

### Sightings of the Lord

We spoke last Sunday about the difficulty we encounter in wrapping our hearts and modern minds around the reality of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Nevertheless, Paul says in Romans 10:8-10: . . . "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." It might even seem to some down right diabolical that God asks us to believe in the one thing most unbelievable in order that we might be saved, to believe the one thing most impossible to believe that we might have everlasting life.

Yet, when you think that through, it makes perfect sense. We had an interesting question asked at the Men's Promise Keepers' Bible Study this past Wednesday evening. Someone asked something like this, "Since God is Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three, doesn't anyone who believes in God also believe in Jesus?" "If God is Trinity then the Old Testament Jews who believed in God, must have also believed in Jesus; right?" Well, believe it or not, that's the first time in almost 40 years of ministry, that anyone asked me that question in that way. It had me going for a second or two. When I regained my composure, I said, "well it depends on what you believe about the God you say you believe in." To believe in God in some generic sense as creator, supreme being, or that "big guy in the sky," is not enough by itself for salvation. James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder." The clear implication from James is that we need more than a generic faith in a generic God. It is also clear that not everyone who claims to believe in God believes in the same God; whether or not you are on the right track depends on what you believe about the God you say you believe in.

Jesus had this conversation with His fellow Jews in John 8:41b-42: "They said, 'The only Father we have is God himself.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.'" In other words, Jesus is the litmus test for believing in the God who really is God. If you have never been taught about Jesus and yet you believe in the real God, as soon as you hear about Jesus and hear what Jesus has to say or meet Jesus, you will say "Here He is! This is what I've been talking about. Here is God appearing in human skin." If by God's grace you already know God before you meet Jesus, you will

recognize God in Jesus as soon as you encounter Him. To know the Father is to know the Son also. And, conversely, anyone who loves Jesus will also love the Father who sent Him for the two are one; they share one in the same Spirit. I Peter 1:20-21 say of Jesus, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

The God we believe in for salvation is not any old god at all, not some shapeless supreme being or faceless creator; but, rather, the One who revealed Himself in the face and words and acts of Jesus, and the One who raised Jesus from the dead. The bottom line in this conversation is that if we can't believe that our God, can and has raised Jesus from the dead, then the God we believe in is too small to be God at all. The fact that we must believe in a God who does things that blow our minds and is infinitely too big for us to wrap our finite brains around should not surprise us or turn us away. If He doesn't scare our socks off, put goose bumps on our goose bumps, and leave us feeling absolutely vulnerable and without excuse in His presence, He is not truly God. If we have not sensed a love that melts every frozen corner of our hearts and compels repentance from every sin, we've not scratched the surface of who God is. If we do not bow before Him in awestruck wonder and cry "Holy, Holy, Holy!" and "Thank You, thank You, thank You!" we have yet to encounter the God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But coming back to the challenge to believe in Jesus' Resurrection from the grave, it seems to me that this is the big dividing point between Christians who are really alive in Christ and in love with Christ and believers who know there has to be more than what they have yet to experience. It also seems to me that coming to this faith is probably more of a process than a one-time epiphany. At least this is what we can gather from the record of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples between Easter and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. They didn't get it all at once; it took a number of encounters with the risen Christ before they got it deep enough to keep them going.

During the time between the first report of Jesus' resurrection from the grave and His last appearance to His disciples on the shore of Galilee, His appearances appear to me to have come like an intermittent flashings of a lighthouse along the sea shore. He would appear to His disciples and the light of that appearance would set the faces of His

followers aglow. Then He would go away and the glow would fade. Then He would reappear and their faces would glow again, but again He would leave and the glory would fade.

Perhaps this pattern is familiar in our lives. There have been times when God has been so real and we have felt so blessed--our faith during those times has been strong and our testimonies have been ardent. But then the glory seems to fade and our faith is more tentative--our spiritual energies ebb. We find ourselves wondering where the Lord has gone and we hunger for a fresh encounter.

Apparently, at the beginning of John 21, this latter case was true for the disciples of Jesus. It had been a while since Jesus' last appearance and the glory had faded from their faces. Peter, being the restless sort of fellow that he was anyway, was the first to take action. He couldn't stand around waiting for Jesus to show up again, so he says, "I'm going out to fish!" Those with him agreed to his suggestion and volunteered to go with him. Soon they are back on the lake doing what they had done before Jesus came into their lives.

And that's always the danger for us when it's been too long between fresh encounters with the Lord. We tend to drift and guess where we drift to? We drift back toward where we were before we met Jesus. We are drawn to familiar places and familiar faces. Old temptations rear their ugly heads.

But then again, as much as it looks the same, it's not the same--not for us on whom His light has shined. The old pleasures do not bring the same rewards. The old comforters do not comfort us any longer. The latter part of John 21:3 tells the story: "So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing." **Going back to who we were before Christ is not an option.**

The disciples fished all night but caught nothing; that's a great description for believers who try to go back to life as it was before they knew Christ--there's nothing there but frustration.

John 21:4 says, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus." Do you know who's always waiting for you when you bottom out? When you come to the end of yourself? The irony here is that we usually don't know what a special place this is; all we can feel is the fear and the helplessness and the frustration of our present circumstance. We feel like failures, so lost and exhausted, and ashamed. We feel absolutely alone. But in

this case what feels like the worst place is actually the best place, because now we are in position for a fresh touch from our living Lord. Jesus is available to us when we are finally emptied of ourselves. **Now we are ready to hear His voice.**

John 21:5-6 say, "He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish." Please notice the progression. Disciples have become somewhat disillusioned and impatient in their relationship with Jesus Christ. They try returning to their old lives. They find nothing there but frustration. Now they are exhausted and desolate. Then they begin to hear afresh the Lord's call upon their lives. They obey His voice.

A miracle occurs. They are reminded that He is still alive and more alive than ever. They move back toward Him.

John 21:7-8 tell the story: "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards." Hearing the Lord's voice and obeying His voice leads to the experience of a miracle, which in turn, leads to recognition. "It is the Lord!" We are impressed now with how fast the disciples return to Jesus. Peter swimming, and everybody else rowing, as fast as they can, make their way to Jesus. Would you say, **"now we can't wait" "to get back to Jesus." "for Jesus," "is alive!"**

John 21:9-14 conclude our passage for this morning: "When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

Again, I want us to recognize the pattern. Spiritual staleness leads to spiritual apathy and doubt. Doubt leads to an attempt to return to our former comforters. The attempt to go back leads to frustration and desolation. Spiritual desolation prepares us to receive a fresh encounter and to hear a fresh word from the Lord. Obedience to a fresh word from the Lord leads to a miracle. The miracle opens our spirits to the reality that Jesus is alive and present with us. Our faith is revived. This leads to renewed fellowship with Jesus and with one another.

Does any of this sound familiar? Have you been here? Done this? Where are you at in your spiritual walk with Jesus this morning? Are you fed up, dried out, and ready to pack it in? Or, have you come to the end of yourself where you are ready for a fresh word from the Lord? Or perhaps you are enjoying the blessings of a recent encounter with the living Jesus? Where are you at in your spiritual walk? Which direction are you moving?

**Wherever you are at this moment, just remember that God has never loved you more than He loves you right now, and that He's waiting for you to recognize Him standing on the shore. He has food for you. He has love for you. He has forgiveness for you. He has fellowship for you. Hear His word. Obey His voice. Recognize the miracle. Come back to Him. Have a fresh encounter. Know again that He is alive.**

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Sermon for March 23, 2008

**He Speaks, Stones Roll!**

**Psalm 46; Matthew 27:50-54;**

**Mark 16:1-8**

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