

The Emmaus Road Story

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Date: 23 April 1995

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[0 : 00] I'll just pray first. Our God and Father, we look at your Word tonight. The day is almost over and the darkness is beginning to come.

And we ask that the reverse process may go on in our hearts, that there may be the beginning of a new day, and that by your Holy Spirit and through your Word, light may come. We ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

It's not hard to find people that will say that Luke's Gospel is the most beautiful book ever written. And I'm not going to debate that. You can make up your own mind whether you agree or not. In the Gospel of Luke, the most beautiful story is undoubtedly the story of the road to Emmaus. And it's found in Luke 24 beginning at verse 13, and you can find that in the Blue Pew Bibles. You can also find it on page 186 in the prayer book if you run out of Bibles. So there it is, and I trust you can see it all right. The great advantage of this beautiful, beautiful story is you've heard how impossible it is to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. All you have to do is give a preacher this story to talk about, and he will almost certainly make a sow's ear out of a silk purse. The, um... You see, what's happening here, let me just remind you, that the eternal God, the creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, has just done the totally impossible thing. And that is to have brought Jesus Christ back from the dead. That is, I would argue, and I don't know that anybody could contest it, that is by far the most important fact in the whole of human history, that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. And, uh, history tends to revolve around it. The Easter hymn says that death's mightiest powers have done their worst. And it has been demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the mightiest power is the most important thing. The power is powerless before the Almighty God. Death is a tyrant that holds us all in the thrall of fear and despair. And that power has been broken by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[3 : 41] So now God has another problem, which in some ways seems greater. And that is how to take people like you and me and make us aware of it. I'm sorry that there are so many of you here tonight.

It's all right. You can stay. But you see, Jesus, on the first Easter evening, chose to speak to two people. And, uh, that's quite mind-boggling.

When you think that God was speaking through him concerning the greatest event in the history of the world. And he chose for an audience two people who were walking down a lonely country road. And he went and drew near and walked with them.

And he chose for an audience three people who were walking towards the village called Emmaus. As he drew near to them, something strange happened that they didn't recognize him. Now, we regard our eyes to be perhaps our most important faculty. And what you can see, you tend to believe.

The New Testament is very careful to show you or to convince you that you are not going to see. The New Testament is very careful to show you or to convict you of the reality that your eyes are most often used to do.

[5 : 21] And your eyes are the door of deceiving you and your eyes are afraid to be afraid to ■.' That you would like when you see. But you see your eyes are baik usually until you dive and be careful.

because our eyes are Gegenrucks in others says, that your eyes are most often used to deceive you, and your eyes are used as a door of deception into your heart all the time.

And so it was important for this occasion that the eyes of the two disciples who were walking along the lonely country road should not recognize the person of Jesus.

They knew that somebody had come near them. They heard somebody talking to them. They were aware that a person was there, but they didn't know who he was.

And there may be many such people in this congregation tonight who have heard the Apostles' Creed, but you don't really know who he is, and you're not sure of that.

[6 : 39] So what happens is that God, having chosen to make his announcement to them, fixes it so they don't recognize him by sight, and furthermore, when he comes near, these two people are stopped by him.

I mean, they stop in their tracks, perhaps at being interrupted by an unknown stranger. And it says that their faces were disfigured with sorrow.

So not only were their hearts and minds confused, but their faces were disfigured with sorrow. And they, nevertheless, when they go to answer Jesus' question about what it is they're talking about, they're able to answer.

Because they're engaged in talking and disputing one with another. They're taking the events of the day and all that has happened on this weekend, they're discussing it, and they are, in a sense, disputing it, trying to establish what the truth of it is.

What it is that they had hoped. What it was that they had expected. What it was that had happened. Where had things gone wrong? How could this tragedy have taken place?

[8 : 22] All these things they were discussing and disputing between themselves. And as it turns out, they were very well informed about the facts of the case.

Very well informed. If you notice the text carefully, you will see that the subject was Jesus of Nazareth, that Jesus they knew to be a prophet, a proven prophet, whose power was demonstrated in the miracles that he performed and whose power was demonstrated in the teachings he gave.

And he was powerful both in his relationship to God and his relationship to people. So they knew all that about Jesus. They also knew that the events that had taken place, that their chief priests and the rulers of the people had given him up to be sentenced to death and they had crucified him.

