

"A JOURNEY THAT MADE HISTORY"

Luke 24:13-35

This wonderful narrative is one of the most lovely and beautiful short stories that was ever written. It has one advantage over most short stories in that it is true. It begins with a brooding sense of tragedy, is lighted with a sense of mystery, and carries in its conclusion a glorious secret. While the writer of this story was a physician, he was also an artist. As such, he related convincing facts, and at the same time gave us beautiful pen pictures, profound, impressive, and significant beyond the imagination. This remarkable narrative has brought light to many darkened hearts, and comfort to innumerable souls. Ian Maclaren, the author of "Beside The Bonnie Briar Bush" and other delightful Scottish stories, says that he sometimes wished he had never read the Gospel of Luke so that he might again have the joy of reading this beautiful story for the first time. Certainly the proper way to enjoy this narrative is to catch the historical atmosphere of this chapter and to follow the story as it unfolds itself. This method we shall endeavor to follow.

Some places have a very casual existence; no one turns aside to see them. Other places have a singular attraction; they draw visitors from the ends of the earth. What was it that put Emmaus on the map and gave it the unique distinction it has so long enjoyed? The surpassing reason for its distinction is that our Lord came there on the day that He arose from the dead. The Emmaus story has a wistfulness, a wonder, and a worth all its own.

I. Emmaus Was The Home Of Two Disciples.

These disciples, Cleopas and his unnamed companion, had gone from Emmaus to Jerusalem-- a distance of about seven and one-half miles, to observe the Feast of the Passover. While in the Holy City, doubtless they had seen their Lord, had heard His last sermons, and were greatly grieved upon witnessing His so-called trial and gazing upon the cross on which He died. When that tragedy was enacted, for the handful of disciples the sun had gone down behind the cross, and disappointment and despair took possession of them. There was indeed a panic among the followers of the Nazarene. Some hid themselves in Jerusalem, while others fled from the city to escape from the hands of persecutors. Two of them, Cleopas and his companion, took the road leading to Emmaus, which was their home.

Some places are distinguished for their location, for their environment, for their mineral or their manufactured products; other places are distinguished by the people who live there. Every good home has a distinct social value; it is a moral sentinel safeguarding the community. Every good home has an incomparable personal attraction, an attraction that calls its members from distant places. It was their unrelieved sorrow that sent these two disciples home; home from the city where life was no longer tolerable because Jesus was dead; home to the village where amid familiar scenes they could take up life again. In the confidence, sympathy, and shelter of the old village they would find life more endurable than elsewhere. One of the distinctions of Emmaus was that two disciples lived there. Without that, there had been no Emmaus story. Neither of these disciples were apostles. They were among the less prominent of the group which followed our Lord.

II. Emmaus Was The Goal Of An Historic Journey.

When these two disciples set out from Jerusalem, they never dreamed that their journey that day would make history, and that it would be spoken of throughout the world in all the centuries that were to follow.

In writing of the day that he walked with Wordsworth among the lakes of Cumberland, Charles Lamb said, "That day stands out as a mountain in my life." The day of that momentous journey to Emmaus stands out in scripture and church history as one of the "mountain" days. It set the feet of Christians on higher ground. Without the experience of Christ alive the innermost parts of the soul has none of the altitudes, none of the exultations, and none of the visions that only the summits give, and none of the momentum that only the heights supply.

Equally momentous was the day that Hazlitt walked with Coleridge from Wem to Shrewsbury. The road that wintry day became spiritualized as if leading across the delectable mountains to the Golden City. The milestones were mute with attention, and the pines upon the hills had ears for the stranger as he passed. Eloquence made the red leaves rustle on the oak tree. When the essayist Hazlitt was a young man at home, his mind was dull and his faculties unawakened. But in one of those charming essays that he calls "Wintersloe," he narrates how the poet Coleridge came to see his father, and young Hazlitt walked several miles home with him. In his own eager and eloquent way, Hazlitt tells all that the walk with Coleridge meant for him. While Coleridge talked, Hazlitt said, "A sound was in my ears as of a syren song. I was stunned, startled with it as from a deep sleep." The syren song was the voice of Coleridge. It wooed Hazlitt from himself. It called him out of the twilight of youthful hesitance and self depreciation. It lured him from the dungeon of despair. It quickened his intellect, gave him a new world, put a new radiance into the sunset for him, and put a new note into the song of every bird. His heart began to burn, but it was not the talk that did it; it was the poet who was behind the talk.

