

Jesus Appears

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of experiential Christianity, where we experience God in our daily lives, and how this is different from intellectual Christianity, where we only know about God.

Duration: 32:48

Scripture: Psalm 119:11, Psalm 119:176, Matthew 7:7, Matthew 18:12, Mark 12:28-30, Luke 24:32, John 20:19-20

Topics: "Renewing The Mind"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the mechanical nature of faith in Christian circles today. He highlights a recent study that shows a significant number of churches in America are either stagnant or decreasing in membership, with thousands of churches closing each year. The speaker then focuses on the story of Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, emphasizing their initial confusion and sadness despite Jesus being alive. He emphasizes the need for a real and personal encounter with God, rather than just intellectual knowledge, and prays for revival and unity among believers.

Transcript

Rather than getting right back in our study in the book of Acts, we're going to do a post-resurrection analysis right now from the Bible. Last Sunday was Easter Sunday. Jesus rose from the dead.

That was what was being celebrated. And the Bible tells us of several post-resurrection appearances that he made. The Bible tells us that for 40 days, off and on, he appeared to his disciples, mostly, and talked to them about the kingdom of God.

He wasn't with them all the time, as he was before he was crucified. But he appeared, then disappeared. And it's interesting why the Holy Spirit would anoint the gospel writers to give an account of some and not others.

He appeared to his half-brother James. We know nothing about that. He appeared to Peter, who had failed him so drastically.

We know nothing about that appearance. He appeared to 500 people on a road. We know nothing about how that all happened, except that it happened.

Others, we get in great detail. So let's look at one. It's familiar.

It's a little bit longer of a story, but let's look at it from Luke, okay? Now that same day, the day that the women were saying he's alive, two of them were going to a village, disciples called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them.

But they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, what are you discussing together as you walk along? And they stood still, their faces downcast. And one of them named Cleopas asked him, are you only a visitor to Jerusalem? And do you not know the things that have happened there in the last few days? What things he asked? About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied.

He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

And what is more, it's the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body.

They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. He said to them, Jesus, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Christ or the Messiah 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. He went through the Old Testament and showed them where he had been foretold. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, stay with us for it's nearly evening and the day is almost over.

So we went in to stay with them. And when he was at the table with them, he took bread and he gave thanks and he broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were open and they recognized him and he disappeared from their sight.

They asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and he opened the scriptures to us? They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the 11 disciples and those with them assembled together and saying, it is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon, that's Peter. Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Probably the greatest problem in Christian circles today is the mechanical nature of the way most people view their faith. A new study has just been done, which was just sent to me this week, that out of the 335,000 churches that are in the 50 states, more than 200,000 of them are either stagnant or decreasing in membership. And 4,000 or more churches in America are closing every year.

Not only that, people are fudging when they are asked in surveys, do you go to church? They say they do, but they really don't, but they claim to be Christian. So given this backdrop, I would like to suggest to you that one of the reasons why things are getting difficult in Christian circles is because that people who go to churches or people who profess to believe in Jesus or profess to have been born again, profess to be followers of the Christ, that their religion has become mostly mental and mechanical. Mental and intellectual that they hold certain views, whether they're in the Bible or not, they hold certain views about

Jesus.

Many make up their own views about Jesus. And then for the most part, it's not real and experiential. It's not dynamic.

It's not real and alive. There's very little consciousness every day that Jesus is alive, that he still speaks and leads and touches hearts. Christianity is something you do on Sunday.

Christianity is something you believe. You have a doctrinal statement. You're a Calvinist.

You're an Arminian. You're a charismatic. You're an evangelical.

You're a Baptist. You're a Methodist. And you pigeonhole yourself, and we put ourselves in a category, and then it has very little effect on everyday living because it's mostly in the brain.

But sin and the world is not in the brain. Sin and temptation and the world is real. It's tangible.

It's experienced. It's the difference between studying what an apple is and knowing the history of apples, all the different types of apples, how to peel an apple, what is the core made up of. It's the difference between that and eating an apple.

You can study all about an apple, but if you never eat an apple, taste an apple, you really haven't experienced an apple. You can study about God. You can know doctrines about God.

You can study his own word. But without an experience with the living God, it becomes all just facts. And when the world comes, and pressure comes, and temptation comes, these are not theoretical.

