

An Idle Tale?

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So here you have two disciples on their way to a village called Emmaus which was about seven miles from Jerusalem, walking there on Resurrection Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead as he promised, and they were walking away from Jerusalem, away from their brothers and sisters in Christ, away from the mission that Jesus had given them, and they were stunned and sad, confused, concerned about what might be next and Jesus shows up and walks with them and listens to them.

Look at verse 15, "While they were talking and discussing together," as many of us have been talking and discussing together of the events of our past few weeks, "Jesus himself drew near and went with them." Lord Jesus, we need you to draw near to us and go with us.

"But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." That verse has caught me. In the midst of whatever it is I'm going through that is hard, are my eyes kept from recognizing Jesus even when he's walking with me?

And he began to ask them questions, "What's going on here? What are you talking about? What is it that you're so disturbed about? And they stood still and looked sad." Then they asked him, "Where have you been? Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem that doesn't know what's going on? Haven't you heard?" Have you asked Jesus, "Where have you been," lately? "Where are you?" Do you have a clue?

And Jesus, I love how he acts like he doesn't have a clue and asks them a question, "What things?" He draws them out and then they share their frustration, that frustration of what about the promises? What about the Messiah? What about the Gospel? Is it real? Is this really going to happen? Where is the power of the promises of God? Where is the power of the covenants? Where is the power of the Gospel that this Jesus preached? Does this work or not? Have you asked that question lately? Is he really who he says he is? Has he really done what he said he's done? Will he really do what he said he'll do?

So they told him his own story, and then finally, I guess he couldn't contain himself anymore and he said in verse 25, "O foolish ones!" And I don't know, we don't get the intonation, we don't know how he said it, but whether there was, I don't know, maybe a mixture of frustration but also compassion.

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" This is me. This is what God has convicted of me over these weeks. I get sad. I get down. I get pushed under the weight of the heaviness of my heart and the heaviness of what's happening and my heart gets bogged down and it's slow to believe what God has said. And I can't help but think you might be there too. Has your heart been slow to believe all that God has written in this book? Is it really true? Are the promises to his people true? Is the Gospel really that powerful? Show me. And this is, I think, the key issue for me and for you and for us as disciples of Jesus, do you believe? Do you believe?

If you go back, look with me if you're still in chapter 24, if you go back to when the women went to the tomb, listen to some of the things that were said by the angels. Listen to this. Let's go back to chapter 24, verse 5. They've seen the angels, "they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men," the angles, "said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.'" Here it is right here, "Remember how he told you." Remember his words? Remember, "while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." Verse 8, "And they remembered his words." The angel says, "Remember what he told you?" And they remembered his words and what was the result of remembering his words? They ran back to the other disciples and told all of these things to them and to all the rest. It was Mary and Joanna and Mary and other women who told these things to the apostles. Remember what he told you? And when they remembered his words, they ran back to their brothers and said, "He is risen! It's true!" Now look at their response, verse 11, "but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

Have you been this week, this last month, whatever, and for whatever reason, I know there's lots more going on in your lives and in my life than just what has happened in our church, there's a whole lot more heavy stuff, but have you been like me and like these men who just hear this book, this story, this Gospel, and think, "Maybe it's just an idle tale. Maybe it's just another story." And we don't believe it. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is it. Do we believe this story or don't we? That's where these guys were. It could have been Cleopas and his wife. I won't just say guys, but that's where they were. They even said, these women came and they seemed to kind of... We're not sure. Is it just an idle tale? Or is it the story of your life and mine and the whole universe.

So how did Jesus help them with this problem? He did two things: he opened the Scriptures to them so that they could see him in the story, that's the first thing he did, and then later he opened their eyes to see them in the sacrifice. When it says that as they sat down and, "he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them," those are the same words that were used at the Last Supper. He took, blessed, broke, gave. It's also reminiscent of when he fed the 5,000. He did the same thing and it was there that he saw him in his sacrifice.

So let's just focus on these two things briefly and then we'll come to the table. He opened the Scriptures to them so that they would see him in the story. Verse 32, first of all, "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?'" But what does that mean, he opened to us the Scriptures? It wasn't that they were just walking along and he just opened and pointed at a verse and said, "Hope that encourages you." That's a dangerous method, by the way. You can open the Bible and point at a verse that says, "And Judas went out and hung himself," and you close the Bible. Open it again and another verse that says, "Go thou and do likewise." Don't try that. That's not what it means by "he opened to us the Scriptures." He didn't just...

Look back at verse 27. Here's how he opened the Scriptures to them, "And beginning with Moses," which is the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," so from Moses at the beginning to the prophets at the end, the whole Old Testament, to them that was their Bible, "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." He interpreted. He said, "Look, here's the story. It's all about me. And here's how all of this leads to this moment and it's not over yet, but Christ had to suffer and rise on the third day." It's true. The story is true and the story is about Jesus. At this point, he doesn't even tell them that he's Jesus. This is amazing. Think about this. Here's Jesus kind of pretending not to be Jesus but still giving glory to Jesus and pointing to Jesus and saying, "Look at him. Look at him. This story is about him and this story is true."

