

Saturday Evening Preparatory Service

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, in a very familiar part of it, verse 28.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, saying, Stay with us, for it is two or three evening, and the day is now far spent.

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

As I said, this is, again, it's a very familiar section of God's Word, and it's a great favorite with God's people, because we so often put ourselves in the shoes of these two men who walked that road, because there are aspects of it that we can so identify with.

These were men whose hopes had been dashed. Everything they had believed in, everything they had hoped for, everything that they had built their future upon seemed to have been dashed.

[1 : 28] And that's a very, very hard thing to bear, because if you have hope, real hope in life, life, then there's always something to look forward to.

We know that hope dashed is one of the sorest things. It leaves a fearful feeling of being crushed and just what is the future.

And we catch a kind of a glimpse of that within the hopes, within the attitude of these men, because we find them saying in verse 21, but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

Now, as we know, these two men, as they were walking the road, they were joined up by this stranger. And again, it doesn't tell us, but I could almost imagine that as they're walking along and they're in deep conversation one with another, all of a sudden this person comes alongside them. And you can almost see them whirre around, turn around and think, where did he come from? Didn't hear him coming? Now, of course, people weren't journeying in cars as we have today, but so there obviously would be people journeying, walking back and forth along the road.

[2 : 50] But they weren't aware of anybody kind of coming up behind them. And then all of a sudden, here's this person alongside them. So there would have been no doubt a kind of a reaction from them initially as to like, where did he come from?

Who is he? So anyway, this person joins them. And again, I think it's important. These are things that often highlight, and I don't think we're going to highlight anything new here, but in light of the Lord's Supper, I think it's very important that it was as these people spoke about Jesus, that Jesus drew near to them.

And that's one of the things that the Bible tells us, that where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of blessed. You know, that's how I think we sometimes underestimate just what that actually is.

That the Lord Jesus Christ, through the presence of his Spirit, comes in a very special way when God's people meet together.

Yes, the likes of where we have a formal gathering like this, but also in informal gatherings. And even just where two or three of his people meet together or talk together about him.

[4 : 14] That doesn't mean that wherever God's people meet together or talk, as it were, just about this, that, and whatever. But when they're in his name, when they begin to talk about himself, things change.

When they may, maybe it's discussing some theological point or something from a Bible study. It might be some experience that they've had. It might be a dream that they've had.

Wondering, is there a spiritual meaning to it? It might be an answer to prayer or some question or some fear or some experience.

But the sharing of these things one with another brings Jesus in a very special way into the midst. And that's quite an amazing, it's an incredibly powerful realization that this is something that is ongoing, this is something that continues to happen amongst the people of God.

And so we find that, just as it says, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst and he's there to bless. Well, that's exactly what happened with these men.

[5 : 26] They were walking along the road and they were speaking about Jesus. And again, we find that they were despondent. And that's such a Christian experience as well.

There are probably Christians who live on the mountaintop. But there aren't many. Because, however, often we may go to the mountaintop, we also plough into the valleys.

And often there are times that the Christian will be heavy of heart for differing reasons. But one of the great things about the Christian faith is this, that we will never be left down like that in a kind of a despondency.

There is always light at the end of the tunnel for the Christian. And that's why it's important for us to focus upon the Lord. Because if our focus is upon the Lord, he will bring us to see.

Even in death's dark veil, there is light at the end of the tunnel. It's a wonderful thing for the Christian. As a Christian enters down into death, there is the darkness of death.

[6 : 37] But there is light at the end of the tunnel. And that's the great difference for the Christian. So this story, although as we meet the disciples, there's despondency, doesn't last for long.

And again, another encouraging thing about the disciples that we find on this road, these two followers of Jesus. And remember, these are not the apostles. These are not the immediate twelve that there were and then came down to eleven.

Because these are just ordinary followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because it tells us in verse 33, And they rose that same hour, that's these two men, and returned to Jerusalem.

And they found the eleven. And those who were with them gathered together. The eleven being the eleven who were to be the apostles. The eleven immediate disciples of Jesus. Reduced from twelve, because Judas has now gone, down to eleven.

And so, it's not the immediate eleven. It's not those who were to be apostles, who were set aside.

These are followers of Jesus. And again, we know that's encouraging.

[7 : 46] Because if it had been, say, Andrew and John who were on the road. Or Peter and John. Or James. We would say, well, we could expect that.

These are men who Jesus had called directly. Had set aside for a great work. Jesus was just about to commission them. To send them out with the gospel.

Of course he's liable to just come beside them. But it's not. These are what we would term ordinary followers. Just like you and me.

And that again encourages us. Because it shows us that the Lord, in his sovereign will. Will come to, at times, and he will display himself.

Reveal his presence. Reveal his power. In a special way to you. And I'm sure all of us can think of times when we were incredibly conscious of the presence of the Lord.

