

Broken Bread and Open Bibles: The Emmaus Road (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. ¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ¹⁹ And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. ²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” ²⁵ And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13–35)

I Don't See Him!

- A. If you've been walking with Jesus for any time at all, you know you go through seasons where you just feel like you don't see him, you don't get what he's doing, you don't feel him near you, things seem cold and dark.
1. Oh sure you've had those mountain top experiences, right? Where everything just seemed awesome and you'd pray and it was like God was right there attending to it.
 2. But now you pray and you just feel kind of stupid, like a 20 year old writing a letter to Santa Claus or something, you're old enough now to know better. God's not here.

- B. You know, the most amazing thing about this story of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus is Jesus is right in front of them. He's walking with them the whole way. But they don't see him.
1. We spent a good amount of time considering this a couple weeks ago when we looked at [vv. 13-27](#) in particular. The title of that sermon was [Letting Down and Lifting Up](#).
 - a. And that was really the big idea: sometimes God has to let us down (in terms of our nearsighted expectations, misaligned notions of God—his ways, his plans, etc.) in order to lift us up and give us experience of something even greater.
- C. These two disciples wanted Jesus, as the Christ, to redeem them from Rome and things.
1. In this framework, a dead Messiah was a failed Messiah. He didn't liberate Israel from Rome, he was crucified by Rome. So they were let down. They were going home. Seven miles back to Emmaus, away from Jerusalem. It's over.
 2. And in their sadness and dejection, they couldn't even see what God was really doing, that Jesus was on the move, working a redemption, not less than what they'd hoped for, but so much more. Rome is too small a target for our Savior. He's come to liberate us from Satan, sin, and death itself.
- D. And God's always doing this sort of thing with us. Yet, nonetheless, it's true, isn't it, sometimes we just don't get it, we don't see him. Maybe you're in one of those seasons now.

What Can We Do?

- A. Well, this sermon is about how we come to see again. What was it that opened these disciples' eyes here? What can we learn? What can we do in our times of darkness?
1. As far as I can tell, this text gives us two things we can do to see again, two ways that Jesus is brought back into our spiritual line of sight, as it were: (1) We Break Bread; and (2) We Open Bibles.
 - a. We'll take those one at a time as we move through now [vv. 28-35](#) in particular.

(1) We Break Bread

Setting the Stage (and the Table!)

Testing the Heart

- A. Before we can really get into this first piece we do have to set the stage a bit. Let's pick the story back up now beginning at [v. 28](#): "[So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther . . .](#)"
- B. Now, it's that last little comment there that caught my attention: "[He acted as if he were going farther . . .](#)"

1. While we can't be certain what is meant by this, part of me is inclined to understand Jesus' "acting" here as a sort of test.
 - a. It could simply mean that he was giving indication of moving on, and perhaps he truly was, and that is it.
 - b. But it may also be that Jesus knew what he was doing here and was after something in particular with these disciples. He wasn't yet done with them, but was instead intending to draw them out a bit more, see where they were at in all of this. Are they interested in engaging further, or will they just let him go on his way?

- C. I was reminded of similar times with God and Abraham or Moses, where God lets these guys overhear him, as it were, as he's planning to judge Sodom or even Israel.
 1. And in both those instances the point, it would seem, was to bait these men to action. Both Abraham and Moses step into their role as mediator and type of Christ, really, and they pray, they intercede, they beg God to have mercy ([Gen. 18:16ff](#); [Exod. 32:7-14](#))!
 - a. They were being tested, as it were, and they pass.

- D. There's another place, curiously, where Jesus seems to be doing something similar to what we see in our text. Many have heard the famous walking on water story, but I wonder how many noticed this little detail in [Mark 6:48](#): "And [Jesus] saw that [the disciples] were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them . . ."
 1. And you think, "pass by them"? Is that a typo? Shouldn't that have said: "He meant to go right to them . . . to save them"? "Pass by them"? What is that all about?
 - a. Well, I think he's testing them and helping them grow. He wants them to see him and call out for him, to engage the muscles of their faith. He wants them to grow increasingly aware of both their desperate need for salvation and his overwhelming ability to meet that need in grace.

