

## 15<sup>th</sup> April – The Foundation of Our World – Mathew Hessian

What a busy few weeks we have had here at Caversham...

Firstly, we have been through what I thought was a fantastic series about living missional lives. There was so much practical stuff in there and what has excited me is the conversations that this has caused me to have with people that I would previously not have had.

We will come back to a bit of that a little later...

Then, in the middle of that, the Apologetic Course. If you are left-brain dominant and love logic and reason, then you will have been in your element! Are you ready to provide a reason for the hope you have in Christ?

Then, we had a fantastic Easter journey together. The *Colours of Easter* had us thinking very deeply and, certainly for me, in many ways, about the events leading up to Jesus' betrayal, his crucifixion and then his resurrection.

It was a real chance to be close to Jesus and be a real part of his story. To share in the feelings, the tastes, and sounds, the high and the lows of his Easter Journey really made it real.

It made it real in a surprising way for me – I was left wondering how on earth did the disciples not know what/who they had in front of them? I was thinking - how did they just not get it? Everything about the story just shouted to me – how did they just not understand?!

When they did, the world changed...

Of course, I then ask the next 2 questions of myself. Do I really understand what God is telling me and has been telling me through his word?

And if I do, then so what?

I read Randal's message from last week somewhere high above the Tasman on Tuesday night and I realized we had very similar themes - I guess we married sisters so, that our messages are of a similar - but not the same - theme should be of no surprise...

So I will make no apologies for the similarities – although for punctuation and attention to detail, defer to Randal's ...

When David spoke on Palm Sunday, he asked “Where were you during the donkey ride into Jerusalem?” Remember on that morning in Jerusalem, no one knew of any of the events that were to unfold. The Palm Sunday excitement has passed, the crucifixion was real, and in the light of Jesus having been brought back to life, where are you now?

Surely it won't be about the Resurrection again this morning, I hear you asking...

### **1 Cor 15:12-19**

<sup>12</sup>Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

<sup>13</sup>But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

<sup>14</sup>and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

<sup>15</sup>Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

<sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

<sup>17</sup>and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

<sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

<sup>19</sup>If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

It is pretty clear how important it is for us to have faith and belief in the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Without that truth - what are we doing here? Paul certainly made his views clear in that to the Corinthians.

So, this morning, as we look once more at how the disciples just did not get it. We are going to ask ourselves how well do we really know and understand Jesus?

Of course we have one advantage over the disciples. We have the benefit of hindsight - of being what they call in the US a “Monday morning Quarterback”.

That is to say that it is easy, on a Monday morning, to look at the way a game of football was controlled by the Quarterback on any given Sunday, and to say that we could have or would have done so much better.

We risk doing that when we look at the disciples during Jesus' death experience – but I don't think that means we should not do it.

Unlike the disciples we know the end of the story. You can only imagine how it was for them - the not knowing.

**But** for 3 years, as they sat at his feet, as they reclined at tables with him, as they ate with him, as they watched him perform miracles and as they shared in his ministry, he taught them many things.

He taught them:

- How to live with one another, how to live with strangers, and the outcast and downtrodden - the disadvantaged and the challenges that the rich and successful had.
- How to live under the authority of the rulers of the land.
- He taught them about forgiveness, about love, about freedom from the law of Moses and he taught about the fulfilling of the Scripture.
- He taught them about the Kingdom of God and how they would be able to enter that kingdom.
- He also taught them about his own ministry and his own purpose for being on earth.
- He taught them about the Holy Spirit that would come after him.
- He taught about being the ultimate sacrifice - that on earth they would have life in all its fullness, a life that would see them enter the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that would be never ending and that so long as they confessed him with their mouths and believed in their hearts they would be saved.
- He also taught them, on many occasions, that he would be killed and that he would rise again after 3 days - he would come back to life.
- He told that this had to happen to reconcile man to God and in order for the Kingdom of heaven to come.

They had every reason to believe him, and they certainly thought they did - but did they understand him? They thought they did - but we know they didn't.

