

THE HOME OF CLEOPAS TO SURPRISE HIS SERVANTS
THE HOME OF CLEOPAS TO SURPRISE HIS SERVANTS (LUKE 24:29)

The lights of Emmaus were clearly visible; the journey from Jerusalem was nearly terminated; yet Cleopas and his wife could not have cared less. Their hearts were singing. They could have walked with the Stranger forever! The previous week had been abnormally hectic. Their best Friend had been crucified, their hopes shattered, and their happiness destroyed.

The troubled man and woman would never forget the approach of the Stranger who thrilled their souls. Evidently He knew the Scriptures for "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The sacred writings had become increasingly meaningful, and their problems had been solved. His sermon had been most inspiring, but unfortunately the delightful Traveler was about to leave. "And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went, and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them" (Luke 24:28-29). That couple was about to discover life is filled with surprises.

Those people had been amazed that their Companion knew so much about the prophetic writings. Was He a rabbi, a scholar, or a prophet? He quoted the Scriptures as if He had been their Author! They were beginning to believe dark clouds have a silver lining. What they considered to be a tragedy might be a unique triumph. The Stranger had explained how the death of Jesus was part of God's plan to bring redemption to the world and the Messiah to the throne of Israel. What He said was entrancing, and although He was evidently an important Person, He had entered their humble home. Although He knew they were unprepared for overnight guests, He calmly took a seat at their table. Everything about Him was astounding, and they were enthralled when He began to bless the food.

"And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight" (Luke 24:30-31). When they saw the nail prints in His hands, their depression vanished. "And they rose up the same

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hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way. and how he was known of them in breaking of bread" (Luke 24:33-35). That delightful story contains five astonishing surprises.

The Strange Decision... Charming

Not much was recorded concerning these two lesser-known followers of Jesus. Some of the later church fathers believed that the wife of Cleopas watched as the Lord was crucified. Her husband remained unmentioned until he was returning to his home in Emmaus (see John 19:25). Apart from these references the existence of these people would have been unknown. On the other hand, some very important people were in Jerusalem, and upon them rested the future of the Christian church. They were puzzled and bewildered, for it was rumored their Master had risen from the dead, and Simon claimed he had been favored with a personal interview. Actually only a few miles separated the Emmaus travelers from their friends in Jerusalem, but in another sense, they

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were worlds apart. Nothing more was ever said concerning the couple from Emmaus, but the apostles were destined to become leaders of the Christian church. It seemed strange that the risen Lord should, more or less, bypass the important people in Jerusalem and go out of His way to intercept two travelers. Would it not have been more beneficial to instruct the apostles who would relay His message to the world?

It is encouraging to know God loves little people and is attentive to small matters. If He were only interested in millionaires, royalty, and folk with many talents, the majority of men and women would never enjoy His favor. Christ knew about a woman who touched the hem of His garment, about a child who was willing to sacrifice his lunch to help feed a multitude, and about a widow who placed two mites into the treasury. It was customary for the Creator of the world to help insignificant people in whom He delighted. That glorious fact is a source of unending encouragement. Most people may seem as helpless as babies, but adoring fathers, including the heavenly Father, love to hold little children in their arms.

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The Simple Disguise.. Concealing

Many questions concerning the resurrection of Christ remain unanswered. The Bible says that after He arose from the dead He stayed forty days with the disciples before He ascended into heaven. His body had been changed, for the mortal had put on immortality; yet to prove He was not a ghost, Jesus ate food before the disciples (see Luke 24:42-43). It would be interesting to know if, when, and where He slept during the five weeks prior to His ascension. During the period He appeared to His disciples but apart from those occasions, where did He spend His time, and where did He go? Amid all the questions that might be considered, one delightful detail becomes obvious. The two disciples who were returning to their home failed to recognize the Lord because Christ concealed His identity. He appeared in a disguise! Mark tells us that "After that, He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them" (Mark 16:12-13). The Living Bible translates the text as follows: "Later that day, He appeared to two who were walking from Jerusalem into the country, but they didn't recognize him at first because he had changed his appearance. The Savior was truly a great Physician; He desired to make His patients happy and well. Had He appeared in His usual manner, they would have recognized Him immediately, but the doubts, fears, and questions within their souls would have been untouched. He deliberately disguised Himself to deal with the unseen problems within their minds. Christians should expect their Master to be near even amid the mundane things of life. Rain is expected to fall from dark clouds. William Cowper wrote:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread:
Are big with mercy, and will break
In blessings on your head.

