

The Adventure of Coming Home

In his book *Orthodoxy* GK Chesterton tells the plot of a novel he never got around to writing. In this novel an English yachtsman sets out to discover a new island in the South Sea. The problem was that he slightly miscalculated his course and actually landed on a remote part of the coast England (the country from which he set out). This man landed on this island armed to the teeth and ready to plant the British flag on barbarian soil.

Chesterton says that you are very mistaken if you think that the man felt like a fool when he realized that he had “discovered” England. He might have looked like a fool, but he didn’t feel like a fool. He actually found it exhilarating because within the span of a few minutes he experienced both “the fascinating terrors of going abroad” and “the humane security of coming home again.” This man experienced the thrill of thinking he had discovered a new land and was then moved to tears when he realized that he had rediscovered “home.”

This plot serves as something of a parable for Chesterton’s own spiritual journey. Chesterton was the man in the yacht who discovered England. He set out on a grand adventure to discover truth once and for all. He thought he would land on the distant shores of a new philosophy, but he ended up landing on a well-populated island, a faith that people had embraced for 1800 years old. He had the thrill of a philosophical adventure and the security of coming “home” to orthodox Christianity. He came to the simple truth that Jesus died on the cross for sin and then was raised from the dead three days later.

I have no doubt that there are some here today who have set out on an adventure similar to Chesterton’s. You are in pursuit of the truth. You want to know the truth about God and life and life after death. You might wonder whether one religion/faith is as good as the next, whether all religions lead to God. And so you’re on an adventure in pursuit of truth.

I would like to humbly submit to you today that many people who have set out on that adventure have discovered what Chesterton discovered. They have come “home” to the simple truth that Jesus died for our sins and rose again on the third day. I would like to invite you examine with me how Jesus led the original disciples on a similar adventure. We’re addressing this topic on Easter morning because their adventure involved the realization that Jesus had risen bodily from the dead.

The Adventure of the Original Disciples: Coming Home to their Own Faith

During the three years of Jesus’ earthly ministry the disciples really couldn’t understand who Jesus was or what He was trying to accomplish. He told them over and over that He would die as a payment for sin, but they couldn’t understand what He was talking about. It turns out that *the person and mission of Jesus could only be understood in light of the resurrection*. Once they “landed” on the fact that Jesus had died for sin and been raised from the dead, they realized that they had actually come home. They had come home to the Jewish Scriptures that they had loved their entire lives. They realized that He was the fulfillment of everything that they longed for.

Confusion over Jesus' identity and mission during His earthly life (Mark 9:9-10, 31-32).

Let's consider a couple of examples from Mark 9 which illustrate how the identity and mission of Jesus really couldn't be understood before His death and resurrection. The first paragraph in Mark 9 describes an event known as "the transfiguration." Jesus took His three closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) up onto a high mountain. While they were there Jesus was "transfigured" before them. The word "metamorphosis" is derived from the Greek word transfigured. In saying that Jesus was transfigured meant that His form was changed; Jesus' appearance was visibly changed before the disciples. Mark writes that "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." Matthew adds that "His face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2). This transfiguration gave the disciples a glimpse into the glory that Jesus had from eternity past and the glory that He would have after the resurrection.

You can imagine how Peter, James, and John would have wanted to tell the others what they had seen. This is only human nature. If you experience something amazing it's the most natural thing in the world to want to tell others. Notice what Jesus told the disciples as they descended from the mountain (verses 9 and 10):

9 And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.

Jesus actually forbid them from telling anyone what they had seen ***until after*** the resurrection. Why did they have to wait before telling people that they had seen Jesus' face shining like the sun and His clothes brighter than anyone could bleach them? That question really isn't answered in this passage. But verse 10 is instructive:

10 And they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean.

We know what "rising from the dead" might mean: it means that Jesus was going to die, be put into a tomb for three days, and then literally come back to life. But the disciples obviously didn't "get it." At that juncture in their thinking, there was no way they could accept both Jesus' glory ***and*** His suffering and death. Therefore there was no way that they could represent the transfiguration in a way that was compatible with the mission of Jesus. And so Jesus wisely prohibited them from speaking about the transfiguration until after the resurrection.

The wisdom of Jesus' prohibition is confirmed down in verses 30 through 32.

30 And from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it. 31 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."

We see Jesus' statement as a very straightforward explanation that He would die and be resurrected three days later. But Mark records this in verse 32:

32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

Perhaps they remembered the earlier exchange between Peter and Jesus. Jesus had explained how He "must" suffer and die and be raised from the dead (8:31). Peter actually rebuked Jesus because he thought it was foolishness for Jesus to die. Jesus then rebuked Peter saying, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Perhaps the disciples remembered that exchange between Peter and Jesus; maybe that exchange causing them to be fearful of asking Jesus what He meant by being killed and rising three days later. (See also Luke 9:43-45, Luke 18:31-34.)

This statement that is so clear to us was a mystery to them. They simply didn't have the categories necessary to understand someone being raised from the dead. We see throughout the gospels that the disciples were confused about the person and mission of Jesus. But they were on an adventure. They were in pursuit of truth. They wanted to know the truth about God and life and life after death.

Let's turn now to Luke 24. In this chapter we see how the disciples only reluctantly came to believe that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead. They were predisposed not to believe in the resurrection. But once they were convinced of His resurrection, everything changed. They realized that this adventure with Jesus had really brought them back home – back to the very Scriptures they had learned from childhood, back to everything they had longed for their whole life.

Clarity about Jesus' identity and mission after His resurrection. (Luke 24) We don't have time to read the entire chapter, but let's notice how repeatedly the followers of Christ are told after the resurrection the exact same thing Jesus had told them before His death and resurrection. Notice first what the angels told the women at the tomb. They were confused and frightened when they found the stone rolled away:

5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." 8 And they remembered His words, 9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.