- E. And I think that something similar is going on here in [Luke 24](#).
 1. He wants these two disciples to make a decision. Are they just going to let him pass on by, or are they going to plead for him to get in the boat, as it were. Are they going to press in for more, or not?

- F. And, you know, some of us are in this place right now.
 1. We're being tested. God's wondering what we're going to do with the little bit of space he's created between us. Are we going to go hard after him or are we going to fold and go elsewhere? Are we going to grab hold of his ankles or the fringe of his garment and say: "Where else would I go you have the words of eternal life? I know I'm a dog but even dogs get the crumbs from their master's table, help, you're all I have?"

- a. Will we engage the muscles of our faith and lay hold of him? Or will we just let him walk away?

Digging in the Oars

- A. Well, we see what these two do, don't we. They pass the test we could say. So v. 29 goes on: ". . . but they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them."
 1. I love this! Jesus doesn't take much coaxing, he wants to come in, he wants to reveal himself, he wants to "stay with us"—but he also wants us to want it.
- B. And these two want it with a great deal of passion it would seem. The word at the front there translated "urged him strongly" is an aggressive, forceful word.
 1. It's used in [Jonah 1:13](#) of the LXX, to describe the way the men in a boat out on stormy seas were "digging in their oars" in an effort to get back to dry land.
 - a. What an image! We're digging in our oars. We're desperate. We're not going to let you go Jesus.
- C. So these two disciples are digging in their oars here, as it were. And this speaks to at least a couple of things:
 1. On the one hand, it speaks to their concern for Christ's well-being, of course. Traveling the unlit roads around Palestine at night was a dangerous affair, subjecting the traveler to both bandit and beast. They wanted to keep Jesus from harm.
 2. But, on the other hand (and most significant to our discussion here), it also, I think, speaks to their desire for Christ himself. As we'll soon see, a fire had been lit in their hearts back up in v. 27 when Jesus opened the Scriptures to them, and though they didn't yet fully know who this co-traveling man was, they knew they wanted more.
- D. So they invite him in . . . and in he comes.
 1. We might think here of what Jesus himself says in [Rev. 3:20](#): "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."
 - a. In v. 28 it's as if Jesus is knocking.
 - b. Then in v. 29, we see these two hear his voice and open the door.
 - c. Now in v. 30 we come to the meal . . .

Flipping the Script

- A. So v. 30: “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.”
- B. There is much to see here, but what I want to bring out straightaway is simply the role reversal that occurs. Jesus flips the script, as it were.
 - 1. He’s supposed to be the guest, isn’t he? This isn’t his home. This isn’t his table. This isn’t his bread. And yet, here in v. 30, this guest becomes the host. He’s the one who takes up the bread and blesses and distributes it. This is what the host should do. And yet here he is.
- C. Isn’t that amazing?! We think we are inviting him in, we have something to offer him, it turns out he has something to give us, every time!
 - 1. These disciples think they are prevailing upon him when truly it’s he who is prevailing upon them.
 - 2. They think they are feeding him, when truly it’s he who is feeding them.
 - 3. We go to serve him and suddenly we realize he’s been serving us all along.
 - a. It’s beautiful. It’s the gospel. It’s grace. It’s what Jesus wants to do with you right now. He wants to host a meal. He wants to fill you up.
 - i. And the way he does it is by revealing himself—by showing you more of who he is, and where he is in your life . . .

Their Eyes Were Opened

- A. And for these disciples here, there’s something about the way Jesus breaks this bread that opens their eyes to this. So we read in v. 31: “And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”
 - 1. And later on down in v. 35 we see that they go and tell all the others how Jesus “was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” It’s miraculous. It’s revelatory.
- B. And so here we come, in particular, to that first suggestion of what we can do when we don’t see Jesus in our lives. When we’ve lost that line of sight with him and we’re feeling hopeless, abandoned, alone. Like these two disciples we can break bread and behold him there.

