

RECOGNIZING THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

By Pastor Gordon

Introduction: Preachers all over the world are aware that the majority of people only attend church three times in a year. They go at Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. This adds a great deal of pressure on the part of the Pastor to preach a message that will take root in their heart and stick to their bones until they see them again. I do believe that God has a profound message today for each of you, but in order for that message to get through, your heart must be opened to receive it. People come to the house of God with three types of hearts; one that is made out of stone which makes it impossible for the word to penetrate through and do them any good. The other is a heart with no faith where the word will be accepted, but as soon as they go out the door of the church, they will return to their usual habit with no thought about the Lord or their spiritual condition. As a result, the message they have received will quickly disappear and therefore, will not benefit them. The third category is a fertile heart where the individual is eager and hungry to hear what the Lord has to say because of their need for guidance, support, or the Lord's intervention. That mindset and attitude has great benefit since God wants to bring a solution to whatever dilemma we are facing. Those who open their heart to hear what the Lord has to say will experience the hand of God moving in their situation. Further, the word that they have received will enable them to bear fruits of righteousness, position them to receive the victory, and guide them to safety. There will be evidence where people will be able to see a change in their situation. It is my prayer today that everyone will have a fertile heart so that you will be able to hear, receive and be blessed by what God has in store for you.

In the Christian faith, we celebrate Easter on a Sunday generally on the third or fourth Sunday in the month of April. Christians prefer to use the title, "Resurrection Sunday" instead of the word "Easter" to make sure people are aware this celebration is not about Easter eggs, it is not a fashion show so that the focus will not be on individuals, but rather on Christ. Further, Easter is not a kids' day. Resurrection Sunday is that season where Christians around the world celebrate the triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave after three being in the tomb for three days. During this season, the average person will think about Easter egg hunting, buying new clothes, and going to restaurants. When that happens, Jesus becomes an afterthought, so this special event becomes meaningless. It is a fact that Americans spend over a billion dollars every year to buy candies, cards, and clothing during the Easter season. There's nothing wrong with that so long as we don't lose focus of the fact that the resurrection represents a mighty victory over what many fear the most, death and the grave. Parents should take time to explain to their children that Easter is a special day to remember the sacrifice Jesus made to pay for all the evil things we have done, and after three days, God raised him from death back to life. Everyone who believe and serve him, will also inherit eternal life. It must be made clear that Easter has nothing to do with rabbits laying eggs. In fact, rabbits do not lay eggs, so I don't know where that crazy idea comes from. The Easter season serves that importance purpose of letting everyone know that Christ did suffer and die, but He is now alive, and sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for you and me. When Jesus shows up in our church, home, school, or workplace, are we able to recognize his presence? Can we tell when the Lord is present at Mount Carmel Prayer Chapel? The message the Lord has for us today is designed to alert us to be so sensitive to the things of God so that we will be able to recognize and treasure

the time of fellowship with the Lord. How wonderful it would be if we value, as much as the Lord, the time of fellowship with the Master to the point that we will be aware of His holy presence when he appears unexpectedly to meet with us. In the Bible passage we are about to read, we will learn how the Lord unexpectedly showed up to his own people, and yet they did not recognize his presence until much later.

Sermon text: Luke 44:13-24, *“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”*

Message: The Apostle Paul talked about the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, as follows: *“For what I received I passed on to you as of*

first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.” Resurrection Sunday is important because many people do not believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead. That is why pastors across the globe have an obligation to preach this truth until the Holy Spirit can convince them of the reality of the gospel message. In fact, there are several churches that deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the grave. Instead of relying on scriptures, many skeptics deny the authority of the bible and refuse to accept that Jesus rose from the grave. No one can be a Christian unless they believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The scripture verses we read about the two men’s journey to Emmaus have some important applications for us to think about. Emmaus was actually less than eight miles away from Jerusalem. That is why it took them about two about two hours to make that journey. The two men were troubled because, like many of the disciples, they were hoping that Jesus would have been the one who would redeem Israel and deliver them from the oppression of the Roman government. They were present and witnessed the brutality of the Roman soldiers against Jesus. They saw the beatings, the mocking, the desertion of the disciples, Jesus being hung on the cross, and the spear that was jabbed into Jesus’ side. They were also present that Sunday morning to hear the stories from the women about Jesus being alive, but they refused to believe those witnesses. Rather than be settled with the peace of God and to reflect on the message of the gospel, they instead decided to focus and relay on their feelings rather than on the integrity of God’s word. As a result of what they had witnessed of the mock trial of Jesus, they were

