

THE DOWNCAST FACE

“They stood still, their faces downcast.” (Luke 24:17)

This is quite remarkable! Two of the disciples of Jesus had downcast faces even though they knew the basic facts of the Gospel. This is not a good sign. They were walking to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, when Jesus joined them in their journey. Mark 16:12 reminds us that Jesus appeared to them in a different form so that they did not recognize Him. As they walked they explained to Him what had just happened in Jerusalem. Here is what they said (See Lk. 24:19 - 24).

- Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and the people.
- The chief priests and rulers of the people handed Him over to be crucified.
- They had hoped He would redeem Israel, and this was the third day since His death.
- Some of the women amazed them.
 - They went to the tomb but didn't find His body.
 - They reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.
 - Some companions verified the story but didn't see Jesus.

The point is what they “knew” intellectually, had not yet impacted their lives enough to chance their faces!

Later that night, as you know, Jesus made Himself known unto them in the breaking of bread. Here is what happened (See Lk. 24:30 - 35).

- They strongly urged Jesus to stay with them and not continue on His journey.
- When they ate together He was made known to them in the breaking of bread.
- Then they remembered how their hearts burned within them as they traveled with Jesus.
- Then they got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.
- There they told the disciples what had happened and how they had seen Jesus.

It is safe to assume that after this encounter with Christ their faces were no longer downcast!

Not long before Luke Perine died of cancer he spoke at the Missouri Christian Convention. In that message he pointed out that “Rejoicing in the Lord is just as much a command of the Lord as Acts 2:38”. He then lamented that in 30 years of preaching he had seen some of the saddest faces he had ever seen in church. He said that during a six week stay in the hospital he took a survey to see if he could find anybody who enjoyed going to church. He said that he only found four who did, and two of them were black. One man confessed: “I hate to see Sunday morning come”. Two or three others said that they “dreaded having to sit through that hour”. Luke concluded that “SOMETHING IS WRONG . . .”

When something is wrong inside it invariably shows up in our face. Just before Cain murdered his brother God noted that he was angry and had a downcast face (Gen. 4:6). Hannah's face was downcast because she had no children (1 Sam. 1:18). Belshazzar's face revealed his fear when he saw the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5:6). Nehemiah's face was sad because he heard that Jerusalem was in ruins (Neh. 2:2). A sad face is not consistent with the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is “joy” not “sadness”.

When something good happens to us that also registers on our face. The face of Moses was radiant because he had been in the presence of God (Ex. 34:29). Even the face of Jesus changed on the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:29). When Stephen died his face was like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). Ecclesiastes 8:1 reminds us that “wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance”. St. Francis of Assisi is supposed to have said: “Preach the Gospel every time you have a chance but don't use words unless you have to”. There is a sense in which the face of a converted man is like a living letter known and read by all men (2 Cor. 3:2).

The Bible word for “transformation” is “metamorphosis”. It is found only four times in the N.T. Scriptures. Two times it is referred to what happened to Jesus on the holy mount, and two times it refers to what happens to believers in Christ. When we come in contact with Christ, that life changing metamorphosis is bound to be reflected on our faces (2 Cor. 3:18).