These are real, and thus the pull of the world being real. The temptations to sin, which are real. The allurements of money and riches and power, which are real.

These things squeeze out what's in your head because they're real, and all we have are concepts. And thus, less and less people are involved in church because once you get away from the reality, experiential nature of what Christianity is supposed to be, and it merely is a position in your head and a place you go to once a week, you get rolled over like a steamroller by all the other voices. Now, all the first believers experienced Jesus because he was alive.

When Jesus said to Peter, James, and John, follow me, they saw a real Jesus. And when he walked down the road, they followed him. They didn't have a doctrine about him.

They knew him. When Jesus died and resurrected and went back to heaven, he said, it's good for you that I do that because I'm going to send the Holy Spirit. Now, I can only be in one place at one time, so only a certain number of people can experience me.

But when he comes, I've been with you. He'll be in you, and he'll be everywhere. He'll be with every believer.

He'll be doing all kinds of things because he's God, the Holy Spirit, as much God as Jesus the Son is and the Father is. So that this experiential nature of Christianity can become maintained and not be merely a set of teachings and doctrines in someone's head. Not talking now about emotions.

For those of you who would like to dismiss me and say, oh, he's talking about some kind of emotion. No, emotions are not an experience with the Holy Spirit. An experience with God, the Holy Spirit, which is really Jesus now communicating himself through the Spirit, that can produce emotions.

But you can have emotions without Jesus. You can have emotions in a movie. You can have emotions in an opera.

You can go to Broadway and cry. You can go see Annie and say, man, it's a hard lock life. But tomorrow, tomorrow, I love you.

Tomorrow, you can have emotion. You can cry. That's not God.

That's just emotion. But an experience with God, like these two men had, that changes your life and gives you a burning heart. And because the Holy Spirit is invisible and he is downplayed in most churches, you end up with intellectual Christianity.

We become like Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses who have teaching and doctrine, but no experiential side at all to their religion. It's just follow our teaching and you'll be more right than anyone else. That's not the nature of the Christianity of the Bible.

The Bible doesn't say, oh, study and see that the Lord is good. It says what? Taste and see. That's an experience.

Oh, the theologians and the conservative element of Christianity says, that's just emotionalism. We go by the word, but the word tells us, oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. It's the word that points us to the Holy Spirit.

So we're having less and less Christians who sing and can sing this song, and he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me that I am his own and the joy we share as we tarry there. None other has ever. See, this has been common to Christians over the centuries.

You can experience God, you can walk with him, you enjoy fellowship with him. Now, some churches have tried to replace that by just pumped up emotion in the service itself. But it's not good for us just to have emotion.

It has to be contact with God. And that's why I'm saying every time you walk in here, the pastors will tell you, we pray, we prayed this morning that every one of you would experience God here this morning. What good is it sitting in this pew and hearing a man speak? You need God.

I need God. How many feel their need daily of God? I mean, we need God, not to study and know more about him. I want to know more about him.

But when Paul makes a cry in the book of Philippians, he says, no, now listen, I haven't reached everything I want to reach, but oh, this is what I want, that I might know him. Paul, you already know him. No, I want to know him more and not know him only in su cabeza, but know him by experience.

I want to know him. I want to experience all that he has for me. And this is what changed these two men.

They had an encounter with Jesus. And Christians can live for months without encountering Jesus. And come to church and get dry.

And then the word becomes less attractive to you. And you have less fervor to minister to other people. It's not because you're not a Protestant or a Christian anymore, or whatever you call, whatever we call ourselves.

It's because we've lost the fire, the juice, the salsa. So now just notice this about these men. And I'm done because we want to pray.

This is why it's hard for me to understand how anybody can believe you can have a Christian meeting without a good time of prayer, because at the throne of grace, we actually can experience the Lord. But he can come at other times too, not when you're not in church. These men were not in church.

This was a surprise visit. I want you to notice just a couple of things about this with that context that I just set before you. Number one, they're walking down a road and they're depressed.

They're confused. They're sad. And yet Jesus is alive.

See, Jesus is alive and he's about to join them and he's going to bless them and do something great in their lives. But they don't know it. They have no joy.