Layer #1: Common Grace Bread

- A. Now there’s a couple layers of meaning to this, I think, but in the first place we can just see this in relation to good old common grace. Common grace is that goodness of God that’s shown indiscriminately to every man in the way he cares and provides for us.
 - 1. A classic text for this is Matt. 5:45, where Jesus says our heavenly Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
 - a. There’s grace coming to us from every angle. In the sunrise, in the rainstorm. We feel that especially in California right now, right? Praise God for the rain. He’s with us. He’s caring for us.

2. Another text is [Acts 14:15-17](#) where Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra and they say to the crowds there: “¹⁵ . . . [W]e bring you good news, that you should turn . . . to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

B. You say, where is God? Well, in one sense, he’s in the bread on your table, right?

1. Just as Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father: “Give us each day our daily bread . . .” ([Luke 11:3](#); cf. [Matt. 6:11](#)). He’s providing. He’s caring for us. He’s right here.

C. So the call in this is to slow down and see him in the everyday stuff of life and give thanks for it.

1. You know kids are often better at seeing these things. There’s a sort of magic to the world for them. So Levi, the other day, when it was stormy and windy outside, he looks out and says: “Everything is dancing.” And I love that. There’s a wonder to the way you look at the world.
 - a. And so we look at the bread on our plate and we say: “God is with us. You’re right here. This is from you. Thanks!”

Layer #2: Special Grace Bread

A. But there’s another layer of meaning here I think. And this now is related to what we’d call special grace. In the biblical worldview common grace and special grace, while distinct, are always related. In one sense, special grace leads to common grace, and in yet another sense common grace is meant to lead to special grace.

1. Common grace is that which comes to all indiscriminately from the merciful heart of God.
2. Special grace is that which comes in particular to the children of God in Jesus and the covenant of grace established by him through the cross.

- a. So special grace bread, then, in this sense, is not just the everyday bread that we all enjoy from God, but in particular that sacramental bread we partake of in communion, that bread which stands for the broken body of Jesus and our participation in him by faith.

B. Now, to be sure, I don’t think it likely that Jesus is somehow formally initiating a communion meal here with these two disciples, but I do think it is intended to echo such a thing and bring it to mind.

1. Luke, I think, is trying to hint at this when here he even echoes the language of the Last Supper back in [Luke 22](#).
 - a. In our text Jesus takes the bread, blesses (or gives thanks for) it, breaks it, and then gives it to his disciples.

- b. Well, this is precisely the same chain of events outlined in [Luke 22](#). Only there he goes on to further explain: [“This \[bread\] is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” \(v. 19\)](#).
 - i. He tethers the broken bread to the cross and the new covenant established by him there. He is the bread of life. Because his body is broken for us, we can be nourished and put back together in him.
- C. And so then here in the sacrament of communion, when we come to the table together and partake of the broken bread symbolic of his body given for us, we see him afresh with the eyes of our hearts. The communion meal is the gospel for our senses. We can see and smell and touch and taste his grace to us in Christ. I’m welcome at the table—forgiven, loved, cared for, en route to glory.
- D. So from this, if we’re in the place of doubt or despair, if we’re struggling to see Jesus in our lives, here is something we can do!
 - 1. We can stop and see him in everyday grace of a good meal as we enjoy it with family and friends.
 - 2. But we can also, we must also, gather with God’s people, the new covenant people, and see him in the special grace of the communion meal.
- E. The early church we’re told did just this. We read in [Acts 2:42](#) of the sorts of things that marked them as a community: [“they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”](#)
 - 1. I love it, one commentator looks at this [“breaking of bread”](#) and asks: Is this referring to some larger fellowship meal or the Lord’s Supper? And he concludes: the phrase [“likely covers both” \(ESVSB\)](#).
 - a. We need common grace and special grace bread in our fight for sight, if we’re going to see Jesus even in hard times.

