

The scandal of the cross (II)

My claim is that, in the New Testament, to ‘preach the gospel’ means to tell the story of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

As I see it, that is the whole purpose of the Bible, to get the message of the gospel across to us. And at the centre of the gospel is the cross which, as I tried to depict last time, is totally and utterly shocking!

The familiar story of the disciples on the Emmaus road, has come across to me today with incredible power. (Yes, I know this is Lent, not Easter. Sorry, but I can’t help it!) Just think of how they felt!

They had actually been with Jesus and they **knew** for a certainty that Jesus was the **Messiah** – they had seen the lame walk, the deaf hear, etc. in exact fulfilment of loads of (Old Testament) scriptures. And Jesus spoke with such authority! Can you imagine their growing excitement? Clearly, this was the Messiah. Yes, he had said something about dying, but they weren’t really listening. Like us, they heard what they wanted to hear and ignored the rest!

He [the stranger = Jesus] asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. (Luke 24:17)

‘Downcast’? **Is that the understatement of the (first) century?!**

- Their closest friend had just died. (Bad enough on its own?)
- Nay, their closest friend had just been **flogged, publically humiliated and murdered.**
- Nay, **God’s Messiah** (so they thought) had just been flogged, publically humiliated and murdered.

And they were **really** confused because some of the other disciples were saying that Jesus had come back to life. Crazy! They had seen him die, remember.

The stranger then says, *“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (24:25-27)*

At the very least, he would have done a Bible study on Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, but it does say, *“Beginning with Moses...”*. And gradually they would have seen scriptures that began to make sense of what had happened. Maybe it wasn’t a defeat after all?

But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. (24:29-31)

Can you imagine how they felt NOW?! “Where has he gone?! That was Jesus! He really **IS** alive!”

Have you ever wondered why Jesus legged it at that point? It feels a bit heartless, doesn't it? Once they realised it was him, they'd have had so many questions they wanted to ask him, and it would have been great just to sit and gaze at him. What an amazing evening that would have been for them.

But then follows one of my favourite verses in the Bible (v32): *They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

Maybe **this** is the understatement of the (first) century?!

They simply **had** to share this good news!

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”
(24:33,34)

They had no need for atonement theology. Jesus is alive! Death has been defeated! That's good news. That's fantastic news! That's gospel.

(But I'll be back return soon with some atonement theology.)

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