[8 : 44] You might be able to think of a particular time in your Christian experience. And you knew that the Lord was present. When you went away.

You know, maybe sometimes it's afterwards. Like Jacob. Jacob said, surely the Lord was in this place. And I didn't know it. It came to this realization.

Oh, the Lord. The Lord was really, really close to me there. And sometimes it's just afterwards. Or sometimes while in it.

You are so conscious of the Lord's nearness and the Lord's presence. Anyway, here are these men. And they're needing strengthening. They're needing encouraging. Because they're down.

And so do we. And that's one of the great things that we have with the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table. It's a place to strengthen us along the way.

[9 : 44] And these men needed to be taught. They needed to understand things. And so do we. If you were to be asked, what?

Now, again, we have lots and lots and lots of things that you say. Oh, I wish I was this as a Christian. I wish I was that as a Christian. I wish I had. I'll tell you one thing I'm sure all of us would wish is that we had more knowledge.

We're told to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm sure all of us would say, you know, I would love to know more. And I'm sure a lot of the fault lies with ourselves. Because so often, rather than seeking to delve into the truth and to dig deep, we might get caught up with other things. That's the nature of the world and the nature of ourselves and the world that we live in.

So maybe the fault often will lie with ourselves. But we've got to remember that we have the presence of a wonderful teacher dwelling within us, a Holy Spirit.

[10:45] And the Holy Spirit delights to reveal the things of Christ. And so we should be going to the Lord constantly and saying, Lord, by your Spirit, open my understanding.

Help me to see wonderful things out of your law. We find the psalmist often would be saying that, Lord, teach me your way. Teach me, teach me, teach me.

So often we're finding that, Lord, teach me. And we should be doing exactly the same thing. Going to the Lord and saying to the Lord, Lord, teach me. Because the Lord loves to teach us.

It's not that the Lord is going to say, oh, that's not my responsibility. There are other people to do that. The Lord's not going to say, it's not something I want to do. He delights.

This is something that we find is part of the great work of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of Christ and reveal them unto us. And so let us go more and more and more.

[11:44] And particularly as we come to the Lord's Supper asking that our hearts will be opened in order that we will understand and that we will see.

So, as I say, the Lord has given us things. Just as he came beside these men and strengthened them in the way, so the Lord gives us the Lord's Supper as a means of strengthening us.

And sometimes we can put too much store on the Lord's Supper in the sense that we can feel and we can understand that, that there might be times we're not fit or ready or right to go.

You might be here tonight and because I don't know how it is for you. But just supposing you feel that you're struggling as a Christian, that your faith, that you're wobbling in your faith.

You're looking back over your Christian life and say, you know, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, I was a much stronger Christian than I am now. I'm a wobbly Christian now. I feel that I'm going, yeah, take a step forward and another step back.

[12:51] I sometimes feel that I'm lurching from side to side and I'm not making the headway that I should go. Maybe I shouldn't go to the Lord's table. Rubbish. That is the very reason why you should go to the Lord's table.

Because the Lord has given us this to strengthen us, as we say, a means of grace to strengthen our faith, to encourage us in the faith. So it's so important that we take these things on board and realize that the Lord has given us this for our benefit and for our good.

But we find that Jesus, he says to them that they were slow of heart. That there's this slowness of heart. Now, it could be that their understanding was limited.

And, of course, we know, we often said it, their understanding of who the Messiah was or his particular role. They had misunderstood. They thought, of course, he was going to set up this earthly kingdom and such like.

But we can have a slowness of heart as well. Kind of hinted at that. There can be a lethargy about us. And this is a field where Satan plays havoc.

[14:08] Because you know how so often we can have a slowness of spiritual heart. We have a choice. Do we do this or do we do that? We know that if we do this particular thing, it will help us spiritually.

And so often we choose the other thing. So often we make the wrong choices that don't help us as we go through life. Which causes a deeper slowness of heart.

And Satan makes field day or creates havoc at these particular times. But anyway, we need to be stirred up within our heart.

And particularly in the day that we live in. Because we live in tough days. It's tough spiritually.

Because we're living in a climate that is not what we would say with a great spiritual air about it.

It is we're living in a day where the kingdom of darkness seems to be on the rampage. Where there is an opposition to the Christian faith. That even in our own lifetime, even in the last number of years, seems to be growing at an incredible speed.

[15:22] There's a darkness beginning to envelop the land. It's very easy to become discouraged. We shouldn't. You know, sometimes we say, oh, we're living in incredibly difficult times.

Well, I don't think the times we're living in are any more difficult than they were in the days of the apostles. The apostle Paul, he lived in desperate times. Far harder than it is for the likes of ourselves.

He lived in the midst of the Roman persecution with the whole Roman culture of worshipping the Caesar and all these things.

