

Real Heart Burn

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[0 : 0 0] We're looking at the 24th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, and have been for the last two or three weeks. And the purpose of it all being to look at the resurrection of Christ and to try and understand it.

There are three stories in the 24th chapter of Luke's Gospel. And the first one describes the women as they went to the tomb.

The second story describes Christ meeting with disciples on the road to Emmaus. And the third one is the scene back in the upper room where Christ reveals himself to his disciples.

Now, I just want to tell you something that struck me very forcibly this week, and I worry about it.

I hate being in the religion business. Midland Doherty sounds attractive beyond all my imagining to think of going there every day.

[1 : 2 4] But religion really suffers these days, I think, because it really is getting the works. The other day, after that tragic football scene in Sheffield in England, and they were interviewing various people, and they talked to the president of the Football Fans Association for the whole of Britain.

And the commentator was asking about it and saying, was being asked about it. The commentator was probing this president of the Football Association of Great Britain and asking how such a thing could possibly happen.

And he said, well, now, why did that happen? Why would they behave in that way? And the president of the Football Association of Great Britain sort of lifted his eyes up and he said, well, with us it's like a religion.

Well, think of what that means. That means that basically religion is lemming-like mindlessness, mob enthusiasm, defiance of law and order, totally irrational behavior, and senseless and meaningless death.

All those things are associated with religion. Now, the result of that is, I went to see a distinguished citizen of this city, who's been in this city almost as long as this city has been a city.

[3 : 0 6] And so I said to him, well, what do you think? You know, I'd just been to the doctor, and the doctor knew how to handle me.

He put a pressure cup on here and listened to my heartbeat and took my pulse and did various other indignities, which I suffer patiently. So I thought to myself it would be nice as a minister to be able to go in and sort of say something like that to people.

And so I said to the doctor, this fellow was a doctor, I said to him, I can't take your blood pressure or see what your pulse is or look down your throat, but tell me what you think about God.

And so he told me what he thought about God, and he thought that he didn't believe in him. Honored, respected, you know, just a paragon of what Vancouver is all about, a pioneer of this great city.

He said, if I believe in anything, I suppose I believe in Mother Nature. And then he went on to tell me that all religions were the same, he thought, and that I've heard before.

[4 : 22] And I think the closest he came to anything that I would think of in terms of faith was he said that when I was faced with a critically ill patient having to perform an operation, I would say, help me for Christ's sake.

And that, you know, that was real to him. I don't denigrate that at all. But, you see, what's happened is that religion has really got out of hand in our society.

And, I mean, I got also the line about religion is the cause of most of the wars in the world today. And then they were enumerated for me to demonstrate the truth of that statement.

So you think, well, what is one going around promoting religion for when the consequences of it are so totally disastrous for everybody who seems to get involved in it?

And, you know, and where intelligent, sophisticated, respected, altruistic, good citizens of the community consider that the greatest contribution they can make is not to get involved in religion, which tends to induce the kind of thinking and the kind of behavior which is so detrimental and so glaringly wrong in some way.

[5 : 46] Well, the magnificence of this story of the road to Emmaus is that I think it describes to you what religion is all about from a Christian point of view. And at the heart of it, of the Christian faith, and at the heart of this story is an encounter with Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

That's where it's at. And apart from that encounter, I'm not sure that you can really understand what Christianity is about apart from that personal encounter.

when you can understand a whole lot of theology and you can have read the Bible through a hundred times and you can have gone to church all your life, but this encounter, this has got to be the continuing focus of your life.

And mine is that we have to maintain that encounter. And I think that's very hard for us for us to understand.

But I want just to show you how this sort of paradigm of how this encounter takes place, which is in this 24th chapter of Luke and part of which we read today, how it takes place.

[7 : 07] And just to watch, to watch as the two disciples are walking along the road and Jesus comes and joins them and dismantles the structured unbelief of these disciples.

Because most of us have a fairly formidable structure of unbelief. What I'm referring to is when the doctor says to me, all wars are caused by religion.

I believe in Mother Nature. I believe in crisis that you can cry out to someone you don't know necessarily. I believe religions are all the same. Most of us have a structure of unbelief of which those are ingredients.

And that structure of unbelief protects us from any serious encounter with the Christian gospel so that if anybody is going to encounter that, then that structure of unbelief has to be dismantled, has to be demolished.

