

Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes

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[0 : 00] Now, we are turning to Luke's Gospel for our Bible reading, and you can find that on page 885, Luke 24.

The different Gospels, as you know, give us different accounts of what happened during the 40 days between Jesus rising from the dead and ascending to heaven. Luke, in his Gospel, concentrates very heavily on the first of those days, the day of resurrection itself, and then at the very end of the Gospel, the last few verses, goes on to the last of those days, the day of the ascension to heaven.

And we're going to read the great story, which is usually referred to as the Emmaus Road story. We're going to read from verses 13 to 35.

Luke 24, verse 13. That very day, that's later in the day of resurrection, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

And they were talking with each other about all the things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

[1 : 12] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, And they said to him, And they said to him, A man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all people. And how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all, this is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.

They were at the tomb early in the morning. And when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

[2 : 16] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the woman had said, But him they did not see. And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew nearer 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 the word 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.

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

[3 : 26] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.

Then they, the Emmaus Road couple, told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. Now may and may God bless that glorious passage to our hearts.

Now perhaps we could have our Bibles open, please, at that story we read on page 885.

And we'll have a moment of prayer as we turn to the word. And God our Father, we have read how the risen Lord Christ opened the scriptures to that disconsolate pair on the Emmaus Road. And that when these scriptures were opened, their hearts burned within them, their eyes were opened, and they went back to share that message.

[4 : 44] Father, we pray that that same Lord Jesus Christ, through the power of his living spirit, will do that to us this evening. That indeed, you will open our eyes to behold wonderful things out of your law.

We ask this in the strong name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. One of the very great stories in literature is the story of the return of Sherlock Holmes.

Having apparently died in a tussle with Professor Moriarty, his great arch rival, he perished in the Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland, and left his faithful companion and friend, Dr. Watson, completely disconsolate.

And for a good number of years, I think it was three years, Watson remained disconsolate. One day, walking through London, he bumped into an old and rather ragged-looking bookseller, selling second-hand books.

And the stranger was very rude and very aggressive. Watson couldn't understand it, because after all, he simply accidentally bumped into the man. He tried to say sorry to him, but the stranger was having none of it.

[6 : 04] So Watson went back disconsolately to his lodgings in Baker Street. Sometime later, a knock came to the door, and the faithful Mrs. Hudson said, Sorry, sir, I tried to prevent him coming in, but he insisted on coming.

There, to Watson's amazement, was the old shabby bookseller. And Watson, of course, was amazed. He said, What are you doing here? And the man says, I've come to apologize. I also want to sell you books. And if you look over there on the shelf, there's a space where these books would fit in nicely. Watson turned round, and then, in a moment, as he looked back, Charlotte Holmes stood in front of him.

He just could not believe it was true. It was far too good to be true. His beloved friend had returned from the dead. Now, that is a brilliant story.

And it's a pity it's just the story. Here we have, though, a brilliant story, which is true. The return of Jesus Christ to his grieving disciples as they trudge along the Emmaus road.

[7 : 11] The story is wonderfully told. There's suspense. There's dramatic twists. There's the recognition scene. Luke's stories are absolutely brilliant. I know you're not supposed to have favorite Gospels, but this is my favorite Gospel.

And Luke has, the Gospel has been described by the French philosopher and skeptic Renan as the most beautiful book ever written. I would certainly agree it's one of the most beautiful books ever written.

And this story draws us into the presence of the risen Christ. It's the longest of the story. He has three stories here, essentially. The first one was read for us this morning.

And then this, the longest of them, there's a pattern to it. There's the dramatic appearance. There is the unfolding of the Scriptures. There is a transformation in those who hear.

And then there is the message to tell. Everything changes. Now, at the beginning of his Gospel, Gabriel had said to Mary about the Savior who was to be born, the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

[8 : 17] He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. Of his kingdom, there will be no end. Now, it must have seemed like whistling in the dark. It must have seemed utterly unbelievable that this would happen.

When you read a story like this, you begin to see it's not only possible, but it's actually certain. It's already happening. As we look at this story, what I want to do is to try to draw attention to some of the main highlights in it.

Very often, when we are expounding the Bible, we go through verse by verse. What I'm going to do is actually take highlights of the story. This is the kind of story you could spend many services on. But I want to talk about three particular elements in the story. And the first one is this. What happened on the Emmaus Road was a tangible, actual experience.