So I want to say to us: I think that's what we need right now because the purpose the Scriptures, the purpose of the Bible, is to develop faith in us. If our hearts are slow to believe all that God has said, then what God has said is the very thing that he's going to use to quicken our hearts with faith. Paul said in Romans 10, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Go back to the story but don't just go and do random little devotional exercises that give you a little shot for the day. No, go to the story and look for Jesus because John said at the end of his Gospel, "I have written these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior." The purpose of reading the story is not to just be informed but to be transformed; it's so that you grip on tighter to Christ and hold on to him and follow him and love him. This is what I need. I need to go back to the story and read it and look for Jesus. Keep my eyes fixed on him who is alive and seated at the right hand of God the Father, subduing his enemies, advancing his kingdom through his church by the power of his Spirit.

That's what we need and so, well, I'll get to that in a minute. I wanted to read, is Donna here? Are you here? Okay. Donna puts all kinds of really cool quotes from Puritans on Facebook all the time. I stole some that were appropriate to this message.

This guy, we'll have to ask Donna and Bill Camp who this guy is, Octavius Winslow. If you're going to have a child and you're looking for a name, Octavius. Octavius, there you have it. But listen to what Octavius Winslow says about the word of God and it's important to the church. He says, "We reiterate the important truth that, the Word of God—than which the Church on earth possesses not a treasure so divine, costly, and precious—is the instrument employed by the Spirit in commencing, carrying on, and completing that work of grace on earth which is the soul's preparation for the enjoyment

of glory in heaven." God has given us this word, as Paul said to Timothy, to equip us to be his people; to be the embodiment of Jesus on earth.

J. C. Ryle said this, I love this, "Give me a candle and a Bible and shut me up in a dark dungeon and I will tell you everything that the whole world is doing." Give me a candle and a Bible and shut me up in a dark dungeon and I will tell you everything that the whole world is doing. That's profound. He's saying that the Bible, this story, is the story of the world. This is reality and let's add to that: give me a candle and the Bible and shut me up in a dark dark valley of difficulty, and I will tell you not only what the world is doing and what it's supposed to do and where it's going, but I'll tell you what God is doing in the darkness. I'll tell you what God is doing in his church. I'll tell you what God is doing for his glory and our good because the story tells us. No matter how dark the dungeon is, we can know what he's up to.

I teach my students and I'll tell you this very quickly, I teach my students at Trinity to read the Bible with 3D glasses and those 3D's are that the Bible is the drama that God has written so that we might love the story of Jesus, and so read this book like a story. It is. Creation, Genesis 1 and 2. Fall, Genesis 3 through 11. Redemption, Genesis 12 through John. Restoration, Acts through Revelation. It's God's story. It's our story. It's the world's story.

It's a drama but it's also doctrine, teaching, theology. It's doctrine, teachings that help us learn the story of Jesus. So when you read all of these stories, when you read through this story, ask these questions: who is God? What is he up to? Who are we? What's gone wrong? What has God done to remedy that problem? And what is God doing now? What is he up to now? And when you ask those questions of the whole story, you develop doctrines and you learn this is what God is like, this is what God is doing, this is what we're like, this is the problem, this is the solution, here's what God intends for his people, his church to be now. That's all theology, doctrine.

It's very similar, I tell them and I pull out my three paperbacks or four paperbacks that are almost falling apart from high school, of the Hobbit, Tolkien's the Hobbit, Lord of the Rings trilogy, you know, all three of them, Fellowship of the Ring, Two Towers, Return of the King, and I say, "Here's the story in these four volumes. There are others that he has written that tell the story of Middle Earth." But then I pull out another paperback that I found at a garage sale called The Complete Guide to Middle Earth from A to Z, and you open that little book and it's just got in alphabetical order, all these topics and people and places, and you look at Gandalf. So what they've done is they've asked the question: who is Gandalf? And they've gone through the entire story and hold all the answers to that question into one place and said, "Here he is. This is what he is, who he is." Or what is whatever.

So these are truths that have been distilled from the story that help me understand the story better. Doctrines, if you will, I read this to help me understand the story but not much of this makes sense without the story.

The third D is the Bible is directions. It gives us directions, laws, commands, do's, don'ts. There are 613 or so commands in the Old Testament, think about all the commands in the New Testament. I'm beginning to believe that the one command Jesus gave, "Love one another as I have loved you," that's what the whole New Testament unpacks and says, "This is what that looks like." All those "one anothers." The Bible gives us directions to help us know how to live in the story. The drama helps us love the story of Jesus. The doctrine helps us learn the story of Jesus. His directions help us to live in the story of Jesus because the story of Jesus is our story. It's true. It is not an idle tale.