And so Jesus comes along and joins with them and quietly demolishes their unbelief. And I just want to show you how I see him doing this.

[8 : 18] these disciples had heard his teaching, witnessed his miracles, and saw his crucifixion. So they didn't lack an understanding of who it was, who Jesus was.

They knew all those things. But they had no idea how to interpret them. They had no idea what the meaning of them was. So that many in our society are in just that position. They have heard the stories, they know about the miracles, and they know about the crucifixion.

But they have no idea how that applies or how that works out in their life. And Jesus had to break that down. The second thing he had to break down was that their eyes could not see him or recognize him as he joined with them and talked with them.

And I think that's because our eyes cannot see what our hearts cannot imagine. There's a whole reality beyond our daily experience which we can't even relate to as they couldn't relate to the reality.

The third thing was they did not believe the women. I mentioned this last week and I've decided that I am a feminist, an absolute committed feminist.

[9 : 29] But the one thing I believe about it is that it's far too important an issue to leave to the feminists. They don't even know what it's all about.

There's something far more to it than I think they've even begun to see. The third thing is I mean the next thing that they rejected the possibility of the supernatural in that they wouldn't hear what the angels had to say.

Now most people and if you look at most sort of contemporary sect religions it really is based around somebody who's come along with a new word you know a new revelation a new statement a new vision something someone who says something.

It's interesting that the angels those supernatural creatures that break into the story of the New Testament never say anything new.

Their function is to tell you what you already know and to remind you of it. that's their function. Our problem is not the problem that there's something we ought to know which nobody has yet told us.

[10 : 42] The problem we have is knowing what we already know and understanding what it means. And that was the function of the preachers and the angels. The next thing that of course that they got hung up on was that that it was already the third day and being the third day nothing yet had transpired since the crucifixion of Christ and so in the due course of the passage of time they began to despair as we all do.

I mean we all tend to react that way to the passage of time. It's now the third day. And so Jesus takes all these things which form the structure of their unbelief and it would be very worthwhile for you if you're not a Christian to examine the structure of your unbelief what it is that causes you not to believe and to examine it in depth.

Those of you who are Christians to help other people do that because until you've dealt with the structure of unbelief you can't start to build. Jesus did that first and having done that he then begins to work with them and he does it three ways.

He rebukes them he reminds them and he reasons with them. The rebuke is that they are fools and slow of heart and unbelieving.

The reminder comes from taking Moses and all the prophets which they already knew and working through them to show them that they already had the content of what they needed to understand the resurrection and then reasoning with them that the death of Christ was necessary because the Christ must suffer in order to enter into his glory.

[12 : 35] So beginning with Moses and the law and the prophets he interprets to them all the scriptures concerning himself. Now that's how he does it.

He takes the scriptures. Now you see what this means. it means that the basic testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not come from the women who were at the tomb.

It comes from Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, the whole content of scripture bears witness to it so that your faith in the resurrection is not just questioning the historic events of the resurrection day but understanding how that the resurrection day is established by the witness to the necessity of it which is contained in the scripture.

And that's what Jesus did as he began to build this faith in these people so that they could understand the resurrection. And he talked to them about the fundamental problem.

Someone told me yesterday of a group of women who were getting together. One of them has said there's never been anything in my life which has anything to do with religion.

[14 : 00] Where do I start? I've got three children, I've got a home to look after and I don't know where to start. He started with Moses and the Ten Commandments and said at least I begin to know what this is about.

And so Jesus started with Moses and the Law and the Prophets and began to build a structure of thinking. A structure on which the basis of our encounter with the risen Christ can be built.

Now how did he do it? He did it by walking along the road with them. In other words they were going somewhere and as they went they talked.

Now I think this is the way people learn. They learn by association. They were making kind of subliminal associations with the road along which they were walking but then they were also listening to Christ talking to them about Moses and all the prophets so that they were able to tie into every point along that road.