See, if you look at verse 9, before the passage we read, the woman had gone to the tomb. They had met these angels who said to them, why are you seeking the living among the dead?

[9 : 26] And then verse 9, returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Obvious, there's the eleven disciples. Judas has now gone.

And there's another group of friends of Jesus who are gathered there together, among whom are this otherwise unknown man called Cleopas and his unnamed companion.

We don't know who Cleopas' companion was. It could have been his wife. But we don't know.

There's no evidence in the story. So, the story is unfolding amid a great deal of speculation and suspense.

They've heard these astonishing stories, but they don't know what to make of them. And so they journeyed to this obscure village named Emmaus. Nobody even knows where the site of Emmaus is, which is great news for the commentators because then you can fill page after page speculating about us and ignore the theology of the text, which is what so many commentators do.

It's a totally obscure and unknown place. But doesn't this fit in with the whole gospel? The Lord of Glory bypassed Rome and Alexandria and Athens and came to Bethlehem.

[10 : 41] And now, he joins these two unknown people, not the big names, but two unknown people on the road to this tiny and obscure village called Emmaus.

Now, we know it's a tangible experience because, first of all, it is not wish fulfillment. You cannot read this story and say, these friends of Jesus saw what they expected to see.

They had psyched themselves up and they expected to see him. They did not expect to see him.

After all, he had predicted the resurrection, but they were not expecting it.

The point, verse 22 to 24, Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning when they did not find his body.

They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels, said he was alive. Some of those went to the tomb, found it just as the woman had said. And then this unbearably poignant phrase, but him they did not see.

[11 : 47] That's the beautiful irony. Him they did not see. And, of course, the stranger walking with them, as they do not know at this point, is, in fact, the Lord of glory himself.

And their sense of disappointment is really almost palpable, tangible. Verse 21, We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

It's just like all these messiahs, isn't it? He hasn't delivered the goods. It hasn't happened. We've been let down again. As I say, the supreme irony.

They were not expecting this. These two did not expect to meet the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus any more than Saul of Tarsus expected to meet the risen Lord on the road to Damascus.

This was not wish fulfillment. Now look at the circumstantial detail in the story. Verse 16, Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

[12 : 49] Now, we don't know why. I mean, notice it's were kept, presumably because they were not yet ready to meet him and hear what he had to say.

But the striking parallel in verse 31, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Did God conceal all this information from them?

Probably. Because in the current confusion, they needed to learn things before they actually recognized him. And verse 20, Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

It was these grim facts that were filling their minds. It was the horror of what had happened. Now, this had been predicted as well. Remember how throughout the Gospel, throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke, many occasions, Jesus says, The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men. They will mock him. They will flock him. They will crucify him. And on the third day, he will rise again. But of course, they really didn't believe any of it. They couldn't believe the first bit.

[14 : 01] It was too awful to believe. He'll be delivered up. He'll be mocked. He'll be crucified. And they couldn't believe the second bit because it was just too good to be true. Grim details of the cross still filling their minds.

And then when they arrive at Emmaus, the further circumstantial details, verse 28, 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. It's towards evening. And the day is now far spent. So they invite him in to stay with them. And they invite him to sit with them at the table.

And they show him hospitality. And then the stranger performs a simple action. Now, at the beginning of a Jewish meal, the host, usually the father of the family, would pick up a piece of bread

and break it to indicate the meal was beginning.

And in a flash, the stranger became visible. He is no longer the guest, but the host. In a flash, their eyes are opened and they recognize him.

[15:13] And he vanishes. Now, I think the point about vanishing, that's once again another little circumstantial detail. Within a few weeks, he is going to ascend into heaven.

They're not going to have his physical presence any longer. What he's demonstrating to them is that he is still with them. That he is still for them. That he is still there when they need him.

They can manage as the church ever since has had to manage without his continuous physical presence. So it's a tangible experience. This is something that actually happened.

The story, if this is a myth, if this is a legend, I have never yet read a myth or legend like it. It is so true to life. The emotions, the actions, and the whole turmoil that goes on in these people's minds are just so true to life.

I'm sure as we were reading it, you probably felt, had I been on the Emmaus Road, I would have acted exactly the same way. Disillusioned, disappointed, discouraged, and not recognizing the stranger.

