it's dismissed as nonsense.

And actually, don't these two men have the ultimate supernatural encounter? I mean, Jesus himself is standing right before them.

It's almost comical, isn't it, how at the end of verse 24, they wistfully say of their friends, but they did not see Jesus while looking him straight in the eye.

And at that point, you just want to stand up and shout at them, hello! Hello! Your friends didn't, but you can see him. You're experiencing what all of us wish for.

[18 : 40] You are literally having a divine encounter right now! But, as we have already noted, God kept your eyes from recognizing Jesus.

And once again, we ask, why? Why doesn't God just open your eyes then and there? Well, let's think about that now.

I suspect it's because Jesus has a greater purpose in mind. He wants to teach them and us what it truly takes to see him.

And if Jesus simply reveals himself immediately, at that point, they might simply walk away thinking that the key to seeing and knowing Jesus is simply to look for similar experiences, to constantly seek out more and more visions, to keep their faith alive.

But if that is all they learn, their faith won't be deepened in the long run. That won't sustain their relationship with God for the long haul.

[19 : 55] For you see, seeking such experiences is always a perennial temptation. I have seen this unfold in the life of someone I know. For years and years, he chased dramatic encounters with God.

At one point, he even moved to the United States to join a well-known Christian ministry that advertised itself as specializing in supernatural ministry.

But when life got hard, and when the emotional highs faded, he found he had nothing solid to hold onto. He walked away this illusion.

today, he simply regards Christianity as a hateful, irrational religion. Something to be discarded. It's tragic.

Because what he wanted was real, but what he built his faith on couldn't keep him going. nothing. And so that's why Jesus keeps their eyes closed for now.

[21 : 05] Because he wants them and us to see that the crucial problem isn't merely a lack of experiences. It's actually our hearts.

just like my friend, the disciples had Jesus right there, but they miss him. Because as Jesus says in verse 25, they were foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. That is the real problem. So how do we fix a slow heart? What truly opens our eyes if it's not just bare facts or experiences?

Well, the answer lies in what Jesus does next. And what we discover is that if we want to truly see Jesus, there are two essential elements that go hand in hand.

Here is the first element. Scriptural reorientation. Having explicitly identified the posture of our hearts as the problem, what does Jesus do next?

[22 : 22] Look at verses 26 and 27. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

Now, isn't that striking? What does Jesus think it will take for them to truly see him? Is it more information?

More experiences? No. He opens the scriptures. And he doesn't just read out the words or mention the facts.

Instead, he explains. he teaches. He instructs. He shows them where all these words are pointing and steering and directing us to.

Himself. And he shows them from the scriptures that it is necessary for him to suffer, to die, and then rise again.

[23 : 32] Did you catch that word? It is necessary. The NIV doesn't use that exact word, but it's there. It's necessary.

It's essential. It's a must. You see, why are these two men so sad? Because they don't think his death is necessary.

They don't think it's part of the plan. And they don't think so because basically, they don't really get what the Bible is truly all about. They don't get that from beginning to end, it is about God's big plan to reverse the curse of sin and bring about his kingdom in all its fullness through his chosen king. And if you don't get what the Bible is truly all about, you won't see the real Jesus. You might see the moral teacher Jesus, or the personal therapist Jesus, or the wish fulfillment Jesus, or the social activist Jesus, but not the real Jesus, the saviour, king.

I'm going to pick on the former British Prime Minister David Cameron as a prime example of this. In 2011, he described the central message of the Bible in this way on the screen.

[25 : 06] It's all about leading good lives and helping each other the best we can. Or in an Easter message in 2015, he said this, Easter is all about remembering the importance of change, responsibility, and doing the right thing for the good of our children.

And sadly, he badly, absolutely missed the point. If that is what he thinks, it is not surprising he didn't see Jesus.

For in that very same Easter message, there was not a single reference to Jesus, the cross, or the resurrection. But Jesus is clear in verse 27.