They have no peace. Why? Because it's not real to them. They got questions.

Spurgeon, the great British preacher said on his deathbed, the only thing that will overcome doubt and unbelief now in my final days, I see, is a manifestation of the glory and the presence of God. You can have preaching. It can be great.

It can be clever. The speaker can make you laugh. He can use flowery language.

But unless my soul meets the living God, who's going to lift me? Then it becomes a show, Christianity as theater. So they are down in the dumps like we've been. Jesus is alive.

He loves us. He's going to help us. But since they haven't made the connection, doubts and circumstances and the crucifixion has overwhelmed them, they need a visitation from the Lord.

Just like some of us. We're here today. You walked in.

You're down. You're discouraged. It's like Jesus isn't alive.

Like God doesn't love you. But see, that's the difference. You can know these things in your head, but unless they're real in your heart, you give in to what you see around you and you go down in the dumps.

So the antidote to that is an appearance of the Lord, or we would call it today, an experience with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, but something real. So very poignant part of this story is they're not looking for him. He's looking to be with them.

They're not walking and praying, oh Jesus, if you're alive, come to me. He comes to them on his own. Oh my, my.

How many times has Jesus done that to me and to you? We're down. We're at a low point in our life. We're going through all kinds of things and the Lord draws near to us.

How many have ever experienced it? Just lift your hand and say amen. I mean, it is true. He's a rewarder of those who what but even when you're not seeking him, he still will come to you.

Is he not amazing? I can tell you moments in my life so low, so twisted, so wrong, so discouraged, so messed up before and after being in the ministry, but in his mercy, he comes to me like he does these two men and that changes everything. He came to them and sometimes he has to come to us because we don't even have the faith to reach out to him. Do I get an amen? I mean, it's the truth.

What struck me the other day this week, I was reading backwards through Psalm 119 and the last verse is so strange. Here's a man, 176 verses, the longest chapter in the Bible and here's a man who has written these marvelous words like, thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. All these 176 verses, there's truths in there that are so, open my eyes that I might see new things from your word and all of that.

Most people agree it's not the Psalmist David who wrote that Psalm, it's someone else, but this is marvelous. And then how in the world does he end the Psalm with this kind of admission? Look at verse 176, I have strayed like a lost sheep, seek your servant for I have not forgotten your commands. Notice this, I've strayed like a lost sheep.

I don't know about you, but I say, I've experienced that in my life. Anybody here with me? I have strayed like a lost sheep. That encourages me so much.

The man who wrote the longest chapter in the Bible could also say, I have strayed like a lost sheep. Notice what he says, you seek me, please come after me. Please chase me down because I'm in a bad place.

I need your help, but you'll have to come after me because I'm at a place where I can't even reach out to you. That's so honest. For I've not forgotten your commandments.

I know you're real. I know it's true, but you got to seek me and find me because I'm wandering. If you're wandering and straying, the Lord is looking for you.

He's the good shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep. He wants to approach you, wants to approach me and reveal himself to us. So he came to them, but they didn't know it was him.

And I was pondering all day yesterday that maybe here today, before I close, this is going to ring somebody's bell. The Lord sometimes approaches us and whispers something and we don't know it's him. Can I give you a couple of hints? Whenever you hear any urging to prayer, it's him.

Whenever you find any thought in your mind to get alone with the word of God, it's Jesus. Respond to it. Whenever you feel a burden and you feel like weeping over someone that you see messed up, that's not the world, that's not the flesh, and that's not the devil.

Be careful because sometimes Jesus approaches us in just the everyday moments of life. We have to be awake to him. He can visit you in the number three train while you're hanging on there.

You do need him on the number three train sometimes, the A train too. You can be just washing up in the morning or taking a shower and he could just touch your heart and he wants you to just sing to him in the shower. In other words, if you decompartmentalize Jesus, you're going to miss something.

If you say he's for nine o'clock Sunday morning, you're going to miss what he can do. He didn't come to them in a synagogue or at the temple. He came to them walking on the road and he was revealed to them while he ate a meal.

Some of the most precious moments in my life, looking back, have been eating with people. I think of one time eating with a pastor when I was still in college, eating a lunch up on top of the house he had in Connecticut, and while we were eating and talking, the Lord came. The Lord came.

