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Title: The Burning Hearts

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Introduction

God never makes mistakes. But that doesn't mean that those he made are always, so perfect. In the first year I was your minister, in 1994, I made a mistake that I thought was going to cost me my job. You see I was running out of ideas for our youth group and I was telling this to a friend of mine who had run youth groups for years and he said "I've got just the right answer. You need to run a Winter Olympics Night."

Now he went on to explain, that a Winter Olympics night is when you get heaps and heaps of Baby Powder, cover a wood floor with it and then get all the kids to take their shoes off and pretend they are skating on ice. You can have running races, relays, obstacle races, all sort of things. Well it seemed like a good idea and in fact it was a brilliant idea.

Except when it came to cleaning up. Because powder got into everything and we had down it in the Kingscliff Hall where we have Church every Sunday morning. And I just couldn't get the powder up. I stayed for a couple of hours. I asked one of the ladies, making her swear on a stack of Bibles not to tell anyone if she could help. She went down every day and got more of the powder up. Until it came to the Sunday, it didn't look crash hot, but it looked acceptable and till this day, I don't think any of the regulars realised what had happened to their floor. God doesn't make mistakes, but that doesn't mean we don't.

For being a Christian, being a follower of Jesus doesn't stop us from making mistakes. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Peter denied him three times. And then there is this wonderful story of two of his disciples, Cleopas and his friend, walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday, just two days after Jesus was crucified. Boy didn't they make a couple of real clangers.

1. Making A Mistake

For as they set off on that short 7 mile walk, they started talking about the events of the last week or two. And the first mistake they made was thinking that it was all over, that the Jesus phenomena was dead and buried, so to speak. And because of that they were so disappointed - they were two very dejected people.

For they had seen just a week before, Jesus enter Jerusalem on a colt and the whole city was in an uproar. They had seen him teach in the Temple courts among the huge Passover crowds. They had seen him confound the religious experts and yet also teach in a way that even the most simple could understand. And now he was dead. And these two

men, who previously had so many hopes and dreams for what Jesus was going to do, were most likely on their way back home, with their tail between their legs. Shattered and disappointed. Their first mistake was thinking that the crucifixion was the end. They would never hear of Jesus again!

But their second mistake was just as grave. They really hadn't realised who Jesus was, even though He had been in their midst for the last three years. For as they were talking, a fellow traveller joined them. And asked them why they were so downcast. And they went on to tell him about Jesus, how he was a prophet, someone powerful in word and deed, someone whom they had hoped would redeem Israel, who would set the Israelites free from the Romans, their political overlords.

You see, they didn't realise that Jesus was more than just a prophet, he was their Messiah. They didn't realise that he wasn't just a powerful teacher, he was God himself. They didn't realise that Jesus wouldn't redeem Israel from the yoke of the Romans, he would redeem the whole world from the yoke of sin. They didn't realise that when Jesus had died on the cross, it was not just the chief priests and the teachers of the law who had put him there, but God had also allowed it to happen, to pay the penalty for all our wrongdoing.

They didn't recognise who Jesus really was. And in one of the great ironies of Scripture we read of *"these two disciples trying to tell Jesus what's happening, when they obviously 'don't have a clue themselves!"*

But that is not where their mistakes end. For these two disciples allowed their emotions to get in the way of the facts. They are so disappointed that they don't recognise that their travelling partner is Jesus himself. They are so full of sorrow, that they have forgotten that Jesus three times predicted he would come back to life on the third day. They are so bewildered that they are not willing to trust the eyewitness testimony of the women who had seen an angel. Of the apostles who had seen the empty tomb, of their companions who had found the others stories were true.

You see their emotions had blinded them, spiritually blinded them to the extent that all they could see was the cross, they couldn't see the empty tomb.