As a nation, the Jews didn't believe in a resurrected Messiah. They had nothing in their world view on which to base Jesus' teaching... not what he was *really* teaching anyway - even though Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead in front of their eyes - they did not truly believe he would raise himself.

Here are some of the things Jesus said to the disciples about the resurrection:

#### **Matthew**

*12:40 For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

*16:21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.*

*17:23 And they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.*

*20:19 And will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.*

**Mark 9:31-32** *For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.*

And so it continues in Luke and John – You get the picture – it wasn't a surprise. There was no reason not to believe and to misunderstand all that Jesus was teaching them about his coming resurrection.

So what happened leading up to the death of Jesus – how did the Disciples show their understanding of these events?

We heard the stories of Peter last week, the 3 Denials. Would this have happened if Peter truly understood and believed what he had been taught for 3 years?

- Peter showed his limited understanding again in the Garden when he lopped off the Guards ear thinking he was protecting Jesus....
- Judas was clearly not fully understanding of what he had been taught – if he was, would he have betrayed Jesus the way he did?
- Jesus asked the disciples to stay awake and watch with him in his darkest hour in the garden – I think if they truly understood what was about to unfold they would have stayed awake....
- At this stage the Disciples did not understand Jesus to have been so literal – did they think it was some sort of magical, spiritual event Jesus had been teaching them?

And then He died:

- The Disciples don't get much of a mention at that point – they were hiding in case they were associated with Jesus.
- The woman attended to pay their last respects and tend the body – [they had a devotion no one can question that – but an understanding?]

- The Pharisees knew what was afoot but didn't actually understand - they wanted to seal the tomb to prevent a body snatching and a false story being spread.
- Then the earthquake rolls the stone away on the third day and the first reaction – even then – remember all those teachings – even then, the reaction is “someone has taken him” – the Women say it, and Peter and John well they don't know what to think... What they don't say is “Aaah, yes that is right – he told us over and over and over again that he would rise on this the third day.” What is that expression? “As plain as the nose on your face”.

Then the Pharisees learn of the disappearance act and they orchestrated a massive cover up once they realised the body was gone -

**Matt 28:12 – 15**

*And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.*

Had they known the depth of the disciples understanding, I wonder if they would have bothered. But you know in our world of logic and reason Dawkins and – this action from the Pharisees actually supports the rationale evidence for the truth of the resurrection more than it does deny it.

Back to the disciples -

So, Jesus had risen. Even then they did not connect the dots.

Jesus appeared to 2 men on the road to Emmaus. It is clear from their conversation that as soon as he was dead they had given up hope. They did not recognise him and by the time they did it was too late – he was gone!

And then, Jesus met the disciples in the Upper Room and it was not until he ate with them that they thought he was anything other than a spirit. The following week Thomas came in. He needed to put his fingers on scars in order to believe.

So even after all of that, the teachings, the events, and the resurrected appearances, they struggled to accept the reality that Jesus had risen from the dead.

You see the Jews were and are a very successful nation of people: They hold a very strong identity as a nation. They keep it through beliefs, customs and traditions and structures and passing this down the generations. When other nations around them in those times have since been wiped out - the Jews have survived.

Within the framework of their own Jewish experience, their own set of beliefs, the disciples did not truly understand what Jesus really meant. On the foundations of their own world-views, passed down from generations, they could not really fit the reality of what Jesus has been telling them.

They did not understand that when Jesus spoke so often about being a sacrifice and dying and coming back in three days - that what he really meant was - He was to be a sacrifice, die and come back to life in 3 days. He is tricky like that Jesus.

The only frame on which they could hang the teachings of Jesus was on their own traditional beliefs - that he may well be the Messiah - but on their terms not on his.

- Not as a conquering King (not this time round anyway... but that is whole other message we need to know and understand).
- Remember Palm Sunday? And if you have kids you will remember the Palm Sundaes too.... On that day, the cries of *Hosanna* were not for Jesus as a sacrificial lamb. They were cries of *Save Us* - save us from the rulers of this world and deliver us into our own place.

But Jesus was coming on his terms - and we know this - he came as a humble servant sacrificed. Not as the conquering Messiah they were expecting.