Now remember, these are the established powers in the country to which they belong. Their chief priests, the guides of their religion, the readers of their scripture, the rulers of their country.

These people had given him up to be sentenced to death and they had crucified him. They knew also that this had taken place the day before yesterday, that he was dead for three days.

[10 : 17] So, if you, they had heard the first reports that had come in to the disciples from the women who had been at the crack of dawn on this first day of the week to the tomb, who had seen that the body was missing and who also claimed, as women tend to do, that they had seen a vision of angels.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could listen to that? But we're too arrogant, too, most of the time. As they were, apparently, they had seen a vision of angels.

So some of the men went out to confirm the reality of it, to find the hard facts. And they found that what the women had reported was true, that the body was missing.

And that's as far as they knew. But, when you think of the disfigurement on their faces, you recognize that they had had hopes.

And he tells Jesus that the hope that they had was that this Jesus, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people, would have been the one who redeemed Israel.

[11 : 44] On Good Friday, David Short gave a great sermon on redeeming, how Moses was used to redeem the slaves of Egypt and make them into a nation again.

How Samson was used to redeem the people of Israel from the enslavement to the Philistines. How Boaz redeemed Ruth and became the grandfather of King David and the ancestor even of Jesus Christ.

So they knew what redemption meant and they were ready for a redeemer. And when they saw and heard this man Jesus, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people, they assumed this must surely be God's redeemer.

And now he was dead these three days. so their despair was complete. And they went from there to the conversation switched from them telling Jesus to Jesus talking to them.

and he starts out by telling them that they were foolish and slow of heart. That means that they lacked the wisdom that they needed.

[13 : 23] Wisdom isn't something that is cherished in our society. It's something we hope the computers have and that we can make the computer work. But it's not something we have within

ourselves.

And Jesus said they were foolish in terms of the way they thought and they were slow of heart. They were trapped in a quandary of unbelief.

They were trapped in a bog of agnosticism. They didn't know what to believe. All their hopes were smashed. The one they had trusted in had been destroyed.

And Jesus tells them that they hadn't understood. In a sense he compounds their problem for them. And then he rebukes them and he said if only if only you had believed the prophets you know and this is the most damning statement for them as for you because you've lived all your life with the witness of the scriptures and the witness of the prophets and it's possible you have no idea what they're saying as Jesus accuses these disciples foolish and slow of heart if only you had believed the prophets then you would know and the thing that you would know is that the Christ must suffer now there is hardly anything about the life and ministry of

Jesus which is more offensive to more people in the modern world than the portrayal of him suffering the last throes of death hung nailed to a cross and yet if you had known that the very hallmark of human existence is deep human suffering that's the thing that bonds us together your hearts go out to Oklahoma City your hearts go out to poison gases in Tokyo your hearts go out to the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda to the endless hatred and fighting and violence in various parts of the world where human suffering is compounded and compounded and compounded day after day

[16:09] I heard today that a grand nephew of mine had his skull broken by a baseball bat a lovely little boy he's alright I think but the reality of human suffering is what ties us together the reality of human suffering gives us bonds to one another which we never have any other way if you don't know suffering you probably don't know anybody because every relationship involves a relationship of shared suffering at some level and so Jesus said if you'd known the prophets you would have known that the Christ must suffer you see the way Luke is developing his argument is that this resurrection which has taken place has only happened because it had to happen it couldn't be stopped nothing could have stood in the way of it happening that the very son of God should experience human suffering and out of that suffering it says he would enter into his glory you know there's no crown without the cross to put it in very simple terms and the basis on which you and

I will perhaps come to faith is through shared suffering with the Christ who according to the prophets the ancient witness must suffer before he enters into his glory then Jesus takes them and gives them probably the most wonderful Bible study in the history of the world and it says that as they walked might be an idea to consider walking Bible studies sometime but as they walked beginning with Moses and all the prophets he told them the things concerning himself now they walked seven miles it's believed that night so

I hope it started about mile one because Moses and all the prophets is a big story would take a long time and they listened and raptured as we learn to this teaching from the Lord Jesus and having heard it they came to the place where they were going to spend the night and this was a very critical moment a very critical moment because what were they going to do Jesus made as though he would have gone further we're told and they said the evening is drawing the air the day is nearly done come and abide with us they took the initiative this stranger whom they didn't recognize and didn't know