confused and had more questions than answers by refusing to trust on the integrity of God's Word. Since they were overwhelmed with sadness, they coped with their emotion the best way they could by talking among themselves trying to make some sense out of it. Had they focused on the actual gospel message that had been foretold by the prophets that the Messiah would come, would undergo suffering, and would be put to death, then they should not have been surprised when they had heard the testimony of the women. It should have been a confirmation of God's word which would have given them hope and joy. Above all else, those two men should have remembered and reflected on the Word of the Lord when he told them plainly on several occasions that he would surrender his life as an atonement for sin. He also shared with them that He would come out of the grave after three days. Those two men, like many of the disciples, decided to lean on their own understanding instead of placing their faith on the Words of the Lord. Those two men were blessed to have experienced the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus, listened to his teachings, observed the many miracles that He had performed, and saw his passion to save souls. Yet, they did not recognize that same Savior that had done all those things when He walked with them on the road to Emmaus. While those two disciples were walking on the road, they started to discuss the main events that were troubling them, which was the unjust crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus approached them and started to listen intently to their conversation. Jesus asked them what they were talking about, and the two men started to explain their version of what had happened to Jesus. It is at that point that the Lord started to explain to them about the plan of God as foretold by the prophets. The Lord explained the fact that the Messiah had to suffer, die, and then enter his glory. To make sure that the disciples understood God's plan, Jesus went on to teach them about the words of the prophets as written in the Old Testament.

When they finally reached their final destination in Emmaus, the two men invited Jesus to stay with them, and the Lord agreed. While at the dinner table, Jesus gave thanks to the Heavenly Father, and that is the point they recognized that it was the Lord. There was no doubt left in their mind when they saw the special relationship between Jesus and His Heavenly Father through the prayer. They witnessed the intimate communion and relationship between God and his Beloved Son. That kind of special bonding that they witnessed was consistent with what they had observed in the past. This led to the opening of their spiritual eyes that they were actually in the presence of the Master. Jesus revealed himself to them in order to remove any doubt about the reality of His existence and resurrection from the dead. It is at that point that Jesus disappeared from their presence. The two men immediately rushed to Jerusalem to pass the good news about their encounter with the Lord. They also gave a powerful testimony about their experience with Jesus while Jesus they were on the road to Emmaus. They confessed that they had experienced something unique in their heart as Jesus revealed to them the truth of the Gospel. The fellowship with Jesus impacted the lives of those two men. It is impossible to be in the presence of the Lord without being impacted unless we shut him out. Their heart was fertile to receive the word of God, and as a result, they were blessed by His divine presence. The two men that were with Jesus could very well had been you and me. There was nothing that stood out about them. They were ordinary individuals going about their daily business. But, because their mind was on the Lord, Jesus decided to visit and walked beside them. They could have rejected the stranger, or the conversation could have gone a different way by reflecting on worldly things. But since they were seeking truth and opened to hear what the Lord had to say, this divine encounter ended up being a life changing experience that blessed them in a special

way. Jesus proved to them that death does not put an end to a believer's life. Just like the Messiah suffered and then went to glory, we do not need to fear death because we too will be ushered to glory.

CONCLUSION: You will also have at least one divine encounter with the Messiah during your life's journey. It is hoped that you will recognize the Savior during such visits and open your heart to hear the good news that Jesus has forgiven you, love you, and care for you. The two men had been exposed to the teachings of Jesus in the past, but the Word of the Lord had not taken root in their heart. By the grace of God, this divine encounter was different because they were opened to hear what the Lord had to say. As you open your heart to receive the gospel message instead of allowing it to go into one ear and hungry to receive what the Lord had in store for them. You too will benefit from it by inheriting eternal life in the Lord. Going to church is not enough. Listening to Christian television or radio programs is not enough. However, when you open your heart to allow the word of God to penetrate, it is at that point God will invest his Word in your heart so that it can accomplish His divine will of giving you eternal life. Death no longer has a sting. The grave no longer has its victory because the Lord had conquered them both. As a result, you and I as believers, will inherit eternal life. So, we don't need to fear, but instead be at peace knowing we have overcome.

ALTAR CALL: You may have come to church today out of routine to pay your respect to the Lord and may not return again until Christmas. But God has explained the message of salvation in simple terms that even a child can understand it. Jesus, our Messiah, has paid the price for all our faults, shortcomings, and sin. However, you have an obligation to accept this free gift of

salvation by accepting Jesus Christ in your heart, asking him to forgive you of your sin, and to write your name into the Lamb's Book of Life. There is nothing more important than making sure that your eternal future is secure. If you are ready to make this most important decision, please come forward to the altar. By the same token, some of you may have accepted the Lord in your heart once, but have walked away from him into a different path than God intended. The Lord has a plan for your life that will make it meaningful, impacting, and will bring glory to his name. God wants to give you the victory, but you must return home where you belong. The Lord has his arms wide open to welcome you back home. If you want to accept the Lord's invitation, please come forward to the altar.