

Faith Fundamentals

After Jesus rose from the dead, there were some significant events that happened and are recorded in the Gospels. They help us to understand fundamental aspects of the Christian faith.

Confession

Luke 24: 13-32 (Easy Reading version)

That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town named Emmaus. It is about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about everything that had happened. While they were talking, discussing these things, Jesus himself came near and walked with them. (But the two men were not allowed to recognize Jesus.) He asked them, "What's this I hear you discussing with each other as you walk?"

The two men stopped, their faces looking very sad. The one named Cleopas said, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who doesn't know what has just happened there."

Jesus said, "What are you talking about?"

They said, "It's about Jesus, the one from Nazareth. To God and to all the people he was a great prophet. He said and did many powerful things. But our leaders and the leading priests handed him over to be judged and killed. They nailed him to a cross. We were hoping that he would be the one to free Israel. But then all this happened.

"And now something else: It has been three days since he was killed, but today some of our women told us an amazing thing. Early this morning they went to the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid. But they did not find his body there. They came and told us they had seen some angels in a vision. The angels told them Jesus was alive! So some of our group went to the tomb too. It was just as the women said. They saw the tomb, but they did not see Jesus."

Then Jesus said to the two men, "You are foolish and slow to realize what is true. You should believe everything the prophets said. The prophets said the Messiah must suffer these things before he begins his time of glory." Then he began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. He started with the books of Moses and then he talked about what the prophets had said about him.

They came near the town of Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he did not plan to stop there. But they wanted him to stay. They begged him, "Stay with us. It's almost night. There's hardly any daylight left." So he went in to stay with them. Joining them at the supper table, Jesus took some bread and gave thanks. Then he broke some off and gave it to them. Just then the men were allowed to recognize him. But when they saw who he was, he disappeared. They said to each other, "When he talked to us on the road, it felt like a fire burning in us. How exciting it was when he explained to us the true meaning of the Scriptures!"

When we find out facts about things, we sometimes just take them at face value and store them in the back of our minds in case we need them at some point in the future, e.g. which author wrote a particular book, who sang a song that we heard on the radio etc. Sometimes we take time to research for ourselves to confirm what we have found out but are happy to stop there, e.g. they're selling a certain product for a specific price in a specific shop etc. And sometimes the fact is so fascinating, that we feel compelled to share with others, maybe to benefit them but often because we are glad to know it, e.g. rabbits can't vomit!

There was a Haribo advert on TV that featured a Dad being interrogated by his young son as to whether he'd eaten the last Haribo. Of course, he was denying it fervently so the boy called for "Detective Mills". In came his little sister (complete with pigtails) who slapped a piece of paper down in front of her Dad and demanded he "sign the 'fession"! They knew for a fact he'd eaten the last one but he needed to admit to it!

In the Biblical account, the two men knew of events that had happened recently regarding Jesus and they were talking the facts over with each other to try to make sense of them. Jesus shows them the evidence from things they already know from Scriptures that they have read and been taught, but not understood, and turns them into a real-life experience by sharing bread with them. By meeting them at their own level of understanding and taking into account their cultural background, finally, they put two-and-two together, recognise Jesus and believe that He is the Messiah! The penny drops!

Sometimes no matter how much we think about something internally, it doesn't feel real until we speak about it. It could be possible to be considering a career change, for example, maybe even starting to research how to get into this new career but at this point, it's still just ideas. When starting to talk it through with others (often to gauge their reaction) and turn it into a life vision, this is when it comes into existence; possibly too daunting, which causes a change of plan, or possibly cementing the idea into belief that it could actually happen. Then it's time to turn the belief into reality by living out all the things that have been researched and discussed.

It's all very well knowing stories from the Bible in our heads, but until we actually confess with our mouths that we believe those things we have read or heard about are true, we have not begun our journey of faith. That belief will grow from experiencing "co-incidences", logical studies of Christian literature, the love of other Christians or talking through Bible stories and passages with other Christians among other things but at some point we must conclude that "Jesus is Lord!"

Repentance and Forgiveness

John 21: 15-17 (The Message)

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you."

Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."

Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

When Jesus addresses Peter, He calls him "Simon", his original name, rather than the meaningful name that Jesus had given him, as a reminder of where he's come from; that place before his eyes were opened to Jesus being Messiah. Peter was not the "rock" he claimed he would be when he denied Jesus three times. Previously, he'd told Jesus that "Even if everyone else falls to pieces on account of you, I won't. Even if I had to die with you, I would never deny you." (Matt 26 vv 33 & 35 – The Message) He'd proudly thought that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples but when it came to the crunch, he crumbled too, as Jesus predicted he would.

Let's explore this passage more but from a different interpretation, taking into account the words used in the original Greek:

After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon Johnson, do you have an unconditional love for me, more intimate than that which you have for the other disciples and they have for me?"

"Yes, Master, you know that I have a strong, personal affection for you."

Jesus said, "Teach new disciples about that."

He then asked a second time, "Simon Johnson, do you love me unconditionally?"

"Yes, Master, you know I love you deeply, like a brother."

Jesus said, "Show other disciples how to do that."

Then he said it a third time: "Simon Johnson, do you love me as a close friend?"

Peter was upset that He asked for the third time, "Do you love me as a close friend?" and when he realised why, he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you as my best friend."

Jesus said, "Share your experience with others."

In the first two questions, Jesus uses the word *agapao* for "love", indicating an unconditional, all-giving, unselfish love such as that of God, and Peter responds with the word *phileo*, which indicates a strong but brotherly love. He also wisely, chooses not to make a comparison with the other disciples in his response to Jesus' first question. However, Jesus was also intimating at His previous teaching "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and whether Peter could put Him above everything else (family, friends, career, possessions etc) or at least *confess* that he would try to. The third time, Jesus also uses *phileo*. Peter is hurt because the fact he's been asked a third time and in that way makes him remember his denials at the crucifixion, and causes him to come to repentance and realisation which is reflected in his third answer. Although he still uses *phileo*, he adds a word that stresses "you *must* know [how deeply] that I love you." He's now not pretending that he is capable of loving Jesus as much as he made out previously and also seems to recognise that he can't do it solely in his own strength but he is being real about it.

Jesus is first and foremost interested in our hearts. He does not initially command obedience, repentance, promises and good conduct but once confident our hearts are right, all those other things will follow.

It can be assumed from Jesus' responses to Peter's answers that He is forgiving him and urging Peter to move on. He's cut straight to the heart of the matter and addressed the elephant in the room, proving that He knows us better than we know ourselves and the best way to help and lead us. It is vitally important as Christians that we do not have unforgiveness in our lives. It prevents us, and often the person we haven't forgiven, from moving into what Christ actually wants us/them to be doing. We can still do things for Jesus but they will not be fully effective with an unforgiving heart.

Here are some lyrics from the song "Forgiveness" by Matthew West:

It's the hardest thing to give away,

It always goes to those that don't deserve.

It's the opposite of how you feel when the pain they caused is just too real,

It flies in the face of all your pride,

It's the whisper in your ear saying 'Set It Free'.

It'll clear the bitterness away,

There is no end to what its power can do.

So, let it go and be amazed by what you see through eyes of grace;

The prisoner that it really frees is you.

My Dad was horrible to my Mum. I made it my mission to earn enough money to allow her to leave him so she could have the life she deserved. When she died I blamed him for not encouraging her to go to the Doctor sooner, and generally for making her life a misery. I thought I could never forgive him for what he did to her. Then my Dad got vascular dementia. I did the dutiful thing and arranged for him to be cared for in a nursing home and visited as much as I could bear to. It got to the stage where you couldn't hold a conversation with him because nothing made sense and I realised I would never have the chance to challenge him about my childhood. More importantly, he'd never have the chance to say "sorry", although I didn't believe he ever would! So my only choice was to forgive him anyway; easier said than done! Eventually, I genuinely did – and before he died. Singing songs about "it is in pardoning that we are pardoned" and praying

“forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” became easier and more significant, rather than just words!

John 20: 21-23 (NIV)

“Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”

It is often easy to accept Jesus’ forgiveness for our sins once we have come to repentance but so much harder to give others our forgiveness. The news is: unforgiveness is a sin too! The Holy Spirit that Jesus has given us will be stifled and unable to function properly in a body riddled with unforgiveness.

