

DISCONSOLATE DISCIPLES

"But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done." Luke 24:21.

Three years before the disciples had left the receipt of custom and their fishing boats because they saw in Jesus the dawn of a new day, or the herald of a better world. To them the world, which had been enveloped in darkness so long, was now penciled with rays of light. The personality, purposes, power, miracles and wonders of Jesus had captivated them. For three happy, joyous, thrilling and memorable years they had followed Him, charmed by His scintillating personality, held spellbound by His matchless message, amazed by His miracles and mesmerized by His unique and transcendent mission. They had heard His matchless messages, felt the pulse of His power, been inspired by His works, and made new by His spirit. They had been delirious with joy, purposeful with high ambitions and conquered by a holy zeal. Brighter hopes, deeper convictions, higher ideals, keener insight and greater allegiances were theirs.

But suddenly their new day had become a black night. Their new sun had become totally eclipsed. This One, Who had so many men different, had been betrayed by one of their own number, had been forsaken by the rest of them, had been crucified and buried. On the cross He had been challenged to prove His Messiahship by coming down from the cross and saving Himself. He did not do so. Their high hopes had been shattered. Their happy anticipations had become like a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Their illustrious dreams had turned out to be a faded illusion.

At the time referred to in the text Christ's followers were in the throes of a horrible nightmare. When He was crucified all the stars in the canopy of their heaven went out. Instead of cherishing the promises of the One who had charmed and challenged them, they were thinking of the dead, stiff, lifeless form shrouded in Joseph's new tomb. The world for them was gray, shivery, bleak and dismal. They stood helpless upon the margin of the blackest precipice they had ever seen. The batteries of bewilderment sent their electric pall of ruin into their midst. Everything was dark, despondent, ghastly and tragic.

Their dream of an earthly kingdom had been exploded. They were thinking of their loss. They had banked their all on the hope that "this was He Who would redeem Israel." Disconsolate and disappointed, they faced the past. For them there was no future. As they saw it, they faced irretrievable disaster. The blackest stormclouds shrouded their hope of a better and a brighter day. Midnight darkness had cast its pall over their hearts. They never expected to see Him again. Not one star of hope appeared on their horizon.

For three glorious years they had cherished the dream of the world's emancipation from sin. Defeated, deluded, lost humanity was yearning for salvation. Wisdom was bankrupt, morals were in chaos and blackgroomed despair was regnant. The light of their morning had been turned into the blackness of midnight.

You can't blame them too much as they say in an undertone, "We had hoped that this was He." From the glowing heights they had descended to the gloomy depths; from radiant hopes they had fallen into gross despair. They had left all and followed Him Who was pledged to the deliverance of the world from the bondage of sin. Seemingly He had disappointed them and their last state was worse than the first. It had been declared concerning Him, "He shall save His people from their sins." Instead, they had seen the black banner of death unfurled over the head of their hope. This brutal turn in affairs gripped their throats with its icy hand of fate.

Their minds seemingly were paralyzed by the crucifixion. They could not grasp the fact that Christ must die a felon's death. Now that it had happened, it seemed a hideous and irreparable calamity. Their finite minds could not understand that it was not an insuperable

calamity, but that it was the supremest necessity. Their hopes were dead and buried in a deep grave. Their plans were thwarted. They could think of nothing except the greatness of their former hope and the bitterness of their present state.

Christ had told them definitely that He must go up to Jerusalem and be crucified. Again and again He told them about His coming death. They seemed unable to comprehend it. Had they only studied the prophets and comprehended Christ's teachings, they would have known that He would be crucified and that He would rise again. Is not this a major fault with all of us today? We do not search and seek to know the teachings of the Scriptures.

Those disciples doubted, and doubt is so destructive. Doubt is dropping empty buckets into an empty well and drawing nothing out. It mutters suspicion, raises questions, snarls in scorn, and stalks with death. It would blow out all lights. Doubt is a malady that eats at the vitals of life. Their doubt caused these men to fail to recognize the presence of One Who had destroyed death, conquered the grave and brought the sunlight of salvation to the world.

They had lost hope. "We hoped that it was He," they opined. They were sad and broken-hearted. They stood on the crumbled sand of a dream. They had seen a vision of a redeemed Israel and a saved world. That vision had been so grand, thrilling, magnificent and real. But alas, that hope, which had glowed brighter than the noonday sun, was shrouded in crass darkness.