We're not living here in Britain in a culture like that. Although there are a lot of difficulties and we're facing new difficulties more and more.

But it doesn't really matter at one level how things are. We need to be stirred up in our own heart. And that's why we should be going to the Lord and saying, Lord, you know, see these men on the road to Emmaus.

[16 : 21] It tells us that they were slow of heart. Whatever that might mean. Is it kind of dull? Is it that I've lost my appetite? That wasn't true of these men.

Lord, I'm struggling as a Christian. I sometimes, I'm even struggling, I read my Bible and I'm not getting anything from it. I go to church and I get very little from it.

I'm not looking for the company of the Lord's people in the way that I used to. Lord, I need you to stir up my heart. I need you to inject within me the desire, the longing once again to be on fire as a Christian.

And the Lord again will answer our prayer if that's what we pray for. So here are these men and they feel that they've lost everything. But as we know, they haven't.

They haven't lost the work of regeneration in their soul. They haven't lost the image of Christ in their soul. They haven't lost the desire for Christ. All these things are still there.

[17 : 28] And so Jesus shows to them that the way of his kingdom is the way of the cross. And that is the wonderful thing that tomorrow we are celebrating.

It's what you and I already know. That the way of the kingdom is the way of the cross. And that the way for our personal walking in the kingdom is also the way of the cross.

There is no other way. Jesus has said to us that we are to, in order to follow him, we are to deny ourselves to take up our cross and to follow him.

That's what we're told. And Jesus then goes on to show that the whole of the scripture is about him. The whole sacrificial system.

That he was a prophet spoken of greater than Moses. The son of David. The Messiah. The suffering servant. All the sacrifices. All these things running right through the Bible.

[18 : 31] Jesus shows them that is all about me. And then eventually they reach this place. And Jesus acted as if he was going to go further. He wasn't going to go further.

Because he wasn't going anywhere but walking alongside these men. He was there to talk with them. To instruct them. To teach them. But he made as if he was going further. He was testing them.

What would they do? Would they just allow him to go? Or were they going to ask him in? And obviously they passed that test with flying killers. And so we find them.

They're strongly saying stay with us. But they urged him. That's what it says. But they urged him strongly saying stay with us.

For it is two o'er evening and the day is far spent. This was an urgent plea. And this is a kind of prayer that the Lord listens to and answers.

[19 : 31] It doesn't listen to a half-hearted request. You know we can go to the Lord and say. Lord will you come with me and help me. And be with me today.

And 15 seconds later. You have no idea what it was that you asked the Lord to do. Have you ever done that? That you've said a little prayer.

And then you have no idea what it is that you've actually asked the Lord. Do you think the Lord is going to. He may be. And this is the thing. The Lord is often gracious. Gracious enough to answer that. But that's what I mean by the half-hearted.

Where we can just as it were go through motions. Where we can half-heartedly ask somebody. For something or in. But this was asking seriously.

It was urgent. It was like the whole life depended on it. No you're not going further. Please. Please. Please. Please come and stay. It was urgent.

[20 : 31] It was like persevering prayer. Like the Abraham Elijah prayer. Like the widow woman that Jesus spoke about. That kind of prayer that was not going to take no for an answer.

Lord you have to stay with us. And come in with us. And that's a prayer you and I must have for tomorrow. Lord.

You might be saying this. Lord I've been at your table loads of times. I have sat at the communion many, many, many times. Help me not just to come along drift in and drift out.

Lord I want you tomorrow. I want you tonight in fact. To come in and stay with me. Make it so that it's a feast that you and I together.

Are going to enjoy companionship. And fellowship. And closeness. And nearness. Are you going to ask that? Is this what we're going to ask of the Lord?

[21 : 31] Lord. Stay. Stay with us. You know. When they ask that question. Stay with us. There's two or three things we can think of.

One of them is. The alternative. Doesn't bear thinking. Now. Thank the Lord. That he will never. Abandon us. But just imagine.

If the Lord. Thankfully the scripture tells us. That he will never leave. Not forsake. But you know. There are times.

Because of who we are. And what we've done. And how we live. And our behavior. By what we say. And what we do. Sometimes we think. What if the Lord.

Is going to say. Enough is enough. You are now. On your own. What if you say to yourself. What if. I have never been converted.

[22 : 30] What if. The alternative. Doesn't bear thinking. Does it? It's just. You put your mind back.

And think of what it was. Before you. Became a Christian. You say. I could never go back. To that. I would hate. To go back to that. And sometimes. We need to remember.

Where we have come from. Who. What Jesus has done. For us. And where he has taken us. In case we become. Complacent. Just with where we're at.

And what we have. And so we have to say. To the Lord. Lord. Stay with us. Stay with me. Again. We say to the Lord. Stay with me.

