

Having An Open Mind

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[0 : 00] Everybody should have that text in front of them in the form of this sheet, which is here. And it's from the 24th chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, which is the third of the four Gospels.

And it's the conclusion of the third story in the 24th chapter. The 24th chapter is all about the first day of the week, the first day of the new creation, the first day of something which is totally phenomenal.

Luke introduces the day by telling three stories. One of the women who went to the tomb and found it empty. One of the two disciples walking home to Emmaus who were joined by an unknown person who talked with them on the way and subsequently revealed himself to be Jesus Christ. And then the third story is late that evening of the same day when he appears to them in the, when they're locked together in an upper room and they're full of fear and anxiety and doubts and troubles.

And Jesus comes in and talks to them. And this is the third of the three resurrection appearances that Luke describes in this Gospel.

[1 : 27] And it's, I think, about the eighth of the ten resurrection appearances that are spoken of in the New Testament. So you have that background to this passage of Scripture.

If you look at it, what it says to them is, then he said to them, these are my words which I spoke to you when I was still with you.

And the Jerusalem Bible translates it this way. This is what I meant when I said while I was still with you. So what Jesus does is this.

And I want to illustrate this for you in a way which you may not quickly be able to pick up. But that's the person of Jesus.

And the disciples are gathered around him like this. And there they are. And he's talking to them.

And as he talks to them, this is what he says. This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you.

[2 : 33] And then he describes to them what he said. Now, I regularly, and not regularly, but once or twice a year go to one of the football games or a hockey game.

And I go with my friend Peter. And I'm surprised I go once a year because I spend most of the time hearing a great crowd shout and say, Peter, what happened?

You know. I was looking at it, but I could not see what happened. And what everybody's shouting about or excited about or angry about or whatever, I say, what happened?

You see, and Peter explains to me, and then he points me to the instant replay. And then I begin to comprehend what's happening in the game. And I don't know whether people can see more than I see, but just seeing it isn't enough for me.

I've got to have background, you know. And it's like going to a concert. You have to read the critiques in the newspaper the next morning to find out what happened at the concert you were at the night before.

[3 : 30] Or in the same way, you go to a hockey game, and then you read about it the next day in the newspaper and say, oh, that's what happened. I was there, but I didn't understand. So in that sense, Jesus takes the disciples who were there, but they didn't understand.

And so he says, look, if you want to understand this, what's happening, this is the place you understand. You look at the scriptures. It's the scriptures that will explain what's happening.

Now, if you want to then, what he's saying to us is, if you want to understand the resurrection, you can see me here. I'm standing in front of you.

But if you really want to understand what's happened, you have to go to the scriptures, to Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, because that's the way you understand what's happening.

Without this, all you have is the phenomena of seeing someone whom you may or may not recognize as having seen before. Interesting, if you look at the text closely, it says, these are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you.

[4 : 42] Which the reaction might be, well, you're still with us right now, aren't you? But obviously Jesus understood himself to be with them in a different way, a different way than they had experienced before, because I think what happens is, as you come along the road, you see there's the cross, and you have Jesus here talking to his disciples, telling the parables to them, performing miracles.

He was with them in a certain way. For a short period of 40 days afterwards, he was with them in another way. And when he talks here, he says, this is what I said to you when I was still with you. And in anticipation of the fact that when you get to this period, I'm not going to be with you, either this way or that way. What you're going to have when you get to this part of the story is you're going to have the scriptures.

And if you want to know what's happening, that's what you're going to have. You're going to live by the scriptures. And that's how my presence is going to be made known to you. Is through the scriptures.

Now, I'm not... That's what this passage says. I was... This is what I said to you when I was still with you. And he goes on and he says, everything that was written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.

[6 : 08] All that was written in all the scriptures must be fulfilled. Those three things. So that the whole of the community of Christian faith is a community that relates to Jesus Christ through the scriptures.

That's how we know him. That's how we relate to him. It's not a matter of something of a mystical experience, which this was.

Terry was here last week, eh? And he talked to you. And he had that great opportunity, which I coveted, and he didn't use it particularly.

So I... But Jesus, standing there, said, have you anything to eat? And they gave him a fish, and he ate it.

And New Testament scholars have had indigestion ever since. He said, simply because that the reality of Jesus' presence among them as one who rose from the dead is more than they can fit in to their understanding, more than you or I can fit into our understanding either.