But before we are to hard on them, don't we make the same mistakes ourselves? Don't we at times allow our emotions to get in the way, so much so that we never look at the facts at what God has done in this world and what he is doing right now? Don't we ignore the testimonies of other Christians when they tell us that God is still at work? Don't we try and package God or put Jesus into a box, often far too small, because we don't want to think that God really became man, that God really does run a world full of violence and sin and hate? Don't we often fail to recognise Jesus is still at work in our presence?

Sometimes we are led to believe that the first disciples were gullible men who just believed that Jesus had come back from the death without thinking through the facts. The truth of the matter is that these men and women were just like us, who often make the

opposite mistake. Who had to be convinced again and again and again that God did raise Jesus. They had to be persuaded with irrefutable evidence that he was alive, that God is still at work in the world today.

You see the disciples made plenty of mistakes, but that doesn't mean that God writes them off. No time and time and time again Jesus appeared to his disciples. Persuading them. Encouraging them. Giving them another chance. And this is what happens to Cleopas and his friend that first Sunday afternoon. And very soon, their downcast faces were replaced by burning hearts.

2. Burning Hearts

But what turned them around? What has made the difference for Cleopas and his friend? It wasn't just that they met Jesus. It wasn't just that they realised they had made some mistakes. It was because they had a Bible study.

Now today Bible study has a bad reputation. I remember prior to going into the ministry that all my workmates used to go down to the pub for a drink on Friday nights. And I would go, stick around for an hour or so, then head off to a Bible Study. And my workmates could not think of a more boring thing to do. They were going to go off and drink too much, go off to a movie, a dance, a pub crawl. But I would much prefer to go off to a Bible study, so I could learn more about my Lord and Master Jesus.

Well Jesus when he comes across these two disciples firstly calls them foolish. "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Did you notice, he calls the disciples foolish not because they didn't believe the testimony of the women, not because of their slowness to believe the other disciples, but because they didn't believe the prophets. Because they didn't know their Old Testament. Because they didn't believe the Scriptures.

And so "*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" Do you notice that? He tells them that the OT is chock a block full of references to himself! That Jesus is the key that unlocks the jigsaw puzzle that is the OT. That in every book, he is the one that the OT is pointing toward.

Now I would love to have a tape recording of what Jesus said to the disciples on that first Easter Sunday. I would love to know how he drew all the Scriptures together and made sense of them, and made sure they realised they were pointing to him.

He could well have pointed out that in Genesis, he was the fulfilment of the promise given to Adam and Eve, that he would be the one who would crush the head of that slippery Serpent who fooled them in the Garden of Eden.

That Christ is the Passover Lamb in Exodus.
That Christ is the Atoning Sacrifice in Leviticus.

That Christ is the Smitten Rock in Numbers.
That Christ is the Prophet to come in Deuteronomy.
That Christ is the Sheep that was lead to slaughter in Isaiah.
That Christ is the Ideal husband in Hosea.
That Christ is the Hope of the people in Joel.
That Christ is the Saviour in Obadiah.
That Christ is the Resurrection and Life in Jonah.
That Christ is the Restorer in Micah.
That Christ is the Publisher of Peace in Nahum.
That Christ is the Mighty One to save in Zephaniah.
That Christ is the Son of Righteousness with healing in His wings in Malachi."

Jesus is the one who makes sense of all the Scriptures. Over 300 prophecies come true in the life, death and resurrection of the Christ. And the response in the disciples to this Bible study? Their hearts burn! Not just that their souls are warmed, but they burn. The sparks fly upwards to God. Their zeal burns and reaches out to the people around them. Their eyes are opened. It all makes sense now. Their lives will be forever changed.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism had his Emmaus Walk in London May 24, 1738. He tells in his journal that he went unwillingly to Church where the preacher was reading Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on the book of Romans. He realised that salvation was not by works, but by God's grace. His wonderful free gift to him. And his heart was strangely warmed. He felt his sins washed away.

Friends do our hearts burn at the hearing of the resurrected Christ? Are they fanned into flame as you read what Jesus has done for you. How much God loves you. If they don't, then turn back to the Scriptures. If they don't then give your heart to the Lord and give yourself to him afresh. If they don't then make sure that you don't waste this Easter and so you meditate on them on this special day.