- A sacrifice to end all sacrifices - after him there was no need for animal blood to be right with God - his blood was sufficient.
- Jesus said he came to fulfil, not to abolish, the Law of Moses. Adhering to the law was not going to get you into the Kingdom of Heaven any more.
- They had always believed in Just one God and yet Jesus was telling them there were in fact to be Father Son and a Holy Spirit....

Now – I am not saying for a minute that the disciples were not devoted to him – it is clear that they were. But their devotion was not able to help them through the desperate times of these events; the times when he was physically far away from them. The times when they faced ridicule and arrest and harm.

Despite that they had everything going in their favour to actually, really, truly believe that Jesus was for real. When they faced the testing fires, when doubt and fear and confusion reigned, Jesus did not. Because that is not how they understood him.

As Randal made clear last week, the introduction of the Holy Spirit to proceedings changed that for the disciples and suddenly everything they had been taught made sense. It just seemed to click into place for them.

Then they were constantly being filled with the Spirit and that enabled them, it compelled them to action - to preach the Gospel.

But not just preach - it caused them willingly to ultimately sacrifice their own lives for the sake of the mission to which they had been called.

Julian spoke a few weeks back of the *Compelling love of God* – a love that when we truly understand it compels us to act for him – to love others, to love others in a way that supernatural and would otherwise be impossible, to speak out and to act in His name.

The contrast is so immense between the confused, timid, questioning doubting Disciples and the Spirit filled Disciples that went from those first Church days and preached the gospel – even unto death.

In **Romans 9:33** - while referring to the Jews attempts at righteousness through works and considering the gentiles who were believing by faith – Paul pointed them to scripture from Isaiah which says, "*Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame*"

Paul and Isaiah are referring to Jesus. Plain and simple. A stone of stumbling needs no explanation. And we know Jesus is a Rock. To us he is a rock of foundation, the cornerstone.

**1 Corinthians 3:11** *For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

And we know the parable that a house built on a rock will not fall away.

If Jesus is your foundation rock, is your whole world-view based on Him? Your decisions, views on morality, forgiveness, generosity, loving others, sharing and preaching his word? What about your view on creation, death and eternal life, work, money, love and sex. Family and Church - are they all based on your foundation stone?

The reality for the disciples was revealed, as Jesus was visible. For us, it the Holy Spirit. If we are to truly understand Jesus to truly know his teaching in his heart to truly shape our view of the world on him as the foundation then we need the Holy Spirit to be working in us – as God has promised he is.

Once they had been filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples were compelled to action.

Going back to the BELLS series: If you are sitting there wondering how you take your knowledge and make sure you understand the truth of what Jesus is saying as you learn him, listen to these words from John:

**John 16:12 – 13** *"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth: for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come"*

Jesus is saying "I want to tell you the Truth - but you can't handle it'. And so, he is sending the Holy Spirit to help guide them to that truth and to show them the things that God has to say, delivered from God, by Jesus and made known to them by the Holy Spirit.

And then they changed the world forever! Wow!

As believers, each one of us received the Holy Spirit too. We received the day we declared Jesus Lord and Saviour in our life. The Spirit dwells within us. Scripture tells us that very clearly.

As we continue to be filled with the Spirit, we will be compelled by the truth, and our clear understanding of that truth, into action.

So, in our cushy *Monday Quarterback* position, how do we learn from what the disciples experienced during those days?

We really need to learn Jesus – but we cannot do that on our own. We need to acknowledge the helper that Jesus sent to guide us into the truth and into all understanding.

So:

- As you sit here as a faithful servant and follower of Jesus, a learner of him, what areas do you want to go deeper in your understanding? Where is Jesus calling you to focus with him right now?
- If that is not you, ask yourself what world views do you build on that may not align with Jesus as our foundation stone? Things that make him a stumbling block for you?
- Are there things in your life that are not built on the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God raised him the dead?
- Are there steps you need to take to understand more of Jesus this morning?

*“Get wisdom, get understanding; Do not forget my words or turn away from them. Do not forsake wisdom and she will protect you; Love her and she will watch over you.*

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” Proverbs 4:5-6*

*May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Amen.*