That is what happened, but on an infinitely bigger scale, to the two disciples: "It came to pass that, while they communed together, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them." There was a time, not so long ago, when their hopes had been burning brightly like a star. During His earthly ministry, these disciples had known the Lord Jesus, had heard His words, had been impressed with His great personality, had witnessed His gracious deeds, and had followed Him. That He would redeem Israel was the glowing conviction of their hearts. But now, He was dead, and their hopes lay buried in His grave. As they journeyed homeward, they were in darkness, doubt, and despair, because it was the third day since Jesus had died. They did not expect to see Him again, nor hear His words, nor follow Him through any street. Having lost Him, they had lost their hopes and their joy. Consequently, their minds were occupied with themselves, with the bitterness of their disappointment, and with the feeling which comes from thwarted hope. They could think of nothing else than the greatness of their former hope and the bitterness of their present state.

They were stunned by the shattering experience through which they had passed. The tragedy of the preceding Friday had smashed their universe. They had followed Jesus in the full confidence of His Messiahship, only to see Him tamely surrender to His foes. They could not understand why He submitted to the agonies of the cross, when, with Divine resources at His command, He might have called upon legions of angels to deliver Him. Their lights of faith and hope had been extinguished in the blackout at the cross. As they trudged along the road through the region of wild and rugged beauty, they were disturbed, disappointed, distressed, and depressed. With sorrowful faces, the index of heavy hearts, they were groping in the debris of a ruined world for something on which they might build some hope. They had heard rumors, but they could hardly believe them.

As they walked along together, discussing their blighted hopes, a Stranger overtook them and listened to their conversation. At length, He politely asked: "What are the words that ye are exchanging with one another as ye walk?" The word for "are exchanging" means literally to toss back and forth like a ball, which is a vivid picture of conversation between the two. Jesus was the topic of their talk when the Stranger made His appearance. The disciples were astonished at His question and stood with downcast faces. Cleopas was quick to express his surprise. He inquired if it was possible that He had been dwelling

in Jerusalem and had not known the things that had taken place there during the last few days. Jesus asked, "What things?" The disciples told the Stranger of the greatness of Jesus of Nazareth, of the fate which had befallen Him at the hands of the high priests and the rulers, and of their own disappointment. Because they were allowed to tell their story and set forth in order the causes of their misery, they were greatly relieved. The telling of it lifted them out of it while they were speaking about it. Their statement, "We trusted that it should have been He that should have redeemed Israel," was a confession of dead hopes, the language of a starless night. Then the Stranger began at Moses and all the prophets, expounding the Scriptures and authenticating the events that had taken place. Immediately they were overwhelmed, surprised, shocked out of their selfish misery by the words which their unknown companion spoke to them. While He talked their hearts were warmed again. And then then, before the conversation was over, they were on the outskirts of the village of Emmaus.

III. Emmaus Became The Scene Of A Momentous Discovery.

They had come where they wanted to be. This Stranger would not presume upon the slight acquaintance of the way; "He made as though He would go further." With human kindness they urged Him to share their home and board. They were so completely fascinated by His talk that they were unwilling for Him to go on. They "constrained" Him by eager words of invitation: "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent." He was as willing to be entertained as they were to offer entertainment. He never refused hospitality, although it was often refused to Him. He never forced an entrance to any man's house. He never tried to intrude into any man's life. It was always His habit to wait until He was invited. They recognized about Him an uncommon knowledge, an unusual authority, and an impressive confidence.

At the evening meal, "He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them." Instantly the scales fell from the eyes of the two disciples, and they recognized the Stranger as the Lord Jesus Christ. It dawned on them that they had walked that day with Christ who was alive from the dead, and He had sat at their table. If we could only recognize Christ when He is with us in our daily toil, how much sweeter and richer our tasks would be.

IV. Emmaus Was The Birthplace Of A Spontaneous Mission.

When these disciples journeyed to Emmaus, they were tired men. The thing that makes us tired is not always the work we have done, or the distance we have traveled; it is sometimes the strain we have endured, the suspense and anxiety, disappointment and sorrow that have come swiftly upon us and weakened both heart and will. The disciples were exhausted in body and mind, but the recognition of Jesus alive from the dead so revived and thrilled them that they departed for Jerusalem with quick and eager pace, to bring to the other disciples the news that they had seen the Lord.

That is what the experience of the living Christ means to His disciples. He gives them an experience that radically alters life. They find new purpose and hope, new eagerness and laughter; they cannot be silent. Everyone who has seen Christ has become the messenger of the vision. He cannot but speak the things he has seen and heard. Since Christ lives, there is hope for the whole world. Faith is confirmed in Him, hope is established, and love lives again. Let Him take over, and He will give you a holy heart-burn.

"May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,
My Zeal inspire:
As Thou has died for me,
O May my love to Thee,
Pure, Warm, and changeless be, ---
A living fire!"