All the scriptures are about him, even the Old Testament. that's what Moses and the prophets refer to in shorthand. And if we try to read the Old Testament, or any part of the Bible really, just to get lifestyle tips, or for a few good boosts, we wouldn't really understand the Bible, and we wouldn't see Jesus.

That is probably why Jesus decided to have an impromptu Bible study with them. It would have been amazing to listen in, wouldn't it? Perhaps Jesus started with Genesis 3, verse 15, God's promise of a serpent crusher whose heel would be struck, hinting that humanity's saviour would suffer.

[26 : 49] Perhaps he talked about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus, where one goat is banished into the wilderness, representing the carrying away of sins. Is that not another picture of suffering?

Surely he must have mentioned Isaiah 53, of the suffering servant who was pierced for our transgressions, but who ultimately was also exalted.

But the point is, unless we realise that all these different bits and pieces of scripture are there to give us a glimpse of Jesus, we will remain blind to God's ultimate plan and purposes for us.

Vaughn Roberts illustrates this well in his book, God's Big Picture. Imagine, he says, two boys trying to do a jigsaw puzzle, and they make absolutely no progress at all, until one of them looks at the box to see what picture they are trying to create.

It's a picture of a king surrounded by his nobles. And one of the boys cry out, now I see it, the king is in the middle.

[28 : 03] And once they recognised that, they could piece the puzzle together, and they could see the king. And so if we want to see Jesus, we must be prepared to sit at his feet, and study the scriptures, and put it together, so that he is at the centre.

That's what it takes. As another pastor so helpfully puts it, recognition of the risen Lord is dependent in the end on the revelation of the divine word.

And that's why we here at KEC prioritise the whole council of scripture. Why do I bother teaching the Bible overview class year after year? It's not so that I can give you more bare facts.

Not at all. It's so that you and I might truly see Jesus. It's so that we might behold him, taste his goodness, and let the joy flood in when we see what he has really accomplished.

And I'm glad to say that year after year, there are always a couple of people who come up to me and tell me how transformative taking that class is. suddenly the Old Testament comes alive, they say.

[29 : 25] Suddenly I appreciate in a far deeper way how faithful and patient and gracious God is, they say. Or as one person in my class this year put it, suddenly I realise that I'm also part of the Bible's story.

And I've got to live out that story. And next week, in fact, I'm hoping one person from our most recent cohort will share her testimony in service on how she found the entire class.

You see, there is no shortcut. To truly see Jesus requires a life of reorienting ourselves around scripture and a lifetime immersing ourselves in scripture.

It is what will sustain us more so than any fleeting experience. But that is not the only element. Remember I said there are two elements?

And so here's what else we need. Divine illumination. Divine illumination. In verses 28 and 29, the group have reached Emmaus, and Jesus acts like he's moving on, knowing there will invite him to stay.

[30 : 47] After all, such hospitality was common in the ancient world, right? And Jesus isn't done with them yet. So they remain together and they share a meal.

And really that is no surprise for hasn't Jesus been sharing meals with sinners all throughout Luke? Of course he'll be at one more dinner table. people. But remarkably, although he's the guest, Jesus begins to act as if he's the host.

Verse 30, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Why does Luke give us such detail?

because these are the exact same four actions Jesus performed when he fed the 5,000 back in Luke chapter 9.

And anyone who knew their Old Testament would have recognized this miracle as an echo of God feeding Israel with manna in the wilderness. And do you remember what happened right after the feeding?

[32 : 02] For the first time, Peter recognized Jesus is the Christ. His understanding of the Old Testament began to align with the person right in front of him.

Now, fast forward to Luke 24. Jesus has just spent hours opening up the Old Testament, including Exodus, to these two disciples.

And then, as he sits with them, he repeats these same unmistakable actions. It is in this moment, with hearts prepared by scripture, and eyes seeing familiar, significant actions, that God performs a miracle of his own.

