

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes

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Dear Radio Friends,

The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, tells us that Jesus arose on the first day of the week, that is, on Sunday. The Christian church remembers this great event every week by setting Sunday aside as a day of worship to God. At the center of the worship of the church is the preaching of the gospel. And central to the message of the gospel is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On Friday, early in the morning, Jesus was put on trial and crucified. His death was the sacrifice for sin. On Sunday, early in the morning, He arose victorious from the grave. We preach today the gospel of the resurrected Lord.

Today, we are going to look at this great event from the Gospel of Luke 24:13-35. Please refer to this passage in your Bibles. In this passage of Scripture there is recorded one of the appearances of the risen Jesus to two of His disciples as they walk along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It was the day of Jesus' resurrection. We do not know anything about these two disciples except that one of them was named Cleopas. They are not prominent among the followers of Jesus. Probably they had mingled with the multitudes that followed Jesus and heard His teaching. This particular weekend, these two had gone up to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, hoping to hear Jesus teaching again. But how disastrously wrong things had seemed to go. Instead of seeing and hearing Jesus teach the multitudes, they saw Him on trial; they heard the multitudes crying, "Away with Him, crucify Him"; and they witnessed His crucifixion.

That was on Friday. Now it is Sunday. They had intentions to get home today. But this morning, as they were preparing to leave, rumors started coming in that astonished them (v. 22). A group of women had gone to the sepulcher and found that the stone had been rolled away from the door and the body of Jesus was missing. And these ladies said that they had seen an angel who said that Jesus was risen. And, of course, that was so unbelievable that Peter and John, the apostles, went to check on it. And they said the same things. And they added some more details about the linen clothes.

And so these two hung around in Jerusalem for more reports. And there were more. There was a report from Mary and a report from the women that they had seen Jesus. Then there also came an official report from the Sanhedrin and the Romans that some of His disciples had come at night and had stolen Jesus' body away.

These were the things that they were hearing. But they had to start going home to make it by dark. So they set off for Emmaus. And as they go, verse 14 tells us, "they talked together of all

these things which had happened.” They tried to make sense of them, to put them all together. What a conversation that must have been. They are sad, stunned with grief, that Jesus had been killed. But now, what about these amazing reports of the empty tomb? They must have been saying, “How do we make sense of all this?”

It is to these two travelers, heavily engaged in this lively conversation, that Jesus appears. And they do not recognize Him. To understand this, we should remember that in His appearances after His resurrection, Jesus did not always appear in the same form. He appeared always in a form suited to the specific situation. For example, when He appears to Mary, He says, “Touch me not.” But to Thomas, He says, “Behold, my hands and my feet.” And He asks Thomas to touch Him. In another appearance He eats to show that He is really, physically risen from the dead. But then, on a different occasion, He goes through closed doors as a spirit. To Mary He appears to be a gardener. But to His disciples in the upper room, He appears as their Lord. He can be recognized by them.

Now here, in Luke 24, He appears as a stranger. In verse 16, “Their eyes were holden that they should not know him.” Mark 16:12 says that He appeared to them in another form as they walked. He does this here with a purpose suited to this situation. Here He does not come to prove that He is risen, but to answer their questions about the suffering of Jesus Christ. Had they recognized Him, the whole subject would have changed, and their conversation would not have gotten to their perplexing question.

So He appears to them as a sympathetic, naïve stranger who is ready to talk with them and to help them with their problem. They are so engrossed in their conversation that, at first, they do not even notice this stranger. Perhaps He was following them closely or, perhaps, He overtakes them. In any case, He overhears their conversation and, in verse 17, asks a question: “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?” He notices that they are sad. This is why He comes to them—not only to answer an intellectual problem, but to cheer them. Their question touches their souls. It weighs heavy on them. It makes them sad.

For His sympathetic question, Jesus is rebuked by Cleopas (v. 18): “Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?” Cleopas is saying, “Where have you been, man? Everyone knows about this. This is so important to me that I expect that everyone else should be talking about it, too. And you don’t know anything about it?”