[16:20] That's the first thing. But the second thing I want to say, it is not just a tangible experience, it is a true event. Experience is wonderful, but experience is not enough.

Some have seen this, as I say, as simply a kind of myth, a kind of story which talks about the rise of the Easter faith in the disciples.

But it's not that. It's an actual event. Remember the bottom line, as they say, of the resurrection. It is something that happened to Jesus, not something that happened in the disciples.

You know the old gospel hymn, You Ask Me How I Know He Lives. He lives within my heart. That's not good enough, is it? When my heart is wintry, grieving, and in pain, as another Easter hymn says, I don't want to know simply He lives within my heart.

I want to know that altogether, apart from my heart, altogether, apart from my emotions, altogether, apart from my experiences, that He lives and reigns in heaven and earth.

[17:29] I want to know the facts. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. The event which makes sense of all other events.

The empty tomb in the midst of the vast graveyard of this world that makes sense of everything. So how does Jesus demonstrate this to them?

And I want you to look now at verses 25 to 27, which in many ways are the very heart of the story. He said to them, O foolish ones, I wonder if you have to be the Lord or an apostle to get away with talking this way.

O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter His glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. You notice He doesn't say you don't need the Bible now.

[18:34] You've got me. How does He prove to them the truth of what's happened? He opens the scriptures. It's interesting actually when you think of it, this is not the obvious thing to do.

That's one of the things we always say to the Cornhill students, look for the unexpected things in the text. I would have expected him to say something like this. Are you surprised?

I don't remember that time we were in that home where there was grief and pain and sorrow, little girl dead, and I raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Don't you remember that time when, and this is only Luke talks about this incident in chapter 7, don't you remember that time that funeral procession was in the town of Nain, was going to the graveyard with a weeping widowed mother who had lost her only son?

Do you remember how I raised him from the dead? Or don't you remember more recently how we stood at the grave of Lazarus and Lazarus, four days dead, came out of the grave?

That's not what he does. What does he do? Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

[19:51] And later on, in verse 44, Moses the prophets and the Psalms, the Psalms is shorthand for the other division, the wisdom books, Job, Ecclesiastes, and so on.

All of them point to him. So, what he's saying is this. What he's saying to them and what he's saying to us, if you want to understand what's happening now, you won't understand it unless you read the Old Testament.

That's where it's all told. The Old Testament, in other words, is the gospel for the new age. There's no such thing in the New Testament as a New Testament Christian.

They were biblical. Remember Alec Matier, the great expositor, saying once, if you'd asked Jesus what do you think of the Old Testament, you'd probably been rather puzzled.

He says, what do you mean the Old Testament? Oh, I see, you mean the scriptures. I don't know why you call them that. And I think that's a very important thing to remember. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about death and resurrection.

[21 : 00] A pattern of creation followed by fall, followed by the descendant of the woman. The death of the people of God going down to Egypt and the resurrection as Moses leads them in Exodus.

And it's no accident that in this gospel, the word that's used about Jesus' death is Exodus. On the Transfiguration Mount in Luke chapter 9, they spoke of his Exodus, which he would carry out at Jerusalem.

from God's people in exile in Babylon, as we've been looking at in Jeremiah, and then their return from exile. The whole pattern of scripture, death and resurrection.

And if you want to understand me, says Jesus, you need to know the scriptures. Because that's the way he talks to us today. By the power of his spirit, he opens the scriptures.

And now, at this point, we can get to Easter faith. I'm not saying there's no such thing as the rise of Easter faith in the disciples' hearts.

[22 : 03] They've often said before, that's always the wrong place to begin. We don't begin by saying, what does this passage mean to me? We begin by saying, what does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about the gospel?

You see, notice the parallel, verse 27. The scriptures were opened, and verse 31, their eyes were opened.

The connection between these two things. You see, it's not just intellectual. The reason I call this sermon burning hearts and open eyes is because it's never just believing certain things.

It's never just something we hold in our minds. Remember, earlier on in the gospel, the Baptist had said, after me is coming one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

That's not two things, one the Holy Spirit and one fire. That is the Holy Spirit who is fire, the Spirit of God. You may remember Wesley, John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed as he heard the letter to the Romans being expounded.

[23 : 12] In a later generation, who felt early Methodism had lost its fire, met to pray that the Spirit of burning would fall on them. Burning hearts and open eyes.

