

Once Upon A Walk

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[0 : 00] What we're looking at is Luke 24, an amazing story, unique to St. Luke, as is the story of the prodigal son and the story of the Good Samaritan.

And this resurrection story of Christ, the road to Emmaus, beginning in chapter 24 and verse 13 of Luke's gospel, reads as follows.

That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. Their eyes were kept from recognizing him, and he said to them, What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?

And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

[1 : 18] And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes. And besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Some women of our company amazed us.

They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body. He came back saying they had even 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 anyone. He said to them, O foolish men and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken, was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory.

And we'll go on from there next week. The picture that I want you to have here is this one. If you start up here and you come like this, and there's three people walking along this road in this direction, that gives you a kind of illustration of what this story is about.

[3 : 07] Now, the interesting thing about it is that you're walking along like this, and you're talking and you're moving in that direction.

You're all going there. And I've often wondered about this. Counselors like to sit down face to face to counsel each other. It's interesting that when you're walking together, you're not looking at the person you're talking to.

You're looking somewhere else. And in this instance, what they were talking about, where they were going in their discussion, was towards an understanding of the person of Jesus Christ.

But as they moved towards that understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, who was walking beside them? Jesus Christ. So that, I think, is something that people experience.

I don't know that you can make anything of it unless you, in some way, recognize that that perhaps is how it happened to you. That you were going over there, but you were talking about him, but he was right beside you talking to you about himself.

[4 : 20] And he refers to himself in the discussion as, was it not necessary that the Christ, that is me, should suffer and enter into his glory?

So that intrigues me about this story. I think it's a brilliant story, and partly for that reason. I have a good friend who lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, and who is a great bird watcher.

And apparently the mouth of the Niagara River is a great place for watching birds, because lots of birds come there. And I read in the paper one day this winter that he was sighted for, having picked up his binoculars one day and looking out at the mouth of the Niagara River, he had within the span of his binoculars at one time seven different kinds of seagulls.

And so he's become something of an expert on seagulls locally in Niagara-on-the-Lake. And he was out watching these birds one day, and a stranger came along and talked to him, and asked about what he was seeing and so on, and he said and spoke with some expertise on the kinds of gulls that were there, and where they were migrating from, and where they were on their way to, and what was characteristic of them, and how you identified them, and all those kinds of things.

And the person he talked to was very interested, and in the course of the conversation proved quite knowledgeable about the subject, and so that animated him further, and he talked more about his interest in gulls and all, and said finally, won't you come home for a sherry?

[5 : 57] So they went home for a sherry, and they went into the house, and they sat down and poured themselves a drink. And he said, this book is really the most up-to-date book on the subject of gulls.

And the other fellow said, I wrote it. Well, that's this kind of thing happening here, magnified a million times in a sense.

And so this is what's happening as they walk along. It's interesting that the disciples were downcast, discouraged, disheartened, sad of countenance, long faces, is the way it seems to come out.

Well, they didn't have the kind of mindless optimism, which you often run into at funerals, or where someone's been bereaved.

Well, we'll always have these happy memories, we'll always have this, we'll all, I can't forget this, and on and on. We go sort of collecting a few scraps to ourselves to console ourselves.

[7 : 11] These disciples were not consoled, though they had what the world has regarded as probably the greatest heritage of spiritual teaching, which they themselves had been subject to for three years.

But that was no consolation, because the man himself was the one that they were interested in. They weren't interested in the family. They hadn't at least appreciated, as so many wonderfully religious people have appreciated, the great heritage of the Sermon on the Mount, or the wonderful parables that he left.

Because without the man for them, they had nothing. And so they were walking along fairly sad, and he wanted to be with them.

Now, you will remember that Thomas was famous for saying, unless I see the print of the nails in his hands, and the wound in his side, I will not believe.

Now, I don't think Jesus believes that. I don't think he thinks that. I run into it all the time, you know. I'm the kind of person that unless I see, I won't believe.

[8 : 24] Well, you may be the kind of person that unless you see, you won't believe. But the result of that is that you are deceived about most things all day, every day, by people who are experts at controlling what you see.

What you see on television, what you see in advertising, and what you see is highly manipulated to make you react and respond in certain ways.

So Jesus didn't approach these disciples and said, look, here I am. See me? Because he knew that he had to build the structure of faith in the hearts and minds of these people.

And what they saw would not be particularly significant. So the fact that the story says that their eyes were, in a sense, they weren't able to recognize him is only an incident to the story.

Because even if they had been able to, they still wouldn't have had what Jesus longed that they should have, and that is the structure of faith built into their minds and hearts.

[9 : 34] And so he walks along with them, and he cross-examines them. And I want you just to listen to this, and I'm going to just go through the story again, and try and show you how Jesus dealt with this.

Because I think in addition to being a story of the first Easter, it's also the story of how Jesus himself draws near to us and walks with us and helps us to come to the place of building the structure of faith in our minds and hearts.

He begins the cross-examination. What is it that you're...

First, as far as he was concerned, he was going with them where they were going. He didn't change the direction they were moving in. He talked to them about what they were talking about.

And he said to them, you know, what is this conversation about? And they stopped, and they looked sad.

[10 : 46] And Cleopas finally raised the question, the very question that Jesus wanted them to raise. Cleopas said, who are you?

Are you a stranger? That you don't know what's been going on in Jerusalem these days? And so their first understanding of Jesus, the stranger who drew near to go with them, is what has been the understanding of Jesus in the minds and hearts of people for a long time.

That Jesus, as far as we're concerned, and as far as the road we walk on, he is an uninformed, out-of-touch stranger that doesn't know what's going on.