He opens your eyes. The instruction from the scriptures they received earlier, now comes alive with divine clarity, revealing the risen Jesus standing right in front of them.

They receive divine illumination. Finally, they truly see Jesus. And do you see how both are necessary?

[33 : 21] Without scriptural reorientation, the actions of the risen Jesus would be lost on them.

They wouldn't understand. But without divine illumination, they would never have connected what they learned with the person in front of them.

Verses 31 and 32 confirm this for us. Notice what happens as soon as their eyes are open. Jesus disappears. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, now that you have seen me for who I truly am, it is no longer necessary for me to be physically present with you.

And why not? Because these disciples have the scriptures that testify to him. And they have divine illumination, which means they can understand what the scripture is really saying.

And look carefully again at verse 32. What has happened to these disciples? Their hearts are burning. They are on fire.

But notice, where does that fire come from? Is it from Jesus' supernatural appearing and disappearing? No.

[34 : 43] For notice, are their hearts not burning, verse 32, because Jesus has opened the scriptures to them.

Do you see? What does it take to see the real Jesus? What does it take to set our hearts on fire for Jesus? It isn't the bare facts or even a dramatic encounter.

It is by having our hearts retuned and radicalized by the sword of the spirit. that's what the Apostle Paul was also getting at when he wrote Ephesians 3 verse 4 on the screen.

In reading this then, Ephesians 3 verse 4 on the screen, in reading this then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

Jesus. In other words, Paul was saying, as you read my words, which are divinely inspired, you will begin to get a glimpse into just how incredible and wonderful and awe-inspiring Jesus really is.

[35 : 56] So let me ask, do you really believe this? Are you willing to accept this?

I wonder if today some of us are resistant to the idea. We prefer a cheat code. We want to see Jesus without needing to really get into the scriptures.

We want the joy of seeing the Messiah apart from immersing ourselves in the Bible story. But God tells us that is not possible. If you try to go down that path, you will end up like the disciples in the first half of this passage, spiritually blind, saying all sorts of embarrassing stuff with zero insight into God's purposes.

But if you are prepared to cry out to God over and over again to help you see his glory as you open your Bibles, if you are willing to be humble and teachable so that his word can instruct you, if you are willing to take advantage of the classes and seminars that we put on so that we can try to grasp the message of the Bible better, then here is God's promise.

Your hearts will be warm. Do you feel spiritually cold today? Then all the more reason not to close your Bibles, but to open them and to ask for help to know what these words are all about, who they are pointing you to, that will slowly but surely get you burning again.

[37 : 51] And that's what Jesus wants. For don't forget, verse 15, it is Jesus who takes the initiative. He knows these disciples are downcast and confused, he knows they haven't understood, so he draws near.

He, the Lord of all, wants to walk alongside them even though they don't know it yet, for he is determined to turn their grieving into joy.

That's why he wants you to open your Bible. Not because he wants you to do more homework, but because he wants you to know how to delight in him even when life is hard, even when life is complex.

And where there are open Bibles and burning hearts, there are open mouths and confident witness. Did you notice what happens in the end to these two men?

They are in a hurry to proclaim the truth of the gospel. It is true, they say in verse 34, the Lord has risen. You see, the more we see the real Jesus, the more we want to talk about him because we see how wonderful he truly is.

[39 : 09] So let's keep opening our Bibles and keep asking God to show us Jesus so that we may savour him and share him with others.

Let's do that now. Let's pray. Father, I just pray now that as we ponder upon your words, you would indeed open up your scriptures to us and take them to heart.

Father, we pray, Lord, that we would receive instruction from Luke's gospel and we pray for illumination so that we can truly see you, the risen Jesus, the living Jesus, walking alongside us through the highs and through the lows, through the mountains and through the valleys.

And so Father, please motivate our hearts, especially where our hearts have grown cold, to let your word get into us again so that we might know you more and more.

And we might know your grace and your glory. All this we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.