It's a true event, and because it's a true event, that event leads to opened eyes. And that, you see, Jesus establishes the pattern. It's going to be until his return.

How do we know him? He opens the scriptures and speaks to them from them. In other words, it's, both things are important.

Burning hearts and opened eyes. It's not just mindless emotion on the one hand or intellectual posturing on the other. It's the two things, the mind, the mind is spoken to and the heart is warmed. That leads to the third thing in the story. First of all, it's a tangible experience. It's a true event. But thirdly, it's a transforming message.

[24 : 15] And that's verses 32. Did not our hearts burn within us? While he opened the scripture, they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. I always imagine as they went to Emmaus, they trudged along wearily, one foot hardly being able to be dragged in front of the other.

I imagine when they left Emmaus and returned to Jerusalem, they returned in a great hurry, their disillusionment, their disappointment, their tiredness gone. And it sounds so great.

Notice how one message breaks into the other. They found the 11, verse 33, and those guys are saying, the Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.

And then they break in with their message. The Lord's appearing to Simon, to Peter is actually recorded in some of the other Gospels. Luke doesn't record it, but in the other Gospels, we do read. And we do read about how the risen Lord appeared to Peter. There's a wonderful little touch in Mark's, in Mark, I think it's either Mark or Matthew.

[25 : 22] Go tell my disciples and Peter that I go before them into Galilee. Now that and Peter is so moving. Why does Peter get a special mention?

Because Peter was the one who denied. The Lord is saying, tell Peter I want to see him. Tell him I'm going to welcome him and meet him. So it is here.

Now, notice verse 35, they told what had happened on the road. Once again, that's confirmed what I said about the event. And just two, just two things about this.

The word in the power of the Spirit is going to mark the new age. We're not going to go on to the later part of the chapter. Just to refer briefly to verses 44 to 49 if you look ahead at them.

Then Jesus said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, while I was still with you before the cross, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

[26 : 26] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And then he promises them the Spirit stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

In other words, this message, it was heard on the Emmaus Road. We did not walk along the Emmaus Road. We did not stand by the empty tomb. We were not there when the disciples and Peter met the risen Lord or when the Great Commission was spoken or in that wonderful scene at the end of John's Gospel by the Lake of Galilee where Peter is given a threefold opportunity to say to Jesus that he loves him to wipe out the threefold denial.

I believe that's the point of that, or at least one of the points of that story. Nevertheless, we meet the risen Lord by his Spirit as the scriptures are open.

And the second thing is, the Gospel of Luke begins with a rather discredited and unbelieving priest, Zechariah, whose eyes are opened as well.

The Gospel ends, however, with the great high priest himself. And on the verse, look ahead at verse 50, then he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

[27 : 45] Now, one of the passages which I'm sure the Lord would talk about on the Emmaus Road was Leviticus 16, the great day of atonement. And at the end of that great day of atonement, the high priest of the time lifted up his hands in blessing.

Now, this was a transitional, provisional looking forward to the time when the great high priest himself, his work done, would lift up his hands in blessing as he ascended into heaven.

And that's why, even though he's left them, this is the very last verse of the gospel, they were continually in the temple blessing God. So, you see, this experience, we need an experience of the risen Lord.

Now, if we don't know the Lord yet, that's what this story is saying to us. We can meet him on our Emmaus Road, whatever that road may be.

And notice, they didn't go searching, he came searching for them. That's the gospel, isn't he? Left his father's home above, and so on, searching us out. We need, and if we are Christian, we need continually that same Lord.

[29 : 00] Because remember, these people were disciples, they were not unbelievers, these were disciples, part of, not one of the twelve, but nevertheless, part of the group of Jesus' friends.

We need to know that it's a true event, an event which didn't just happen in the past, but an event which determines the future. And it also gives to us a message which transforms, which changes the world.

That's what we are saying as we leave here, isn't it, on Easter Sunday evening. The Lord has risen indeed. And that is what the gospel is all about.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb. Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom.

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering son. Endless is the victory thou or death has won. And Father, as we have walked the Emmaus Road with these unknown, unmentioned elsewhere disciples, we pray that the Lord Christ will join us on our roads that like them our hearts will burn and our eyes will be opened.

[30 : 17] We ask this in his name. Amen.