They had lost heart. Despondency is a crucifying thing. The disciples were bewildered, disappointed, dejected--seemingly at the end of their row. They felt that the decree of misfortune was passed upon them and that the book of their fate was filled. They moaned their lot and hugged their troubles. If they had only recognized the One by their side Who was there to cause their cold hearts to burn, their blind eyes to open, their clouds to vanish, and their faltering feet to become steady!

They should have counseled with their faith instead of their fears. While yet a young man Dr. George W. Truett was raising money for Baylor University. One of the most important meetings of the entire campaign had been arranged. Dr. B. H. Carroll was to be with him for that service. The earth was deluged with rain the night before the scheduled meeting. The people could not get there. Only a few were present. Young Truett said to Dr. Carroll, "I will speak, but there will be no need of trying to take an offering." "Go right ahead and take your offering," said Dr. Carroll. Then he added, "Never consult your fears." That day they had one of their greatest offerings. After individuals had emptied their pockets, they gave their watches, diamonds and jewelry. Doubt with its malignant sting has wrought its havoc upon multitudes.

They were sad. There are those who recognize Christ in sorrow and those who do not. Two parents had been blessed with a beautiful golden-haired girl. Her lovely curls hung around her shoulders. Her beauty and charm enraptured both father and mother. She was the apple of their eye. But she became sick, and died. The father looked upon the cold, lifeless form, gritted his teeth, and declared that God was unjust. The mother looked at the child, raised her eyes toward heaven and said, "Father, I thank Thee for sending this flood of light into our hearts and home. Life is sweeter and heaven is dearer because she passed this way. I will love Thee more and serve Thee better."

Things could be many times worse for us than they are. They could have been far worse for the disciples. Neither individuals nor nations fall except when they play around and lounge on beds of ease. Rome decayed in the days of overfed ease. On the other hand, our nation was built on great ideals, heroic sacrifices, dauntless courage that faced the perils of uncharted Atlantic, windswept shores of New England, a howling wilderness, barbaric tribes, haunting poverty, starvation and sickness. We sorely need a revival of this spirit in America. In realizing that our rights are expensive privileges, we need to remember the words Maxwell Anderson put into the mouth of Washington at Valley Forge: "Some day when men don't have to risk their lives for it, this freedom will seem an easy thing."

There was anchorage for the disciples in the storm. When things were at their worst, when their hearts were the saddest, it is recorded by Luke, "And Jesus went with them." Have you not had Jesus to go with you in dark, dark hours? After all, what is darkness if the light of the world is your guide? What are troubles sometimes but a platform on which Jesus Christ may stand to strengthen us?

Bishop Quayle told of visiting a woman whose illness was incurable. The noise of death could be heard in her room. She was dying by slow torture. He asked her, "Have you any good days?" "All my days are good," she answered. "Are your nights long?" "All long," she said, "but full of His presence." "Are you ever free from pain?" "Never," she said, "but I am never free from peace."

"Jesus Himself drew near." When our hopes are broken, we can trust Him; when darkness engrosses us; when the winds split the sails of our ships into threads; when night comes and the stars go out; when midday is turned into midnight, we are to hold on and to go on.

As the disciples walked along together, discussing their blighted hopes, a Stranger overtook them and listened to their conversation. Jesus was the topic of the conversation between the two when the Stranger made His appearance. At length, He politely asked: "What are the words that ye are exchanging with one another as ye walk?" 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. 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, and shocked out of their misery by the words which their unknown companion spoke to them. While He talked their hearts were warmed again. And then, before the conversation was over, they were at the outskirts of the village of Emmaus.

Having arrived at their destination, with human kindness they urged Him to share their home and board. They were so completely fascinated by His talk that they did not want Him to go on. They constrained Him with 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. Christ never refused hospitality, although it was often refused 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 sat at their table. If we would only recognize Christ when He is with us in our daily toil, how much sweeter and richer our tasks would be.

What did the recognition of Christ mean to the disciples? It meant new hope. New hope surged through their souls. Their Lord had conquered death, hell and the grave. They, as His followers, were delirious with joy. They were ready to go and try to win multitudes to Him. They had been through the fires. There used to stand an old battered safe on Broadway, in New York, on which was the notice, "It stood the test." It had been in one of the hottest fires New York had ever seen, but the old safe had carried its treasures safely through it all. This era needs the message that Christ is alive and will stand every test which is applied to Him.