And He Vanished from Their Sight

- A. Now, as I’ve said there’s a second thing we can do here to fight for sight, but before we get there, I want to say something in passing about what we read there at the end of [v. 31](#): namely, that just when they finally came to recognize Jesus: [“. . . he vanished from their sight.”](#)
 - 1. Is anyone else initially confused by that? Jesus, shouldn’t this be like the homecoming embrace moment, that sappy music starts playing and they all come in for a group hug and reunion and things? Wasn’t the whole point of this to help them see you? Why once they see you do you then decide that’s the perfect time to bounce?
- B. This goes back really to the initial observation we made under this point about God testing us and dealing with us in a way that causes us to flex the muscle of our faith and grow. I think that’s what this is yet again.

1. Jesus gives us enough to believe but not enough to be lazy. If we were always eating sweets out of his palm we would soon grow fat and apathetic. He is interested in training and sending us out as agents of grace in a world of trouble, not in coddling us and keeping us from all trouble.
 - a. So he reveals himself, “I’m right here.” But then he vanishes. “Now walk by faith.”
- C. Haven’t you had experience like this? You’re in one of the hardest seasons of your life. You’re thinking God is nowhere around, he’s abandoned you, and then suddenly, it’s as if Jesus snaps his fingers, and you see him, you know he’s there with you.
 1. Maybe somebody texts you a verse you had just been meditating on that morning: “This was on my heart for you, I don’t know why, praying for you friend, and you’re in tears.” He’s here. It’s as if Jesus just “winks” at you right there and lets you know he has you.
 - a. But then just as quickly as he shows himself he vanishes once more. And you have to trust him, even when you can’t see him.

(2) We Open Bibles

Open Bibles Open Eyes

- A. Okay, now we come to that second heading and this is really what’s brought out there in [v. 32](#): “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’”
 1. In one sense this sounds kind of funny, right? It sounds like they’re saying: “Oh, I knew it all along. I knew that was Jesus. He didn’t fool us.” It would be a bit embarrassing when you think about it, wouldn’t it? How had they missed him?
 2. But what they’re actually saying here is that, while the broken bread was something of a tipping point for them when it came to seeing and recognizing Jesus, something was changing back even earlier when he opened to them the Scriptures.
 - a. Here we see the age-old connection between Word and Sacrament. The two have always dovetailed in the church.
 - i. Why do you think we give ourselves here to the preaching of the Word and the partaking of the Lord’s Supper? Well, because by God’s ordination these are the two things that above else can help us see him and stay on track in our discipleship.
- B. We’ve seen that breaking bread opens eyes. Now we come to realize that the opening Bibles opens eyes as well.

1. And that really is the link that's made here, even linguistically, for us. The Greek word translated "opened" [Gk. *dianoigō*] in v. 32 referring to the opening of Scripture is the same word used in the verse just prior when referring to the opening of their eyes.
 - a. And that's not a mistake. The same connection is made elsewhere in [Luke-Acts](#).
 - i. Just a few verses later in [Luke 24:45](#), Jesus again is explaining the Bible to his disciples and then we read that "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."
 - ii. Or later in [Acts 16:14](#), we read of Lydia, that as Paul expounded the Scriptures and the gospel, "[t]he Lord opened her heart to pay attention to [it]."
- C. The implication for us is plain: if we want open eyes to God and his presence in our lives we have to open our Bibles.
1. So many of us just want experiences of Jesus without any real effort. We want open eyes without open Bibles. We complain about him feeling distant from us, dead to us, even. We don't see what he's doing in our life. And yet we aren't in the Scriptures, the very place above all else where he's promised to reveal himself.
 - a. We're like people sitting in a room with shuttered windows complaining about how dark and dreary everything is. If you want light you throw open the blinds, for goodness sake. You do so, and suddenly the room is transformed! The sun's rays come streaming in.
 - i. Open the blinds! Open the book!