Paul enunciated a very important truth when he said to the Romans, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. When storms threaten the followers of Christ, they should expect Him to perform a miracle just as He did for the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. When "our eyes are holden" and we cannot recognize

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Him, we should never question His ability to save.

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The Splendid Discourse... Convincing

`Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:25-27). Probably the message delivered to the Emmaus travelers was the greatest sermon ever preached. It is known what Simon Peter and Stephen preached in the earliest days of the Christian church, but the subject matter used by the Savior remains a mystery. Perhaps God was content to mention only the source of the materials so that believers in every age would search and find for themselves the things to which He referred.

The first five books of the Bible are attributed to Moses, therefore his writings extended from the creation of man to the conquest of Canaan. The many prophets mentioned in the Scriptures covered the remaining period until the ministry of Malachi. It may be assumed that when the Lord instructed the two disciples, His data was drawn from the entire Old Testament, and He claimed to be the fulfillment of everything that had been predicted. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that unless He was what He claimed to be, He was the most outrageous deceiver in history.

When the Lord spoke with Nicodemus, He mentioned that Moses had lifted up the serpent in the wilderness and suggested this related to His forthcoming crucifixion (see John 3:14-15). The prophet Isaiah described perfectly what was to happen hundreds of years later. What is now called the fifty-third chapter of his book supplied a vivid word picture of the death of the Son of God. Repeatedly throughout the Psalms, David mentioned details that were only fulfilled when Jesus of Nazareth died to reconcile sinners to God. The Almighty saw the end from the beginning and was able to paint on human canvas the scenes to be enacted when the Word was made flesh to dwell among us. The portrait of the Messiah was clearly stamped upon history, and when the risen Christ explained these facts to His fascinated listeners, their hearts burned within them. It should be emphasized that when the Lord spoke to His listeners, He spoke of things "concerning himself" (see Luke 24:27). Unless preachers center their messages in the Person of Christ, they are out of place in a pulpit! The world needs Jesus, but unfortunately modern soothsayers present orations that cannot heal broken hearts and

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homes. The words spoken by the ancient Greeks should be found in every pulpit, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:20-21).

The Startling Disappearance ... Compelling

"And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another. Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:30-32). It was unbelievable; one moment He was there, and the next He was gone! They looked at His empty chair and at each other, and then looked at the chair again. They were astonished and mystified. Suddenly both exclaimed, "He was the Lord." They were as people in a trance, hardly knowing what to do next. Readers may ask how that miraculous disappearance was accomplished, but the actions of God defy explanation. Luke in Acts

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8:39 describes how, after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more.... But Philip was found in Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea."

The exact location of the oasis where the Ethiopian was baptized cannot be determined, but Ashdod or Azotus was at least twenty or thirty miles away. The Holy Spirit could have transported God's servant to the new location, and the same thing could have happened when Jesus left the home in Emmaus. Paul said, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). It would be most informative to discover the details associated with the removal of the Lord from Emmaus and the effect it had upon the couple left behind. They had been away for at least a week and would soon be retired for the night. Their friends in Jerusalem would also be preparing to sleep. Wisdom dictated that however important their message, it could wait until morning. Did the disciples consider these matters? Possibly they did, but the irresistible urge to reach their friends expelled any idea of delay. They had a story to tell, and the sooner they told it, the more pleased they would be. Blessed are the believers whose hearts are so filled with joy they cannot remain silent.

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The Swift Departure... Complying

"And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord hath risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread" (Luke 24:33-35). A thrilling desire to tell others about the Lord is an excellent therapy for tired feet!

Several modern sites have been identified with Emmaus, but there is no conclusive evidence to prove which, if any, is authentic. The village would have been six or seven miles from Jerusalem, which necessitated a journey of one to two hours. The enthusiasm of the travelers might have shortened the time of travel, but in any case, their arrival in the city would have been late in the evening or in the early hours of the morning.

Mark said, "After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them" (Mark 16:12-13). Luke endorsed that report when he wrote, "And they told what things were done in the way. . . Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit" (Luke 24:35-37). Probably the Lord returned along the same road to Jerusalem and arrived a few moments after His disciples. They were delivering their report when, "He stood in the midst of them. No Christian witnesses alone. Standing in the shadows will be the Savior waiting to hear and endorse what is said about Him.

The church should be grateful to the disciples from Emmaus; had they remained in their village, their story might never have been told. Their obedience and testimony guaranteed an entrance into God's Hall of Fame.

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