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The Bewildering Truth by Ben M.

I am going to talk about our bewildering faith. Even the word is slightly bewildering so we have to stop and think what it means. What do we understand about what's going on? It's like watching the killer punch in a boxing match where the eyes roll because he is shocked by the impact of the blow. The gospel is like that. It has a bewildering, affect. It knocks people out and when they come to, the world looks altogether different because of what Christ has done.

Bewildering Faith is a right and proper response to the astonishing things we are talking about. If we are no longer astonished by these things is the life of our faith beginning to burn rather low and do we need to turn up the gas? It's something we need to learn to live with; it's right, normal and natural. More than that it is something you grow to love. This amazement is a foretaste of a greater divine glory that will only come to pass in the world to come.

The earliest manuscripts finish Mark's gospel at verse 8 of chapter 16 where the women leave the tomb in a state of bewilderment. Mark starts his account with the statement that this book is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ and I am convinced that he purposely ended his gospel with this sense of bewilderment. Mark begins the gospel story (1:1) and leaves it in this state of bewilderment so that the gospel will continue off the pages to live in your hearts and lives so that you, the people of God should pick up the baton of this bewildered faith and run with it until Jesus Christ returns.

According to our own calendar it is not unreasonable to say that it was on the 5th of April in the year AD33 that Jesus was tried and crucified. Then on the 7th of April, the disciples, after the euphoria of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, are in a state of bewilderment because of the contradictory things that were happening. We have an account of a conversation between two men as they walk to Emmaus. Their whole conversation was about Jesus of Nazareth. They were saying that Jesus was a prophet who spoke the word of God and was powerful in word as well as in deed. He wasn't just putting on a show for the people. He was the same in the secret place with God as he was with the people. They were amazed at how the chief priests, the ones who should have been the most susceptible and open to this great prophet, were the very people who handed him over to be crucified. That is enough to send you reeling. But it goes on. They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah: 'The hopes and dreams of all the years' that people had held close to their hearts was lying in pieces. It seems that the expression, 'the third day' was significant to them. They are bewildered because the women went to the tomb and didn't find his body. In addition to that they've seen angels who said, "He is alive." How do we make sense of this? The irony is that they are relating all this to a third man, the very man they were talking about. These two were not the last people to find the gospel bewildering. If you are finding the gospel bewildering, well, good for you. That's absolutely right, healthy and normal because we are dealing with an astonishing and mighty God: great in power, work and deeds.

In a way the resurrection is less astonishing than Calvary. That God should raise his sinless son from death is more natural than that Jesus should stoop down and taste death for our sake. The astonishing fact is that Jesus took the punishment for our sin on his shoulders and then returned to heaven to intercede for us! It is the cross that bewilders and astonishes me: that our just and righteous God should love and

provide for sinners as he does.

Another amazing event was Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. In Abraham's day sacrifice of children was a normal event in Canaan. Abraham goes in obedience to God and returns astonished because he received Isaac back from the dead. In Abraham's mind Isaac was as good as dead. God provided his own sacrifice. God's ways are higher than our ways. You cannot figure him out or anticipate what he will do. All you can do is determine in your heart to be convinced enough in his character and power to believe him even though everything in your head says this makes no sense whatsoever. Will you trust the living God? Even though all the alarms are going off, will you still believe in him? God wants faith from us. He is not looking for full cognitive understanding but conviction, belief and trust no matter what happens.

Do you ever find yourself asking, "What is the Lord doing?" especially in times of suffering and discouragement? Jesus was torn apart in the garden of Gethsemane in his desire to do whatever it was that God asked him to do. 'Let your will be done' is the measure of his faith and commitment.

How would we react if we read Isaiah 53 as Jesus would have read it knowing that you were the Messiah and these words apply to you? "You will be rejected by everyone ... esteemed stricken by God ... it is the Lord's pleasure to crush you ... You will be pieced." This is real physical pain and suffering. It is hard to accept the realisation of these things. "You are going to be led like a lamb to the slaughter." To be clear the Messiah will be 'cut off from the land of the living'. He is not like Isaac who is given a substitute. He really will die and be buried in a grave with the wicked. Yet we read, (v10&11)" After he has suffered he will see the light of life." How can you reconcile these two things? We know Isaiah 53 is about Christ because in Luke 24:7 he quotes Isaiah 53:12. He knows God is going to work out this apparent impossibility as only God can. Jesus has seen the power of the resurrection at work in his own ministry. Just as he said to that little girl Tabatha get up, so his father will say to him, my son, it's time to get up. Jesus will open his eyes and he will see the light of life. So on the 5th of April AD33 he goes in faith and says, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." On the 7th of April the women see that he has risen because God is God and his word is true. You can stake your life on the word of God. If he said it he will do it. Long before his death Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me though he die, yet he will live." We are not required to get our heads around it but just believe it. Believe in the God and Father of our risen saviour Jesus Christ. Believe in him through the power of the Holy Spirit and though you die, like Jesus you will live for evermore. Eternal life is the gift of Jesus Christ for all who believe and trust in him. It's okay if you are bewildered. It's good to learn to live with this sense of wonder and realise this strange and precious faith is something to love and adore and hold on to and tell others about. It is the road to life everlasting. May God fill you afresh with his gracious Holy Spirit.