Pastor, what are you talking about? I don't know that kind of Christianity. I'm not trying to convince you about something I've experienced. I'm telling you in the word, from the word of God, he can come at any time to warm our hearts, to encourage us.

Haven't you ever been beaten down by life? Am I the only person here in this building that has needed him? How many say amen by lifted hand here? I mean, we need him to come to us. I've strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant.

Seek your servant. God, I need you. Another thing that happens when you don't have a burning heart and you lose this sense of the reality of God is you start to talk to God about things as if he doesn't know them.

They say to Jesus, oh listen, don't you know what's going on? He's risen from the dead. It's Jesus, but they're talking like, no, you can't believe what we're going through. Isn't that so typical of us? When the Lord is real to us, we run to him and we say, God, here's what I need.

You see what I'm going through. Lord, I'm coming to you. I know you're going to help me.

But when we lose that vital faith, when we lose that vital communion, it's like, oh God, how could you let, God, do you see what's going on down here? Well, of course he does. And I just want to say to everyone here, he knows exactly what you're going through today. He knows if your heart is broken.

He knows who hurt you yesterday. He knows what that person on the job is doing. He knows what you're facing in your family.

He knows how the devil is attacking you. He knows everything. And he's just looking for you to open your heart and for me to open my heart so he can come and make us strong by his presence, by his presence.

Now notice together how his word and his presence work together. And this is one of the ways you can always test whether the Lord is working in your life. The Bible says that he opened to them the scriptures and said, don't you know? Why are you surprised that he was crucified? Why are you surprised by he went through all of that? And he opened the word to them and showed them from the law and the prophets and the Psalms, all that was spoken about him.

Whenever the Lord visits us, he makes us hungry for his word. This is the full proof sign between emotion and praise God we had church and a real meeting with the Lord. When you meet with the Lord, when God visits us, he'll always begin to bring us to his word and open the word to us because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word.

I've lived around in my life, a lot of stuff that's passed as the spirit, but I think it was more emotion and auto-suggestion because when it was over, the people were not hungry for the word of God. This is a full proof sign of when God works in you. Of course, he's going to honor his word.

He wants us to live in the word. And one of the symptoms that is so troublesome right now in America is 1200 people in America stopped reading the Bible every day. And even in the church, there's a biblical illiteracy now, which is staggering.

People are swallowing lies and they're not strong in their faith. Why? They don't pick up this book and read it. We were studying in my church history class.

Do you know that during the middle ages and when the reformation began, did you know that people were burnt at the stake because they wanted the Bible to be in the language of the people? Are you at all familiar with church history? Do you know that at that time, the Roman Catholic system forbid anybody to have the Bible? No, we're the only ones who can interpret it. We'll tell you what it means. You don't go looking in the Bible.

It was forbidden and people could be excommunicated if they owned a Bible and they persecuted and killed people for trying to put the Bible into English or into German. And now we have our Bibles. And how many in the choir are in front of me here? We barely pick it up.

Then we wonder why our faith isn't stronger. I don't know. I'm going through so much.

Pray for me. I will pray for you. But if you don't get in the Bible, you're going to be weak for the rest of your life.

That's like somebody not eating food, not eating vitamins, and then coming, pray for me. My body's all broken down. We will pray, but we're going to pray that God gives you some sense so you start to eat.

How many are with me? Say amen. Listen, this is very practical. This is the way, what the Word of God says.

Jesus opened to them the scriptures. Finally, they said to him, don't leave, stay with us. It's getting dark.

I thought last night, sometimes when our lives get dark, we're going through tough times, how we need to just say to him, don't leave, please. Stay with me. Commune with me.

I'm going to set aside time where I'm not busy working or doing this or that. I just want to be with you. While he was breaking the bread and handing it out, they realized that it was Jesus.

Then he disappeared from their sight. Listen to what they said. This is a challenge to all ministers, but it also speaks about real Christianity.

Here's what they said. Didn't our hearts burn within us when he spoke to us along the way? Not, oh, how funny that guy was. That guy is a character, that preacher, he's so funny.

They never said that about him. Did you hear the words he used, the eloquence, the poem he had at the end of that? No, they didn't say that. Didn't our hearts burn? Because when your heart is burning with the Holy Spirit, by the touch of God, you can face anything in life.