"The Things Concerning Himself"

- A. But there's more to it than just this, isn't there?
1. After all, I imagine these two disciples had opened their Bibles (what's now our Old Testament) countless times, all the time, ever since they were little Jewish kids. And yet their reading of it led them not to greater understanding it would seem, but greater darkness.
- B. So why, when Jesus opened up the Scriptures to them, did it lead to greater light? Why would they say in this instance: "[Did not our hearts burn within us . . .](#)" (v. 32)? Revelation was coming. Things were getting brighter and warmer. Why this time and not others? What accounts for the difference?
1. Well, for this we should go back up to [vv. 25-27](#) and identify just what the Bible study was all about: "²⁵ And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

- a. In other words, he taught them how to read the Bible, the OT even, in such a way that they saw Jesus and the gospel—the cross, his suffering and glory, his death and resurrection—on every single page.
- C. Jesus is the center and goal of all God’s revelation. And the only way to get burning hearts for God and open eyes to what he’s doing in our lives is to learn to read our Bibles in this way.
 - 1. This is why Paul says to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:15: “[F]rom childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings [the OT], which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” It’s all leading us to him.
 - 2. This is why Jesus would say to some of the Jews of his day: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). “You’re supposed to open the Old Testament and see me.”
- D. There is a way to open your Bible and read it in such a way that you actually miss Jesus. Your heart doesn’t burn with passion, it’s misdirected, and sometimes it’s even more burdened. You can read it in such a way that it crushes you rather than blesses you.
 - 1. I’ve not been able to verify this, but I’ve heard it said that the famous author Mark Twain used to have this recurring dream where in it the Bible would be crushing him under its weight.
 - a. Whether it’s true or not, the image is still relevant. Some of us read the Bible like that. We don’t see good news. We see a lot of things we have to do, or else. And what’s missing in this read is the gospel, Jesus.
 - b. When you learn to see him on every page and suddenly your heart catches fire. He’s born the burden of the law and things. He’s been crushed under the weight of it so that I don’t have to be. He’s here to help me grow in grace.
 - i. If the Bible is ultimately about me and what I must do, it ends up crushing me. But if it’s ultimately about Jesus and what he has done on my behalf, that lifts my sails, that lights some fires inside!
- E. A classic example of this is the well-known story of David and Goliath. You remember David has this great faith and courage and he steps forward and slays the enemy of Israel with a single stone. And you read that, what does that mean?
 - 1. Be like David? Trust God and you’re going to go and slay your own giants? That sounds good at first, but it will quickly become a burden when you realize you don’t have the faith or the strength.
 - 2. That’s when you come to realize that the shepherd-king David is a precursor to Christ, the shepherd-king who comes in the line of David and will fulfill all that David was pointing towards. You see, Jesus will slay the greater giants of sin, Satan, and death at the cross on behalf of God’s people. We are saved not first because we are like David, but because we have an even greater David in Jesus.

- a. When you feel like David is just your example, you end up burdened under the weight of it.
 - b. But when you realize David is first a picture of your Savior, then your heart catches fire. And you know what, you can go off and follow more of David's example as well with Jesus enabling you.
- F. This really sets up where we're going in weeks to come. I anticipate launching into a little mini-series on the subject. How do we read our Bibles, the OT in particular, in such a way that we see Jesus on every page, where the gospel is the center and goal of it all? What might this Bible study there on the Emmaus road have consisted of?
 - 1. But for now, let me at least encourage you: open your Bibles, yes, but don't close them until you see Jesus there, until the cross is put once more before you in all its splendor, until you find good news for your soul and a fire starter for your heart.

Conclusion

That Same Hour

- A. The last thing to make note of here is just how this little vignette ends: ["And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem."](#)
 - 1. They had to tell someone! It's the very same hour they had just said was too dangerous for travel. But now off they went. Seven miles in the dead of night.
 - a. Any dread of darkness had vanished from their heart just as quickly as Christ had vanished from their sight. Though they could no longer see him, they knew he was still near them, they knew they had been fellowshiping with one whom had taken on sin, Satan, and grave and lived to tell the tale. What had they to fear bandit or beast now? Jesus is alive!
- B. And I suppose this should be the way we leave our time together here this morning, our times of corporate worship on the Lord's Day, having beheld him in the broken bread and seen him in the expositing Scripture, we are reassured yet again that he is risen and alive and though we see him not with the eyes of our head we can sense his nearness to us in the kindling fire-feelings of our heart. And we walk out bold, unafraid, unashamed, ready to witness and testify to the grace and glory we've known.