Emotional wounds are dangerous; they have the power to hurt continually. It’s no good just bandaging up the wound, it has to be dealt with and cleansed. God will repair the broken places of our lives as long as we are willing to expose them. One of the most important steps to healing is to forgive from the heart (acknowledging the wound and the anger) and then let it go. This can be tough to do but bitterness will set in like gangrene without forgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews tells us to “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Bitterness will affect current relationships and this includes not forgiving ourselves for something too. **[Ref: Word for Today 30/03/16]**

Once Peter had accepted his forgiveness from Jesus, he was given instructions to feed and shepherd, i.e. build up others; something he was now capable of doing.

Witness and Discipleship

Matt 28: 18-20 (Good News Translation)

Jesus drew near and said to them, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:20 (Good News Translation)

The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed.

Evangelism - the preaching or promulgation [broadcasting, circulation] of the gospel – is proactive; you have to **go out** and catch the fish, you cannot expect them to jump out of the water into a boat that is still on the land!

Jesus is not fussy about who hears the good news; He wants all peoples to become His disciples, but firstly, they need to be told! When I was 13, a girl from school was brave enough to talk to me about Jesus (at school!) and then invite me to church to find out more. If she’d just gone to church on Sunday and talked about her classmates, it would not have had the same effect. It is vitally important for us to meet together in order to build the tackle that we need to go fishing but unless we take that tackle into the water, it’s a useless set of ornaments.

Ephesians 4: 11-13 (Common English Bible)

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. His purpose was to equip God’s people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.

Going out and catching fish is one thing, getting them in the net and keeping them there is an entirely different one. When I was young we used to play a board game at my Granny and Grandad's called *Angling*, that was based around coarse fishing; may sound boring but it was probably my favourite game! If your little fisherman playing piece landed on the tackle shop in the corner of the board, or passed by the one on the starting corner, you collected a piece of tackle. You also needed permits, bait and somewhere to fish. You couldn't start fishing until you had collected all the appropriate equipment. *A fish can only be caught if it is contained in the water being fished and with the right bait and tackle.* There was a 'splash' card that said "Keep net has a hole in it" and another one that said "Mice have chewed a hole in your landing net". If you got either of those, you had to surrender all the fish cards that you had collected and you were back to square one again. Other 'splash' cards told you your worms had died, your paste had gone mouldy and the water was frozen, meaning you had to miss a turn or give one of your bait cards back!

When we meet together and grow as Christ's disciples we collect new pieces of tackle or come up with new ideas for bait. We can share these around so everyone is equipped but if we wait too long to venture out, our lines will have broken or our bait will be mouldy. If we go at the wrong time, the waters will be frozen. Jesus has promised that we will be backed up by Him and the miracles that He will perform through us. The basis of the "game" is that we go fishing (witnessing) but the purpose of it is to make more disciples, not merely converts. We have to land and keep the fish. The devil will send mice to chew holes in our landing nets, and our keep nets will get old and in a state of disrepair unless we are alert and responsive.

One of the things we are commanded to do as a way of showing we are serious about being a disciple is to be baptised. Baptism states belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and trust in Him as Saviour. It symbolically displays our death-to-old-self, burial and resurrection-into-new-life. This is a public declaration and however much else we choose to say, the answer to the question "do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord," must always be "yes!" (Confession) Next, we promise to turn from our sins and live a forgiven life in Christ (Repentance and Forgiveness) and the fact that generally we have invited non-Christian friends and family to witness our profession of faith means that we have done a bit of evangelism too! Not only does baptism affirm to others that we have publicly identified ourselves with Christ, it's a constant reminder to us. When tempted to go back to our old ways (as Simon Peter was), we can remember we're no longer that person, we're a new creation in Christ with a new set of values, attitudes, actions and destiny. **[Ref: Word for Today 28/03/16]**

If we are more comfortable with our old life than our new one, that suggests we haven't fully let go of the past. We may be more prone to falling back into our old ways if we haven't spent time with other Christians, testing and honing our understanding and faith. The discipleship and encouragement of other Christians as part of our journey gives us the ability to see things from someone else's point of view, gain confidence in the Word and confidence to share with others our experiences with God. As we talk more to other Christians about Jesus, it encourages us and makes it easier and more natural for us to talk to non-Christians about Him.

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Forgiveness

Fishing