When you've had time with the living God, you can face anything. Because I found this, brothers and sisters, when you've really experienced the Lord, your problems are this big and God is this big. And when God becomes distant and we don't come in with him, our problems are this big and God is this big.

Didn't our hearts burn within us? I want to live my life with a burning heart, and I can't heat up my heart. I can't make that happen. It comes by visitations from the Lord.

Yes, I want to walk in the Spirit. I want to fill myself every day with God's Word, but oh, how I want the experience of God coming to me. And if you read the book of Acts, that was happening.

They would have a great prayer meeting, but then they would have another great prayer meeting a few weeks later or a few years later, a few months later that we hear about. They were constantly experiencing the Lord. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. It wasn't go to church on Sunday and this is my doctrinal position. It was God is alive.

Jesus is alive. That's what he wants for you. And if you're suffering today, you're weak today, you're hurting today, what you need is not pastor symbol or the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

You don't need to be a Protestant or a Catholic. You need a meeting with the Lord. Can we pray together? If you're here in the balcony or downstairs and you say, pastor, I want to become more open.

I want to be more alive to the Holy Spirit. My Christianity is suffering from mechanical, mechanical service, just mental more than heart. I have more an active mind than I have a burning heart.

And I don't want to live in emotionalism, but I want to taste and see that the Lord is good. I want refreshings that come from the presence of the Lord. I want seasons where God renews me because today what I'm facing, what I'm going through, I don't need church.

I need the Lord. I don't need a sermon. The sermon is great.

Point me, but I need the Lord. I need living contact with the Lord. Stand up right where you are.

If you feel that need, I want to pray for you. Just stand up right where you are in the balcony or downstairs. Pastor, that was for me.

Thank you. Thank you. Not going to call anyone forward.

I'm going to pray for you right where you are. Just stand up. Just stand up and say, I want a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

I want to even today in the way that God wants. I want him to come and talk to me and visit me. Open the scriptures.

It takes humility to say that, but my goodness, what an example we have with the Psalmist. I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Oh God, seek me out for I have not forgotten your word.

Anybody else want to stand? Just stand right where you are. Pastor, I love the Lord and I remember times in my life when this thing was beating, throbbing, alive. I have not gotten mature.

No, I'm going to face the fact that I've lost something of that first love, that fervor, that sense of his presence, that sensitivity to where he's leading, what he's saying to me. I don't want fanaticism, but I don't want dead orthodoxy. I just don't want to be a church goer.

I want the living Christ. There's a lot, a lot of people standing in this room. Everybody, eyes closed.

Father God, thank you that you can visit us on the road and you put up with our unbelief and we're telling you stuff you already know. And I'm so thankful that you come near to us when we're too weak to even ask you to come. You come to us in our confusion, in our worldliness.

We're all caught up with a lot of stuff that means nothing, but in your mercy, you come to us. We're discouraged. We're depressed.

We have questions everywhere. We're ready to just explode with anxiety and thank you for all those times you've visited us and brought your peace and your joy. We want to be more sensitive to you.

We want to spend more time with you. We want to experience the living Christ, not just study the living Christ. We thank you for your word.

We thank you for sermons. We thank you for church, but our souls thirst for the water, the reality of your spirit working in our lives. You see the people that are standing? Come, Holy Spirit.

We need thee. You came to make Jesus real. Make him really real.

We pray for all the churches in New York City that meet in beautiful cathedral-type buildings or storefronts. Everyone who calls upon your name, we pray that you'll send a revival of the Holy Spirit to all the Christian churches. We pray that across this country and across this world, there will be an outpouring of your spirit so that Jesus becomes real, real, really real to us, Lord.

In the midst of wrath, remember mercy. In a world that's going downward so quickly, morally, in every way, Lord, the only hope is that you visit your people and revive your church so that we just don't study about you, but we experience you, that our hearts are burning every day with love for you and a passion for people to come to know you. I pray that this coming to us will also provoke great love among the believers, Lord, that racial and denominational barriers will come down and that we will love one another unreservedly.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Be with your people today now in Christ's name. And everyone said, would you turn around? All the men hug about five or six men.

All the ladies hug.

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