I had taken all the other initiatives now they were somehow empowered to say wait a minute stop come and stay with us it was such an important moment that the hymn abide with me fast falls the even tide was written around this little event but you see they asked Jesus to come and to abide with them and so they went into the house and presumably a simple meal was prepared and put on the table and Jesus for some unaccountable reason acted as though he was the host and it was he that took the bread and broke it and gave thanks and in doing that suddenly they recognized who he was it all came together after that long walk and that long talk they suddenly recognized who he was the one who was in their midst and they went back and they they said did not our hearts burn within us as he opened to us the scriptures and you see what moments before they were concerned that this stranger should walk on into the night and that was not the thing to do moments later they set out in the night to walk seven miles back to

Jerusalem to share what had taken place well I tell you this for this reason that to me it is the most amazing thing that the God of all the universe should take the supreme event of human history and through the person of the Lord Jesus should explain it to two disciples on a lonely road and I have a

kind of faith that he wants to do that with you too that he wants to walk he wants I don't know in a sense it's a mirror of what you're doing here tonight you presumably have come here with a friend you have enjoyed discussion and perhaps dispute you have been joined by a third person who might be me in this instance you might be aware of your blindness to the person of Jesus

[23 : 08] Christ and you might consider him a stranger and somebody who's out of touch with reality as they thought Jesus was you might be such a person who knows all the facts Jesus of Nazareth teacher miracle worker betrayed scourged sentenced crucified you might know all that you might know that among Christian disciples there is a rumor going around that he was raised from the dead you could know all of that but somehow it's never come together for you all that has never come together for you as it hasn't come together for those who walked with him on the road to Emmaus and perhaps the reason you keep coming on

Sunday night is that gradually from Moses and all the prophets you will get a kind of foundation on which you can begin to build an understanding of who Jesus Christ is you can begin to have a framework within which you can understand the reality of human suffering and the hope of glory and to understand how God is going to redeem his people all that could happen and the other thing that needs to happen is that you you and I don't leave this place don't don't having walked with Jesus and heard the scriptures and experienced the burning of your heart as the scriptures are read to you don't let that just dissipate when the doors open and the cars start up and the traffic lights change and you disappear into the night you have to take an initiative too and that initiative is to ask Jesus I must say it to come in to your heart and life to come into the place where you live there's a special reason for my wanting to tell you this because please forgive me for doing this but I I want to do it anyway 50 years ago tonight

I walked home after church and I was walking with a friend and we were discussing the gospel and I had been working at it for weeks at that time trying to figure out what it meant to be a Christian and I thought I knew pretty clearly by then what it meant I knew about Jesus of Nazareth I knew about the cross I knew about the suffering I knew a little bit about the prophets and Moses and the law and the commandments I knew a lot of those things but it had never come together for me and it was a it actually was the 22nd of April 50 years ago that my friend I think whom I thought of as a friend but I think in one deeper sense it was Jesus

Christ himself telling me something and the question he the question that my friend asked me is whether I believed and I said yes I do believe and he said well that's all there is to it I said there's got to be more there's got to be some great moment God has got to do something and he said God has done something he has put faith in your heart so that you can say I believe and so it so it was that I I was given a deep sense of having come to a place of believing in Jesus Christ and that faith has never left me

[28 : 33] I have I don't want to go into the nasty biographical details of my side of the bargain but I that reality has not left I got home fairly late that night and my father and mother were indignant at my coming home late said where have you been I said I became a Christian tonight the ultimate excuse you know and somewhat unexpected but the trouble is you can only use it once well that's why this story is so important to me and that's why the wonder of the

God who meets us in our aloneness you know in the circumstances of our lives he breaks in on them and with infinite love and infinite patience he he's able to bring us to the place of faith and trust in him and and that we are given the grace and I pray that you may be given the grace to say the day is far spent my life has gone on too long come in and take residence in my heart you have given me the grace to believe in you that grace which was witnessed by the burning heart as he opened the scriptures and

I know that I belong to you and I want you to take up your place in my heart and that's what that's what Sunday night is about for all of us that we might have in the course of our Sunday evening a walk on the road to Emmaus when Jesus himself draws near and goes with us Amen Amen