Jesus is not deterred. He presses them. “What things?” He asks. He draws them out. He lets them talk. How helpful that can be sometimes, just to listen, to let others with their problems talk and pour out their hearts. They give you all the pieces. And you have only to show them how they fit together. That is what is going on here. These men have a handful of puzzle pieces and they do not know how to put them together. And Jesus finds for them, as it were, the key piece. And all the other pieces fall into place.

Let us look a minute at their puzzle pieces.

Probably they said much more than what is here in this passage. They walked more than two hours. But here you have the gist of it. In verse 19 they tell this stranger, “We’re talking about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” With those few words they express all their happy experiences of the past three years. They had been witnesses to His power: the dead were raised; the sick were healed; the poor and the hungry were fed; the wind and the waves obeyed Him. And to hear Him teach—oh, what a treat. He was “mighty in word.” There was never a prophet like Him. In verse 21, they say, “We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” We were sure that He was the Messiah.

Our hope, they say, was that He would help us. And He played into that thinking. Why, only a week ago He rode into Jerusalem at the shouts of the crowds: Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Everything about Him told us that He was the Messiah. But, and here’s the piece of the puzzle that does not fit (v. 20), the chief priests and our rulers (that word our is important) handed Him over to the Romans to be condemned to death. He could have been Israel’s deliverer. He could have saved us from the wretched political tyranny of the Romans. But our leaders handed Him over. He was crucified. And He Himself seemed to want this. At least, He went willingly. We’ve heard reports that He told His disciples not to fight in His defense. When He was on trial and there were all kinds of false accusations, He didn’t say a word. He was silent before His accusers. And His death? It just doesn’t make sense to us. And now, they tell the Stranger, to add to all this confusion, there are these reports from the women—the tomb is supposedly empty. Supposedly there was an angel. And John and Peter have also seen the same things.

So this was their conversation. And they tell the Stranger: “There’s one thing here that really doesn’t fit. That’s the cross. Why should He suffer?” In verse 21 they say, “We wanted to trust that this was the Christ. It’s the third day since these things were done. And we remember that He did say something about the third day. But His death, the crucifixion, it just doesn’t fit.” These two stumble at the cross.

The sympathetic Stranger walking with them listens. And then all of a sudden He speaks. In verses 25-27, you have Jesus’ answer, a sermon, to these men. In verse 25, His introduction, Jesus says, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” Now, Jesus does not mean that these men are fools like the ungodly fool of Psalm 14 who says in his heart: “There is no God,” and who does not want to know truth. No, these men want to understand these things. But their folly is their slowness in understanding, and especially that they do not understand the prophets and the suffering of Christ.

Verse 27 gives us the content of Jesus’ sermon: “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” He opened up to them the Old Testament to show them what it was all about. That must have been quite a sermon. They had not seen it all—only parts of it. And so Jesus shows all of it to them. He began with Moses. That means that He began with the books of Moses—the first five books of the Bible. He must have spoken of the promise of Genesis 3:15, the Seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent. He must have spoken of the shedding of the blood of animals to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve; of Abel’s sacrifice of a lamb; of the sign of circumcision, in

which there was shedding of blood. He must have spoken of Israel in Egypt, and of the Passover lamb; of the Levitical laws; of sacrifice for sin; of the scape-goat that carried the sins of the people into the wilderness. He must have related to them the history of Israel, the conquest of Canaan, the judges, David, Solomon, the kings, and all the blood that was shed in sacrifice; all the suffering of God's people. And all the while, He was showing to them that the Old Testament spoke about Himself.

In verse 26, we have the theme of His sermon in this rhetorical question that He puts to them. He says, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" A powerful rhetorical question, the force of which was: Yes! Christ must have suffered all these things. He had to. This was the point of everything that Jesus said to them. This is the way God always intended it to be—the way of sin, and through sin—grace. The way of the Fall and man's guilt, and the cross to pay for sin. Sin and its results must be dealt with. And the only way is payment for sin—the suffering of the Mediator.

They listened. And their hearts burned within them. They hung onto His every word. How well this Stranger understood the Scriptures. How well He explained passages that they never understood, drawing from the Scriptures all kinds of things that they had never associated with their Messiah. The suffering of Christ in the book the Psalms; the cross of Christ in the prophet Isaiah; and so on.