Now let me ask you this and this is what I say to my students: have you ever been to one of those opening nights of one of the Lord of the Rings movies or Harry Potter or Star Wars or one of those, especially those midnight showings? You see people dressed up like certain characters. There are people who think they can live in the story that Tolkien told. They think they can dress up and look like and live in the Lord of the Rings. Now watch when the Hobbit movie comes out, it's going to happen again. But there aren't any books written that tell us how to live in the story of Middle Earth because the story of Middle Earth is a tale. I won't call it an idle tale. It is a tale. It's fiction. It's not true. And what do we think about people who live as if and act as if they can live in that kind of story? We think they're nuts. They're flakes. Hello? Gandalf's not real. You've seen the commercial of the little kid dressed up like Darth Vader trying to use the Force? We're trying to use the Force on stuff. "Let me get mom to change her mind." Hello? It's not real.

How do you think your friends and family and the world around you and people at work are going to respond when you start living and I start living as if this story is real? They think it's an idle tale. Most of us think it's an idle tale. That's why the Bible calls the church peculiar people. They are peculiar because they're special but they're also special because they live as if the story is true.

Did you see what these disciples did? As soon as Jesus revealed this is who he is and then they realized, "Our hearts were burning within us as he opened to us the Scriptures." When is the last time your heart burned at a Bible study? Is that the Bible's fault?

"Our hearts burned," and what did they do? They just didn't sit there and burn, they got up and moved and they went back and it says they found the other disciples, they gathered with them. Jesus came in their midst. They worshiped him, still struggling to believe that it was true. Worshiped him. They heard him say, "Go and take the message of repentance and faith to the world. This is your mission. Go." And they turned the world upside down because they believed the story was true and they finally recognized Jesus.

I think that's what God wants to happen to us. Get back in this story. Believe that it's true and then be the community of God's people on God's mission to spread the Gospel, the goodness and glory and grace of God everywhere. That will only happen if we stop thinking this is an idle tale and that it's not true and that it doesn't work.

So in order to help us do that, I want to give a challenge to Metrocrest. I have some friends out there who are going to hand each of you one of these little sheets of paper. Everybody, man, woman, child, can have one and on it, it's called E100. This was developed by Scripture Union, and the E stands for essential. What they have done is they've gathered 50 passages from the Old Testament, 50 from the New Testament, so that you get a big overview of the whole story of the Scriptures and the challenge is that you read those 100 passages, you can do it in 100 days if you'd like, but I want to challenge us and I'm going to challenge the youth group with the same thing tonight, I want to challenge us as a church to do this five days a week. They're broken down into five passages at a time so in 20 weeks, let's immerse ourselves back in the story of Jesus.

Let's look for the drama and see the big picture. That's what this will help you do. You're going to say, "Well, you're leaving out some parts." Well, it's meant to just give you the big overview. Look for doctrine along the way. Ask those questions: who is God? What is up to? Who am I? What's gone wrong? What's he doing? And then look for directions as you read these passages. Directions answer the question: how do I join God in what he's doing?

And essentially if you want to boil down the directions, they are Galatians 5:6, Paul said to the Galatians who were struggling, they were trying to get his directions right, "You know, circumcision, God says to do that." And Paul said, "No, you're getting the law cart before the Gospel horse here. You don't become a law-keeper by just buckling down and doing it. Just do it. No, the Gospel transforms our hearts into hearts that love God and love others. That's the law." So Galatians 5:6, he said, "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything," quit trying to gain your own righteousness by following all these rules, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Faith, embracing Jesus as he is presented in this book and in this table. Embracing him as your Messiah, your Savior, your King. Embracing his love above all other loves and that will overflow then in love back to God and out to others because all the directions boil down into believe the good news, love God, love people.

So I'm going to ask you to do that whether it's as individuals or families. Let's get back in the story and let's ask him to change our hearts to believe that it's not just an idle tale, it's true and he is true. Here is the next point: he opened their eyes to see him in the sacrifice because that breaking of bread would immediately remind them of two nights before, or three nights before, whatever it was, where he sat and he did that. Now they understand what that was. He said, "This is my body." He took the cup, "This is my blood." The covenant is true. Here it is.

So the word of God, the story of God, whether you study it or you hear it preached, and the sacrifice of Jesus as it's visualized in the sacrifice. Jesus stood among them and said, "Look at my hands and my feet." How real do you want this to be? This is real. Well, Jesus isn't physically here with us but he has left physical elements for us so that we can see, in a sense, his hands and feet and remember his words that he said, "For your sake I had to suffer and then entered into my glory."

So when you come to this table, I want you to do this, this is another quote from Octavius Winslow that I just found gripped me this week. When you come to this table in a moment, here's what I want to invite you to do, "Look afresh from off yourself to Jesus. Lay your doubt and fear and trembling down at his cross. And then look up and rest your believing eye upon the sin-atonning Savior and that close believing look at Jesus will resolve doubt into certainty, melt cloud into sunshine, and calm fear into perfect peace and repose." Take a close believing look at Jesus this morning. He has offered himself to us.