[7 : 25] But that's, I think, only a demonstration in a very practical and pertinent and personal way of the fact that when you come to encounter Jesus Christ, you don't encounter him as someone whom you totally understand.

Your relationship to Jesus Christ will be on the basis of the fact that you're up against somebody who totally understands you. And that's what will draw you to him.

You won't understand all there is about him, but you will discover that he understands all there is about you. And that's the basis of the relationship. Well, I've been sidetracked by myself.

That's what is happening here. And so Jesus goes on and says what it is that has been written. And he says that there are three things that have been written.

And the three things that are written are these. Jesus is to die. Jesus is to rise.

[8 : 38] Those two things are there. He says if you want to know what the scriptures say, the thing they say is that Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one of God, the one who is appointed by God to fulfill God's purpose in the midst of God's creation, that one, that one of all the people who have ever lived, that one had to die.

That's what the passage says, you see. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, thus it is written, the Christ should suffer and on the third day the Christ should rise. He says, these are the two compelling necessities that you cannot escape from. If you want to know who the Christ is, according to the scriptures, he is the one who has to die and he is the one who has to, on the third day, rise from the dead because it is impossible that death could hold on to it. Now, what does it say about that? It says that Jesus said to them that he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. scriptures. Now, that's what I, that's what I think the instant replay does, you know.

You see something happen in front of you, but you don't understand it. The disciples all witnessed the trial and crucifixion of Christ, but they did not understand it.

[10:18] The disciples were now confronted by one whom, as far as they could tell, was the same one whom they'd seen die, but they could not understand it.

Now, most people stop there with their religion, you know, that it's something which is totally incomprehensible. And if you're really devout, then the more incomprehensible the things you believe, the more holy you are.

And that's, that's the way religion is supposed to work. But what, what Jesus says to them, he opens their mind so that they will understand that this is what had to happen.

Why did it have to happen? Because the scripture said it had to happen. And why did he rise from the dead? Because the scripture said it was impossible, that that should happen.

So you get, in a sense, two proofs of the resurrection put before the disciples. The first one is the appearance of Christ. But that is a very temporary proof of the resurrection, which we only know about through the apostolic witness.

[11:27] That is, through the apostles who tell us this is what happened. You know, when John begins his letter, he says, the word of life which I have tasted, which I have touched, which I have seen, which I have handled with my hands.

This is what I'm telling you about in the scriptures. Now, that's not our experience. Our experience is that the proof of the resurrection is in the scriptures, which teach us that he must die and that he must rise again.

And he opens our minds to understand that. Now, our minds need to be opened quite a lot. You know, that book, which I like to refer to, the closing of the American mind, is exactly the opposite to what's happening here.

You know, that we in our sophisticated, materialistic, secular society, we're closing our minds to a whole lot of the reality that surrounds us.

That process is going on all the time. That's why you desperately need grandchildren to help you open up your mind to things that you closed on long ago.

[12:42] You need that kind of encounter. But, what's happening here is that Jesus is taking these people and he's opening their minds to understand what has happened.

To understand that the scriptures said he must die, the scriptures said he must rise again. And then he goes on to say, and out of that comes this. If you look at the text, you'll see how it works.

The Christ must suffer, on the third day he rise again, and then without breaking the sentence even, just going on, he says, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. So that there is a continuum. There is death, resurrection, and then out of that comes the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness.

Now, preaching repentance is hard work. Most people think that it's, the main aim of preaching repentance is to make a lot of happy-go-lucky people who are carefree feel awful bad.

[14:01] And the better you are at it, the greater a preacher you are. You get up there and you condemn. And you tell them, you may think, but I'm telling you that if you were to look into your heart, you would see the blackest hole in all the world.

And to do that, to go about condemning people. But I'm here to tell you today that you don't have to do that. Most people have already condemned themselves long ago.

And you don't have to, you don't have to reinforce that at all. You know, that it's, it's already been done. That's, you don't, you don't preach Christ to people who who are carefree and happy.

You preach it to those who are condemned. I've probably told you, I keep, I've told lots of people this, but I used to have a parish in Kingston, Ontario. And we used to take missions, you mean, the government of Canada in those far off days would give you a hundred dollars for a week's preaching at a mission, in the penitentiary.

You know, and you'd, they were great occasions, you know, where you'd get four or five hundred men out to listen to you. I might say it wasn't voluntary. And so, but far easier to preach than in a congregation on the outside because they are already in a penitentiary.