The words Jesus had spoken to them now came back to mind. It began to dawn on them that what Jesus had told them had actually happened. Only after the resurrection did they understand that Jesus ***had*** to be crucified. Only after the resurrection could they understand

that He *had* to pay for the sin of the world. He hadn't come merely to be a wise teacher; He had come to die for their sins.

10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. 11 And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

Even after the women had reported an empty tomb, the disciples still couldn't comprehend the resurrection. Their words "appeared to them as nonsense."

Verses 13 through 35 recount Jesus encounter with the two men on the Road to Emmaus. It's a rather humorous account because the two men are freely talking about theories related to death and resurrection of the man who had been crucified in Jerusalem, not realizing that they were actually talking to the risen Christ. After they mentioned what the woman had reported about the empty tomb, Jesus says this in verses 25 and 26:

25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"

Jesus tells them that they should have understood from the Old Testament that both the death and resurrection of the Christ were a divine necessity. In order for the Christ to bring people back to God He had to die and be resurrected.

27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Jesus took them back to their own Scriptures. Eventually God opened their eyes to recognize Jesus. Luke records that Jesus then "vanished from their sight." At that moment they realized that the promised Messiah dying and being raised from the dead was not merely a theological construct. It was a reality. Jesus had actually risen from the dead. And that changed everything.

Naturally, they ran to report to the eleven disciples what they had experienced on the road to Emmaus. While these two are telling their story, Jesus appears in their midst.

36 And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

Again, they couldn't quite believe that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead. They thought they were seeing a spirit. And so Jesus graciously provided all the proof they needed that He had been raised bodily from the dead:

38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

As a final confirmation of His bodily resurrection, Jesus asks for something to eat:

41 And while they still could not believe it for joy and were marveling, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it before them.

When they saw Jesus actually swallowing bites of broiled fish, they knew that He had literally been raised from the dead. At that point Jesus told them *after the fact* exactly what He had repeatedly told them *before the fact* about His death and resurrection:

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

I love how Luke phrases it in verse 45:

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

When their minds were opened, they understood what Jesus had told them for three years:

46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Jesus made clear to them that they had come home to the faith they had known from childhood. **He** was the fulfillment of everything that their Hebrew Scriptures had promised and anticipated. He was the descendent of Abraham who would bless all the families of the earth. He was the fulfillment of the entire sacrificial system. He was the descendent of David who would reign in the kingdom of God forever. His blood would establish the new covenant that would remove their sins as far as the east is from the west, writing the law of God on their hearts instead of tablets of stone. He was the One who would be marred more than any man (Isaiah 53) and who would die for the sins of the people. When Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, they realized that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything they already knew and loved.

They set out on a voyage as disciples of Jesus; when they finally "landed" they had discovered that they were back home. They weren't merely back home in the sense of coming home to their Jewish Scriptures. They were back home with God. God was now their Father; they were now His children. They could now enjoy the wonders of being in a

household where they were perfectly loved and accepted. In one sense their adventure was over, but in another sense their adventure was just beginning. When they came home to God, God included them in His plans for this entire world. They would now invite others to come home to God also.

The Adventure of the Every Person: Coming Home to God

Every single one of us here today is on a grand adventure. Like Chesterton we have each set out on a voyage to discover what is true about God and life and life after death. We can't help but wonder about these things. We start from several different places. A lot of us started out going to church and hearing Bible stories. Perhaps others of us started out in a faith different from Christianity. Perhaps others of us started our adventure with no faith at all.

Regardless of where you have begun your adventure, we all start in the same place as people who have souls and who are created in the image of God. We instinctively know that there is more to this life and eating and drinking and working and playing. We are born with eternity in our hearts; we know that there is more to this life than what we can touch and see with our eyes.

Here's the thing that the disciples' adventure makes clear: if Jesus really did rise from the dead, He is in a category all by Himself. And like the disciples we have to re-think what we have always thought. If Jesus actually rose from the dead, then what He taught and what He did has to be taken seriously. A person who conquers death has the authority to explain God and life and life after death. A person who accurately says ahead of time, "I am going to be crucified, be buried, and then be resurrected three days later" can be trusted as a reliable guide to God. If He says that through Him your sins can be forgiven and you can come home to God, then we should pay attention.

Earlier Reyna told her story about trusting Christ early in life and then coming back to God in college. I too was raised going to church and reading the Bible. But for whatever reason I was a lot like the disciples before the resurrection. I heard the words, but I didn't really understand the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Those ideas were just words to me. But my second year in college, I "saw it"; I saw a group of students who were followers of Christ and who had true joy. They talked freely about Jesus and about the life they were experiencing. The life (and the lifestyle) I saw in them was far superior to anything I had experienced. For me trusting Christ was like coming home. I finally experienced what I'd heard about my whole life. I came to the conviction that Jesus is in a category all by Himself because He died and rose again.

Wherever you are on your adventure, I want you to know that you can "come home" to God through simple faith in Jesus Christ. He died to pay for your sins; He rose to give you life. If you believe in Him, you will enter into life. When you come home to God the adventure isn't over; it's really just beginning. When you come to Christ your life won't necessarily be easy, but it will be good.

I'd like to mention one more thing before we pray. We offer a course here at Faith on Tuesday nights called Alpha. It's a place where people at any stage in their journey can hear more about Christ and can have honest discussions about Christ. A new course begins this coming Tuesday night. First there is a meal at 6:30, then a teaching video, then discussion. You are welcome to come to this course. Many people have found it to be a good place to learn more about Christ.