And Jesus spoke with them also of the glory of Christ as the goal of His suffering. This glory was not a national glory as they expected. But He took them back to the Fall and to their great enemies—the devil and sin—to show them that the Messiah would come not to conquer a political enemy but to defeat sin. He brought them through the victories of the Flood, of Israel in Egypt, of David over his enemies. And He showed them that these were all victories over sin and the power of darkness. The glory that followed, came always through victory over Satan and sin.

And as they listened, they began to understand the glory of Christ as spiritual and not earthly. They began to see that, yes, the cross was necessary as a battle over sin and Satan. And that the cross and the suffering of Christ was victorious—His way to glory. They began to remember some of the words of Jesus concerning His own suffering.

And so Christ, in this sermon, shows to them the unity of the Scriptures. He shows to them that the cross at which they stumbled was the key to it all. In verse 32, their hearts burned within them as they listened. That is, they believed what He was saying. They believed the Scriptures concerning Christ and His suffering. They saw the necessity of the cross.

And then, so quickly, they were home in Emmaus. How disappointing. They could have walked on and continued listening to this man all night long. But they are home. And it is late. So they compel this stranger to stay the night with them. After all, He will need to find somewhere to stay. Verse 29 tells us "they constrained him," that is, they pressured Him to stay. And He consented. He came into their home.

And verse 30 tells us that He sits down to eat with them. He takes bread and He blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them. There is something very familiar here. They remember the feeding of the multitudes, the report of the disciples about the last Supper, and suddenly their eyes are opened. They know who this is. And we can see Cleopas opening his mouth to say something like: “My Lord, and my God!” Or we can picture him or his friend reaching out to embrace this Stranger. But He is gone. He vanishes out of their sight.

Are they downcast? Are they sad now that He is gone? No, no. They are overjoyed. Their eyes are opened. Now they understand it all. The suffering, the cross, but also the resurrection and glory. It all fits together now in their minds. It had to be this way.

And now watch them. That same hour they hurry back to Jerusalem to add to the joy of the disciples. Listen to them exclaim: “He’s risen,” and relate verse 35, what things had happened along the way and how He was known of them in the breaking of bread. What a joy. They had seen the risen Lord!

And now they understood His suffering. They had witnessed His glory.

Is this not a marvelous passage? I pray that the Holy Spirit has carried you along through it, too.

Let us finish now with a couple of points of application.

First, if you see and understand the Scriptures as Christ explained them here; if you see Christ and His suffering as the central theme of the Word of God; if you understand the necessity of the cross as payment for your sins and see the glory of Christ as heavenly and not earthly—they praise God for your opened eyes. How we would all like to have heard the sermon of Jesus. But today, God has opened our eyes to these things. And He speaks to us in the true preaching of the gospel. Christ is risen. Praise God for opened eyes.

Second, may this live, not just in our minds, but in our hearts. Like these disciples, we can often be so confused by our earthly circumstances. Especially by the pain and the grief and the suffering that sometimes come in life. Then may the cross and the suffering of Christ live in our hearts. Suffering is necessary not only for Christ, but also for us. In Matthew 16 Jesus tells His disciples that He must suffer and die and that discipleship means denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him on the path of suffering. This was His way to glory. And for us it is the same. If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together (Rom. 8:17). Believe this. The cross was Christ’s way to glory. And suffering, for every child of God, is the God-ordained way to glory.

Third, we have here an encouragement to prayer. Are you confused? Are you troubled? Then take it to the Lord in prayer. As the psalmist says, pour out your heart, pour out your complaint, to Him. He will hear. He sympathizes with His people. “Why are you so sad?” He asks these travelers. Today we have a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities, tempted and tried in all points like we are, risen victorious in glory, receiving the prayers of His

people. Let us listen to Him. Let us not wrestle with the Word of God, but let us hear it and put our faith in the Christ that God has revealed in all of the Scriptures.

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank Thee for the Scriptures, which are a beautiful revelation, from beginning to end, of the suffering Savior, who is our substitute. And today, we rejoice in His glory. He is risen, and He is ascended, and He sits at Thy right hand. This gives us great hope and great confidence as Thy people in this world. Lord, we pray that He may come again. Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.