[15:45] You know, you don't have to tell them they're sinners. They know that. They understand that profoundly. No question about it. And if you don't, you know, if, if they try and assume anything else, there's 499 other people there to tell them how in fact it is.

And even, you know, and so it's a whole a whole lot easier. And basically, I think the preaching of repentance is to people who desperately need to find a place of repentance and know it.

Now, our society is not keen on repentance because, I mean, success in our world is never having to say you're sorry.

And, you know, all you got to do is say you're sorry and you're dead. You know, because, and there's a reason for that. Do you know what I found out last night?

This is, for your, that sorrow and sorry are two quite different words coming from different roots. you can think about that afterwards.

[17 : 04] I won't work into it. But this is, this is feeling sorry. That is repenting for what you have done. And that something is basically wrong.

And, you know, and the, and the, the one sort of conviction that is enforced on us in our world is, I can't admit I'm wrong.

It doesn't matter what I do, I can't admit I'm wrong. I mean, it would be suicide to do it. So when, when the good news comes, the first statement of it is, the good news is now that you can admit you're wrong.

You can repent. You know. Most people feel about their marriages. If they ever admitted they were wrong, it would be over.

Most people feel about their jobs. If they ever admitted they were wrong, that would be the end. And so, it's really good news. But it's good news for another reason, and that is that the preaching of repentance is not the sole occupation of the preacher, the Christian preacher, but that it's repentance and forgiveness.

[18 : 23] forgiveness. It is, it is the reality of being forgiven. There's a, there's a, a very sort of sobering article in the Manchester Guardian this week about a company of parents and friends of the people who were killed in the, in the Lockerbie air disaster and that they went to the White House and they, they wanted to get some kind of response.

And one of the things it says in the story is that Pan Am has never apologized. But you know and I know that the structure of things is that Pan Am can never apologize.

You know, because what are they going to do? You know, with everybody ready to sue them for a million dollars, how do you, how do you apologize? How do you admit you're wrong?

How do you accept the blame? And so we, we structure a society in which you can't say you're sorry. You can't apologize. You've got to be able to shift the blame or the cost to somebody else. Because once you see, once you go to somebody and say you're sorry, you then put them in the position where they've got to pay the price of forgiving you.

[19 : 55] And most people are not willing to pay that price. And so we just eliminate from our society either repentance or forgiveness.

Because if you admit it, you're condemning yourself, and if you don't condemn yourself, you're going to put the other person in the place where they have to forgive you.

And forgiveness costs. And that, you see, is why Luke says the scriptures teach that Christ must die, Christ must rise, you must repent, and in that you will discover forgiveness.

forgiveness, and that that's the message that's to go out to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Now, that's what he says. That's what Christian faith is.

The good news, that there is a place of repentance, and in that place of repentance, you discover the profound reality of forgiveness, and with you, the new creation begins.

[21 : 04] new life begins from that point, from the very point in which, you see, you see, the thing is right there for you. There is Christ's death, and your repentance.

There is Christ's resurrection, and your forgiveness. So that it's not just something that happened historically a long time ago, it's something that becomes a part of your life, when through repentance you die with Christ, and through forgiveness you are raised with Christ to new life.

And that's just, that's at the heart of the beginning of the new creation. Something brand new has broken into our world, and the proclamation of that brand new thing is that Christ has died, Christ is risen, you're to repent, and in that repentance you will find forgiveness.

And that's what happens. Now, we need to tell the whole world about it. He says, you know, beginning here we have to go and tell the whole world about it.

But the only way you can tell the whole world about it is it's happened to you. You know, you can't say go, you can only say follow, you know.

[22 : 29] this is where we're going, to a place of repentance and forgiveness. Now, that's what Christ considered to be really important for his disciples.

As he appeared to them, he spoke to them and said, this is what I was telling you all along, this is what I want you to understand. Opened their minds to understand the scripture, said it's necessary Christ should die.

It is necessary that he should rise. It is necessary that you should repent. It is necessary you should find forgiveness. And that's it. That's what he said.

And that's what we have to hear in order for the gospel, which is the essential message that God has for us in Christ, should be heard and appropriated by us.

Let me just ask you to bow your heads for a minute. Father, we can see from a long way off the reality of your death and hear the testimony across the intervening centuries of the story of your resurrection.

[23 : 55] But that very story, as we hear it, is an invitation to us to share in your death through repentance and to share in your resurrection through forgiveness.

forgiveness. And in that way, to become part of your new creation. Give us grace to hear this. Open our minds that we might understand it. we ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.