It was there that we were talking about this and it was here we were talking about this and we do that so that most of you who have got any grasp of the Christian faith will remember the place and the time where it first was made known to you so that you have that kind of association so you can talk about your journey and it was at that point in my life that I learned this and it was at that point in my life that I learned this and so Jesus goes with them where they're going and as they're going ties in the understanding of Moses and the prophets to this thing that was happening and I think that that's a profound insight into the way that education takes place I mean you all know how if you meet Mr. Kelly you think Mr. Kelly you know and then you can make the association you have association so Christ walks them along the road and builds into associations with that familiar walk to them the things concerning

[16 : 09] Moses and all the prophets and concerning himself so that they would do that so Jesus starts to build with them we find out subsequently in the story that as they walked along the road not only were they having the association with what was around them but they said did not our hearts burn within us so they were having an intense emotional experience as they listened to the teaching which Christ gave them you know how often you get involved in totally vacuous conversations where you're struggling hard to say the next possibly intelligible thing and that the whole thing just turns to fizz and evaporates on the air so meaningless and contentless is the conversation but that was not the kind of conversation they were having the kind of conversation they were having was burning their hearts every step of the way and they were conscious of a reality which transcended all that they were talking about all the ideas and all the concepts and all the teaching were still some greater reality which was dawning upon them emotionally and spiritually and psychologically and all sorts of other ways so that as they walked they were very much aware of their hearts burning within them and so

Jesus builds up this deliberate construction of faith in them by teaching them how to understand what they already knew now the advantage of talking to somebody who is really intelligent talking to somebody who is really mature and wise is not that they impart things to you that you don't know but they help put things together that you already know so that everybody in this room has a vast storehouse of uninterpreted raw material which is your life experience which you don't understand I talked to a young lady this week and she was in a kind of pitiable situation with a father dying and tremendous sense of grief for herself and agony for her father and she just sort of said as a child I was abused and now this I cannot make any meaning of it whatever life to me is totally meaningless and of course most of us are in some measure in that condition we've experienced a whole lot more than we can possibly understand in terms of human relationships in terms of our encounter with ourselves encounter with the world with success with failure with goals with dreams with vision all of us are just a mass of kind of uninterpreted uninterpreted and uninterpreted reality and we don't know what to do with it and then somebody comes along and talks to you and begins to take all those things and turn the lead of your experience into gold and so you suddenly find yourself enormously enriched by the fact that in your life things have happened which have tremendous meaning that you were never aware of before now that's what Christ did for those disciples he took all the raw material of their life the bitterness the disappointment the pain the suffering the joy the meaningless relationships the dead end streets that they'd been down and he put it all together forth so they began to see what it was all about they began to understand they began to understand themselves and that was that was what Jesus did well how could they respond to that well the way they responded was they came to Emmaus to the place they lived and all they could do is say come in and share the place we live that's all they could say and they had to say it because

Jesus were told made as though he would go further and he wasn't going to do it unless they invited him that's next week's sermon no it isn't I but I just want to point it out in passage they were invited to come in they were offered hospitality they shared a meal together they shared a home they shared a meal and there was the ritual of the breaking of the bread such ordinary ordinary ordinary experiences aren't they I mean just the kind of thing that our everyday is filled with and we don't even notice it come on in have a meal take this skin and in that totally ordinary experience this was not some transcendent result of years of research and pilgrimage into the mysteries of the unknown it was not where Christ took them he took them to their home and to a meal and to sitting around the table and to the breaking of bread and in that moment they knew who he was and he vanished from their sight because they knew who he was quite apart from his physical presence they knew who he was at a much deeper level and his physical presence was no longer necessary to them and so they saw him and he vanished from their sight well you see when your eyes see they see because your heart finally knows and your intelligence demands and you see that that is the focus of what it's all about you suddenly see who

Jesus is that's what it means to come to faith that's what it means to I think to be a Christian I don't think you can define it any other way than to encounter the person of the living Christ in his simplest of all ways a long walk conversation hospitality sharing a meal breaking bread in those most ordinary circumstances of life Jesus Christ the one who rose from the dead makes himself known while we may go in search of some esoteric experience at the fringes of human consciousness the person of Jesus Christ meets you right where you are and that's where you have to be able to be willing to meet him and I think that's hard work for us I mean I think that everything in us says we want you

God but we want you out there somewhere sometime and he comes in and and breaks bread with us well that's that's the that's the story and and I want to quit but let me just say a prayer as we do our God we live in a world where we know that everybody who is alive will be dead and that's kind of thrust and impetus of our lives but in the course of that it is your sovereign and divine purpose that we should encounter him who was dead and is alive even

[24 : 41] Jesus Christ our Lord so we ask that you will in your grace bring us to that encounter with the person of your son Jesus Christ break down the structures of our unbelief and build in our hearts and minds the structure of faith within which we can see Jesus we ask this in his name Amen de amen you and Jesus you