

Recognizing Christ in the Midst

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It is one thing to profess that Christ is in our midst. It is another thing to live in the living reality of His presence. Consider the following account after Jesus' resurrection.

Luke 24:13-35 (NKJV) *"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, 'What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?' Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?' And He said to them, 'What things?' So they said to Him, 'The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain 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.' Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.' And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?' So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."*

From this account we see that Jesus was clearly alive in the midst of these two men. Their blindness could not change this reality. In the same way, Jesus is alive and in our midst today. He attends our every gathering. He is with us at all times. He dwells in the midst of His saints!

Unfortunately, unbelief keeps us from recognizing Christ's presence. On the day of the resurrection, Cleopas and Simon were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about a seven mile journey. As they walked, they were talking about the events surrounding Christ's death and burial and the shocking reports of His resurrection. As they talked about these things, Jesus came alongside and joined them in their travel. Surprisingly the One they talked about was with them and they did not recognize Him! Their eyes were restrained. It is possible that

Jesus looked different because not even Mary recognized Him initially in the Garden. Most likely, however, the reason they did not recognize Him was because they did not expect Him to be alive!

Cleopas and Simon are not alone in their unbelief. Sometimes we do not recognize Jesus because we do not believe He is among us. When we profess that He is among us, we still do not recognize Him because we expect Him to come and move among us in a way He did before. Our unbelief blinds us to Christ's presence living and dwelling among us. He is in our midst but our actions and behavior reveal that we do not believe that He is.

Part of the unbelief in Cleopas and Simon was because they failed to believe the prophecies of the Scriptures. Hadn't Moses and the prophets foretold the sufferings and glory of Christ? The Scriptures gave them sufficient reason for hope and faith. Their unbelief, however, blinded them and caused them to live in hopelessness and defeat. Because they failed to call to mind the promises of Scripture, they longed in unbelief for the One who was right there in their midst!

Like Cleopas and Simon, many of us fail to experience and enjoy the living presence of Jesus in our midst because of unbelief. Jesus literally walked with these two disciples, talked with them, corrected them, taught them, dwelt with them, sat with them, and even began to eat with them and yet they could not enjoy His presence because they did not recognize Him. In the same way, Jesus is with us on our journey in life but we often do not recognize His reality in our heart. We beg and plead for Jesus to come rather than recognizing and honoring the fact that He is already with us!

Jesus promised never to leave us nor forsake us. If He is with us then how can we recognize Him and enjoy His presence? It is notable that Cleopas and Simon did not recognize Jesus until their eyes were opened in the blessing, breaking, and distribution of the bread. The breaking of the bread broke their unbelief. It carried them back to Jesus' last meal with the twelve before His death on the Cross. Paul said, *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."* (1 Corinthians 11:26 NKJV) Jesus said, *"Do this in remembrance of Me."* (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) The power of His presence begins by remembering in faith what He has done and what He has promised. This memorial meal is usually called "The Lord's Supper". This meal is also called the "Eucharist" ("Thanksgiving"), and "Communion" because through it we corporately experience a common fellowship with Christ through His body. As we remember in faith what Jesus did for us on the Cross, we recall the work of redemption that naturally invokes His presence.

In the early church, the ordinance of "breaking bread" became a regular way of remembering Christ's sacrifice and invoking His presence in their midst (see Acts 2:42). As we preach the Cross and remember His sacrifice in the breaking of bread, we will live with a greater sense of His presence in our midst. He has not left us to travel this journey alone. He is with us. All we have to do is believe. Then our eyes will be open to recognize Him in our midst!