

27th April 2025, Sunday After Easter: The Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32) 'Questions, questions'

Questions, questions.

I wonder how you feel about questions? I like questions. For 12 years I was a market researcher – I was essentially paid to ask questions. It was my job, and there was a certain satisfaction in wording a really good set of questions – even if not everyone who our company phoned up appreciated them!

Jesus loved questions, too. In fact, the gospels record that Jesus asked 307 questions, many more than he was asked (183). Jesus loved to teach through questions. Much as we may like to think that we learn mainly through answers, often you don't get the right answers if you don't ask the right questions. The modern market research industry knows that – but Jesus knew it 2,000 years ago.

And if we go back to **that first Easter Day, we find that it's a day as much of questions, as answers**. Yes, we might look back now and rightly describe the Easter story as giving us all the most important answers of human history, indeed human existence itself – but that's not how the first witnesses of Easter experienced it. The narrative is full of confusion and bewilderment. The women who went to the tomb wondered at the stone rolled away, and then (having heard the words of the angel) fled, trembling and afraid. The men who then heard their message responded in just the same way – 'their words seemed like nonsense,' Luke says. Peter ran to the tomb to see for himself and he also went away, wondering to himself what had happened. More confusion, more bewilderment.

And then we get to this wonderful encounter on the road out of Jerusalem. The word has spread that the tomb is empty, but still nobody really grasps what it means. Cleopas and his friend are talking and debating and wondering. And Luke reflects this in the way he tells this story: at its heart are questions – no less than 5 in 20 verses – a cluster of three at the start, then 2 further questions which drive the narrative at key moments – we'll look at these three moments to help us reflect on the story today.

The first question, not surprisingly, belongs to Jesus, the great question-giver. The two disciples are divinely kept from recognising their companion, who asks in v17: 'What are you discussing?' 'Don't you know??!' they reply, to which Jesus tries again: **'What things?' In other words, our first question is essentially: 'What just happened?'**

And it might sound obvious, but to really grasp the value of this wonderful story, indeed the whole Easter story, we need clarity about what really happened on Easter Day. Cleopas and his friend certainly didn't have that: 'we had hoped this guy was the one, the Great Rescuer – but he's dead, two days now, and now the body's gone.' It's the facts, but it's not the story, is it? Everything that Cleopas said is true: Jesus *was* a powerful prophet, he *was* sentenced to death and crucified, he *was* the one appointed to redeem God's people, the tomb *was* empty and witnesses *did* testify that he's alive.

They've got all the information – but something is missing. They've got the facts, but not the story. So, Jesus' next question is critical: (v26) 'Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' In other words: 'Wasn't all this part of the plan?' Or you could say, Jesus next question takes the first one a stage further: **OK, you know what just happened – now what does it *mean*?**

What happens next is, of course, the one bible study every follower of Jesus wishes they'd been part of: the one where Jesus himself takes the two disciples through the Old Testament to show exactly what it said about him.

And it's a good reminder to us, too, to make time to invest in the first three quarters of Scripture. Let's admit that much of the Old Testament is much harder to get into. When someone has just come to faith and wants to explore the bible, I usually say to them: whatever you do, don't start at the beginning and read it like a book! I suspect Jesus might not have agreed with this advice – but, even if we do need the New Testament to explain what Jesus' death and resurrection really means, the story of the Road to Emmaus tells us that Jesus was perfectly able to tell that story using just the pages of the Old Testament.

The meaning of the Easter story didn't just come from nowhere – it was foretold: in the Torah, in the History books, the wisdom books and the prophets. The Messiah was going to die for our sins and rise again to new life; God was going to renew the covenant and write it on our hearts by his Spirit. And this Messiah was going to burst the banks of salvation history to flood, not just the nation of Israel, but the whole world with this good news. When the Messiah enters his glory, as Jesus says, it is good news for the whole world.

This is what the Easter story means – and I'm sure it took the full 7 miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus to tell it. But there is one more question, this time uttered by the two disciples. It comes after their eyes had been opened and they had recognised Jesus: (v32) 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scripture to us?' In other words: **now that we know what it means, what does it mean for us?**

I think their response is beautiful: their hearts *burned*. Isn't that what happens when the Lord reveals the great truths of Scripture to us – our hearts burn? They get filled with life and hope and inspiration, they come *alive*. When John Wesley was asked what his approach was to preaching, he said this: 'I set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn.' He burned, of course, with the fire of scripture, whose good news caused his heart to fan into flame day after day, week after week.

And even the good old Church of England includes this simple response in Morning Prayer each day (**we used it at the start**): 'As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you, now and forever. Amen.'

As we reflect on this wonderful story today, may this, too, be our experience. May it cause our hearts to burn. The questions in the text lead us on our own journey: to understand what happened, to grasp what it means... but, above all, to lay hold of what it means *for us*. Jesus is alive! He did exactly what he said he was going to do, and indeed what the scripture promised he would. And he is with us, and reveals himself in the scriptures and in the breaking of bread. From this point onwards, we never walk alone. Cleopas and his friend eventually realised that; may the Lord sink that truth deep into our hearts, too. Like the two friends may we offer this simple prayer to Jesus: stay with me.

Jesus has risen. The great questions of life have their greatest answer. The resurrected Messiah has now entered his glory. May the Lord grant us grace to follow in his footsteps, empowered by his very presence: in this season, every day, and through our lives, on the same dusty road to glory. Amen.