Because those who are his, find reading this message from his word, reading these Scriptures not dull and boring, but full of life and vitality. Something they never want to miss out on. So..... these two disciples make their mistakes, their hearts burn and then they recognise their risen Saviour. They realise that he truly is alive.

3. Seeing the Lord

But think for a moment, how hard it was for Jesus to prove that he was alive? Have you ever tried to prove that you are alive? I was reading recently about a Vietnam vet named John Crabtree. John been wounded in Vietnam and was on permanent disability, receiving government benefits, until one day he was notified by the government that he was dead. His benefits stopped. He wrote a letter to the government, explaining that he was alive. Nothing changed. He tried to call the government. Do you think that solved his problem?! Finally he contacted a local television station which ran a human-interest story about his situation. The reporter asked one of those standard "How do you feel about your situation?" questions. John Crabtree answered, "I feel frustrated - have you ever

tried to prove that you're alive?" (cited in (Homiletics by Leonard I. Sweet, Vol. 9, No. 2, April-June 1997, p. 11)

But Jesus too was trying to prove that he was alive, but the disciples didn't just get it. He explained that the Messiah had to suffer, to die but that he would come back from the grave, but Cleopas and his mate still didn't understand. And so when they shared a meal together, he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. And suddenly they recognised him.

Did they remember how Jesus used to break bread before he was crucified? Or did they see his nail marks on the inside of his hands? Or was it that God finally took away their spiritual blindness? We will never know. But they saw their Lord. But more than that. They saw that their Lord Jesus was alive. Yes he had been dead, but now he was alive. Yes the cross had filled their thoughts, but now the empty tomb made sense. Yes he had died for their sins, but he would now be forever with them.

And the response was immediate. As Jesus whisked himself away, they boldly went back to Jerusalem. No longer were they afraid of the robbers and wild animals on the road. No longer did they feel they couldn't travel at night. They were off. They had completed their Emmaus Walk, and now they were starting their Jerusalem Run.

Hearing the Scriptures had made their hearts burn. Knowing that Jesus was alive had given them the assurance that faith in Jesus was real, that it was life changing. That it was more important than anything else. If Jesus really was alive, this would change the world.

Let me end with the story of John Scully. In 1983 Scully was the President of Pepsi Cola and one of America's fastest rising corporate stars, but he was being headhunted by Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Computers. Jobs and his staff, were badly in need of a brilliant leader to manage their rapid growth, and had been trying to lure Scully away from Pepsi.

But Scully was unconvinced. He had no interest in leaving Pepsi and he knew almost nothing about computers. Besides, he was being groomed for the top spot at Pepsi and his salary, share options and perks were beyond anything Jobs could hope to match.

They were overlooking New York one night and Jobs said to Scully, "So are you going to come to Apple?"

"`Steve, I really love what you're doing. I'm excited by it. But I don't think I can come and help you, I don't think I can come to Apple.'

Jobs' head dropped as he stared at the pavement. After a weighty, uncomfortable pause, he issued a challenge that would haunt Scully for days: `Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugar water or do you want a chance to change the world?'

That's the same sort of challenge that Jesus gives to us this day. Do you want to keep living for yourself? Do you want to continue to chase after the gods of materialism, of

money, of home, of family, of sport? Or do you want to help change the world?

For if Jesus did die and if he did come back to life, that is earth shattering news. If Jesus is alive, then that should set your hearts ablaze. If Jesus is your Lord, your living Lord, then life cannot stay the same.

Well the Scriptures say he is alive. The eyewitness proof says he did come back from the dead. And the experience of millions upon millions of Christians is that he is still alive today. We just have to work out whether we believe. Whether we really believe it to be true. But if it is true, it is news that will change both the world and your world. So allow it to sink in and burn away at your heart and you will never, ever be the same again.