And that's how we treat him. And so Jesus doesn't seem to be disturbed by that. He proceeds. You're the only person that doesn't know what's happened.

Jesus says, well, what has happened? And so they begin. Well, it's about Jesus of Nazareth. Who's he?

[11 : 59] Well, he's a prophet. A great prophet. And he spoke with great words.

What he said was, well, it was memorable. You couldn't forget it. And the interesting thing about him was, not only did he speak with these strong words, very powerful teaching, but he did things.

So that what he said and what he did, in a sense, kind of balanced against each other. There was this teaching on the one hand, and there were these miracles on the other hand, the things that he did.

And I'm not sure if there was ever in the history of our people such a prophet as this, who both said it and did it.

And those two things seemed to come together in him in a way that I can't remember happening before. And the strange thing about that was that he was very much in favor with God, because God obviously blessed him, and everything he did was blessed by God.

[13 : 10] And obviously he won the love and admiration of people. Oh, that's who he was. Well, what happened to him? Well, this is what happened.

Our own chief priests and rulers, the leaders of our people, what we would think of as the establishment, the people who make the decisions for us, the people who have the good of our people and our heritage and our culture and our religion at heart, these people.

Turned him over to the Romans. And they were determined that he was to be crucified. We don't understand why they would do that.

Why don't you understand that? Well, the fact of the matter is that we had rather hoped that it was he that would redeem Israel.

Oh, well. Why did you think that? What did you think?

[14 : 24] How do you think he would do it? Well, the way it happened was, you know, scarcely a fortnight ago, Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, just over the hill there, was dead and buried and in his tomb.

And Jesus went there and called him and he came forth wrapped in the grave clothes. Within that same week, he went into Jerusalem.

And as he went into Jerusalem, people suddenly became very excited about it, tore down leaves, spread them in his way, put their coats in his way, and he had this triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

We thought this surely must be leading somewhere. And no sooner had he got into Jerusalem than he made a scourge of leather thongs and went to the temple, which is more like a thieves' market than a temple.

And he took that and he drove them all out of the temple, overturned the tables, and we thought, well, surely this is the beginning of something great.

[15 : 39] And then later that same week, he met with the sort of the twelve who were the closest to him, and they had a long evening together, and we thought they were probably planning for something that was about to develop.

But in the middle of the night, he was arrested. Before morning, the Sanhedrin had met and condemned him. They had taken him to Pilate, and by dawn, he was on his way.

And by noon, he was crucified. That's what happened. And we hoped that he was the one who was at the very point of redeeming our people, redeeming our nation, making us again a free people.

Oh, well, is that all that happened? Well, that happened three days ago. Did anything else happen?

Well, yes. Some of our women were there early this morning. They were going to do the embalming, and they took the spices and the ointments, and they went out to the tomb, and when they got there, the tomb was empty, and they didn't see anybody.

[16 : 58] Well, was that all? Well, they said that they had a vision of angels, if you can imagine. Women are like that. They had a vision of angels, and he said, they said that the angels had said, well, he's alive.

Well, some of our company. Jesus said, what happened then? Well, some of our company went out, and yes, the tomb was in fact empty, but they didn't see anybody, and no vision of angels, and they came back, and we've just left them, and we're on our way home.

Well, Jesus turns on them, and he says, fools and slow of heart. You know, I just think that, you know, you get so many people who are convinced that the resurrection didn't take place, you know.

Well, you know, I think this story is just, if I may use this description, it's sort of like Agent Orange in the sort of stench of our mental jungle, which drops in and burns it out.

You know, this story is such a powerful story. And Jesus, when he turns on them, he says, you fools, fools, and fools, not in the sense of being malicious or evil, but in the sense that, don't you see?

[18 : 35] This isn't something that's being hidden from you. This is something which is being opened up to you. Can't you see what's happened? And he says, you're slow of heart, slow-witted and slow-hearted for the thing that's right in front of you.

It's right in front of you because all your life you've listened to the prophets being read. And Jesus says, what the prophets said would happen has happened.

That's all. You know that. You know the prophets. You know the empty tomb. What they said would happen has happened. Then he said, it was necessary.

It had to happen that the Christ should suffer. Now, you know that when you're, that most of the heroes of our world promise you a way of getting there without suffering.

And, they said, you have to know that it was necessary that he should suffer. There was no way around. And so, Jesus proceeded and he had to suffer.

[20 : 06] He had to suffer in order to enter into his glory. Strange way of describing the death of someone was entering into his glory.

His glory, of course, was God's raising him from the dead. And, I was talking to someone about this story this week and they said, well, if somebody is going to be a great leader for God, somehow that person has got to be made known.

How has God made him known? God has made him known by raising him from the dead. That's why he's someone you have to pay attention to that he should enter into his glory.

I've only got one minute to finish so I'll do it in one minute but I wish I could spend another half hour. Here it is. They said, we hope that it was him that should redeem Israel. But now he's been crucified.

Jesus, as he talked with them on the way, had a purpose of redemption which involved not just Israel but the whole human race.

[21 : 10] to redeem something is when your family home has been sold because you needed the money and some stranger has moved in and bought it and then your rich uncle arrives from the other part of the world and sees you downcast and disheartened and says, I'm going to buy it back and give it to you.

So Jesus has come to buy back to the love of God hearts that have been estranged from him. Jesus' work of redemption was at the heart of people.

That their minds and their foolish minds, their slow-wittedness and their slow-heartedness which had taken them off in love of all sorts of things alien to their true heavenly Father, that those hearts should be redeemed and brought back through faith in Christ to the one who loved them and the one from whom their inheritance would ultimately come, the inheritance of the kingdom which he had promised.

We're halfway through the story and the next half is next week at the same time and the same station. Thank you. Thank you.