Because of. The uncertainty. Of life. You and I. Don't know. What tomorrow is going to bring. You and I. Don't know. What's around the corner. Life is so fragile. It is so uncertain.

[23 : 25] Lord. I need you. I need you. As my rock. My shield. My shelter. And as we see here. It says. Stay with us. It is toward evening.

And the day. Is far. Spent. And how true that is. For our shells as well. Because. It is. Towards evening.

And the day. Is far spent. With regard. To our own lives. Every day. Is taking us on. And on. And one day.

It's going to come. The last. We're not trying to be. Dramatic. Or anything. But there's going to be. A last. Communion. For all of us. We don't know.

When that will be. This could be it. It could be the evening. Of our lives. Without realizing it. It happens so often. In the experience. Of others.

[24 : 19] Why might it not. Be the experience. Of ourselves. These things. Can happen. Lord. Stay with us. Because the evening. Is drawing near. And so.

We find that. Verse 30. Jesus. He stays. And he went in. To stay with them. And when he was at table. With them. He took the bread. And blessed. And broke it.

And gave it to them. And it was at that moment. That their eyes were opened. Now. I don't know. What exactly.

Happened at that moment. Some people think. That it was a reenactment. Of the Lord's Supper. And that they recognized. That well. These. These two men. Weren't at the institution.

Of the Lord's Supper. And at the Lord's Supper. Jesus took the bread. And he gave thanks. On this occasion. He took the bread. And blessed. And when we read.

[25 : 14] A similar occurrence. It was like. At the feeding. Of the thousands. That he took the bread. And broke it. And gave. That he took the bread. Gave thanks. And he broke it. And handed it out.

And dispersed. Through the disciples. To the people. Maybe these men. Would have been there. And they had seen. And they had heard. And it clicked. That's Jesus. But we also know.

That their eyes were held. Because it tells us that. That the. That they. In the. Not recognizing. Verse 16. But their eyes were kept. From recognizing him.

Maybe there was an element. Of unbelief in that. Maybe it was just that. The whole situation. Was such that. They didn't recognize him.

This seems to be in keeping. With the reaction. Of all those. Who met Jesus. After. He rose from the dead. Initially. Not recognizing him.

[26 : 11] And then. Recognizing him. There was obviously. A similarity. But there was also. A difference. We find. Probably the first. I might be wrong.

And I can't remember. Going through it. Systematically. But Mary. At the grave. She thought. Jesus was a gardener. And she said. If you have taken him. Tell me.

Where you have laid him. And Jesus just said to her. Mary. And in that word. Her eyes opened. And she recognized. It's Jesus. And so.

This is the pattern. All the way through. It's the same. In verse 36. As they were talking. About these things. Jesus stood among them. And said to them. Peace be to them. But they were startled. And frightened.

And thought. That they saw a spirit. And so. This is the pattern. But again. It tells us. That their eyes. Were. Kept. From recognizing him.

[27 : 06] So. There might have. There might have been. An element of divine. Power. In that as well. Just as there was. Divine power. In the opening of their eyes.

To recognize him. Recognize him. Certainly. Initially. In your experience. And in my experience. When we first came. To recognize Jesus.

It was divine power. It wasn't anything else. Or anybody else. It was the Lord. Alone. Who opened our eyes. To see Jesus.

And. That of course. The most wonderful experience. That we've ever had. And this. Whole. Little section. Here.

It's very dramatic. It's very graphic. It's very. Almost explosive. Taking bread. Breaking it. Blessing it. Give it to them. Eyes open.

[28 : 01] Recognition. Vanishing from their sight. It's just. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. It's just. Like that. And you know. When you go through the Bible. Sometimes. You say to yourself.

You know. God works. Really. Really. Slowly. And other times. You say to yourself. The Lord. Works. Really. Really. Quickly.

Sometimes. He answers. Before we even ask. We cannot limit. The Lord's working. But the one thing he does is. He works.

Surely. And so. These men. We find that their hearts. Burn within them. Through the recognition. Of the Lord. They're saying.

No. No wonder. See when we're walking along the road. Remember our hearts were burning within us. Oh my word. How did we not see him? Well surely it's our prayer.

[28 : 57] Lord. Help us. To know you tomorrow. Help us. To see you. In the sacrament. Help us to believe in you. Maybe in a deeper way than we've ever done before.

Help me to recognize how personal. Your work has been. For me. Help me to give thanks to you. For your great love.

In setting me free. And in opening my eyes. And giving me the grace to follow you. Let us pray. Lord our God. We give thanks for. Your gracious goodness to us.

We give thanks for every blessing. That we receive. We give thanks for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we pray that we will be strengthened by it. Oh Lord.

Encourage us in the faith. Do us good. And part us with your blessing. We pray. For giving us all our sin. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 55] Amen.

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