

Faith Revived

by Ron R. Ritchie

Last Thursday night I was privileged to have a visit from two former Walnut Creek students who are now in college. We hadn't seen each other for some six months so the first thing we did was to reflect on old times and old friends. It was an encouragement to see how many of our mutual friends were still growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ and were now assuming roles of Christian leadership.

Then there came a heartbreaking story right in the middle of this evening. We had known and worked with a beautiful young woman when she was there in high school. She was strong in the Lord, a keen Bible student, and a wonderful witness to the power of the Lord in her daily life. Upon graduation she left the area to go to a state university and gradually we lost track of her. My friends said they finally had received word about this girl... but it had come by way of a local newspaper headline which read: "Young Coed Leaps From Dormitory Window To Her Death."

This coed had become so concerned about her Grade Point Average that she was finally driven to doubt even the power of the personal involvement of her Lord and Savior with her personal problems. You see, when the issue was drawn to its finest point she really doubted that Jesus Christ could do what he promised he would do. He promised that he would give her wisdom if she would ask. He promised that he would set her free from anxiety if she would but cast her cares upon him. He promised her joy and peace if she would rest in him. But her doubt obscured all this truth, and her lack of faith drove her to an eleventh - story dormitory window from which she plunged to her death.

I submit that this lack of faith on the part of our christian sister is not a new problem. Rather, it is a problem which every Christian has had to face in every generation since the death of Jesus Christ. Would you please turn with me to Luke 24, verses 13 through 32. I hope that all of us will allow the Holy Spirit to admonish and encourage us through this passage. I believe that when we are finished with this passage this morning, if we have allowed the Holy Spirit to have full reign in our hearts, our faith in the power and the promises of our resurrected Lord and Savior will be revived and refreshed.

Let me provide a little background so that you will know where we are. Jesus, it would have appeared to some of his followers, had been approaching the peak of his career at this time. They remembered his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a colt, the crowd placing palm branches on the ground before him, the hundreds of voices lifted in unison, shouting: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." His followers, I am sure, also recalled the beautiful few days which had followed that event.

But suddenly, strangely, things had begun to change. There was that last supper. Jesus had talked about things that they could not really understand. Judas had come in and there had been whispering. Then he was given some of the supper and asked to leave. What had all that been about? They had found out soon enough when, after the prayer meeting in the garden up on the slope of the Mount of Olives where they had fallen asleep, Judas had come with the temple guards to arrest him. So Jesus had been betrayed by one of his own, arrested, beaten, charged, condemned by the crowd, and then sentenced to be nailed to a cruel Roman cross until he died. Later his body was taken down from the cross by some friends and laid in a borrowed tomb.

On the third day some women who had followed Jesus when he was alive arrived at the tomb with spices and perfume to anoint his body. But, much to their amazement, fear, and distress, they found that the stone in front of the tomb had fallen away and that the tomb itself was empty except for some grave clothes. Suddenly two men in dazzling apparel appeared and spoke to them as recorded in verse 5 of chapter 24. I love what they said:

"Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"

"Do you not realize that graveyards are set aside for dead people? You have come to seek Jesus, but he is not here because he is among the living!"

"He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered....

Can you imagine what these women felt? They had been grief- stricken for some three days. They had been at the cross. And when Jesus was put into the tomb late that afternoon they had gone to get the spices and perfume. They had planned to go back to the tomb that evening. But, realizing that the sabbath was approaching too quickly and no work could be done, they put everything off for a whole day, waiting in anticipation. As soon as the sun broke on that third day they raced to the graveyard, only to be informed: "He has risen, he is living!"

And they must have said, "But of course he isn't here. He said he wouldn't be here! Why are we here?" And they raced back, hearts throbbing with the news. "It is revolutionary! Never have we heard of anything like this ! Wait till the eleven hear about this, and the other disciples, waiting in gloom and discouragement in the upper room. We must tell them! Go! Let's run!" Can you see them running down the hill, into the town, up the steps, opening the door: "Men! You wonts believe it' He's risen again!" And the eleven said, so characteristically, "Nonsense! What? Nonsense! You silly women!" Verse 11:

And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

Apparently a short time after the report was received and was evaluated by this astute committee, two disciples who were present and believed the evaluation decided that there was nothing left to do but go home:

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about at, these things which had taken place. And it came about that white they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see."

They have the facts! They have been discussing them back and forth. Then the Lord says, "What things?" and they do it all over again. Where do they end up? Looking sad. Their voices betray their tension, the tension of: "It's the third day, and he said he would rise. It's the third day, and we don't see him anywhere!"

Here are two followers of a man who claimed to be the Son of God, and now this man in whom they had vested all their hopes and dreams, their security and faith, is dead. Now we find them walking along the lonely, dusty road and conversing, tossing the conversation back and forth like a ball, and absently kicking rocks. They don't know what else to do, so they keep discussing the same thing over and over again. While they are traveling (the whole picture is in motion) Jesus himself approaches them and begins traveling with them. But their eyes are prevented from recognizing him.

Jesus knew where his disciples were ! What is so fascinating to me is that these were not the major apostles. They were just two previously unnamed disciples who loved the Lord, but for whom his death had seemingly ruined everything. But Jesus knew where they were--physically, mentally, and spiritually, and he moved in alongside them, right where they were. They were just ordinary disciples really, not the "big names" we still talk about today. Isn't it wonderful that Jesus is concerned about every one of us, regardless of our position?

So he moved in to encourage their faith. Some have suggested that he desired not to be recognized so that the disciples could be free to discuss exactly where they were spiritually. This is true, as far as it goes, but I see also that he wanted to take the emphasis off himself and place it upon source, as we'll see in a minute. This story really need not have taken place had the disciples believed the women's report. But now, because of unbelief, they are found downhearted, perplexed, and on their way home. So we have the privilege of watching Jesus meet men where they are and slowly, carefully draw them out to a point of renewed faith.

"What are these things that you are discussing," Jesus asks. They say, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who is unaware of the things which have happened here in these last few days?" Try to imagine the shock of these disciples. Don't take their question as just an idle, dull reaction. Do you realize that every one in town was talking about this? This was the Passover Season and the city was packed to the brim with Jews who had come to celebrate the Passover. And when they crucified Jesus Christ everyone in town knew what had happened. They knew who he was, and the rumors and the truth about him roamed intermingled throughout the city. I am sure that these disciples are saying to themselves, "Who is this person? Is he so out of touch with reality that no one has informed him of the events that have occurred? He must be a visitor. Certainly he doesn't live here! This is incredible! Where has he been for the last three days?"

Let me compare the utter shock and incredulity of this moment with something to which you and I can relate. I emerged from a history exam at Dallas Theological Seminary, 12:29 P.M., Friday November 22, 1963. This was a day none of us will ever forget. Suddenly I saw several men run up to a student who was carrying a transistor radio. The faces of these men were filled with disgust and gloom and anger and disbelief. And the announcer, in a highly excited voice, said, "Ladies and gentleman, it is incredible but true, John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States, has been shot in downtown Dallas, and they are rushing him to the hospital at this very moment."

I remember that we ran over to the library and several dozen men and I stood around a radio in silence. At exactly 1:00 P.M. the announcer informed us that the President of the United States was dead. I recall the uncontrollable tears that rushed from our eyes, the fear, the grief that gripped our hearts, the momentary sense of hopelessness, and the prayers for the family and the nation.

Then the questions started to pound at us: "Why? Who? When? What's going on? Can anyone make sense out of all of this?" There was speculation about conspiracies, foreign and domestic plots/ bribes, and what have you. Then everything in town started to shut down--schools, shops, and businesses. Everyone rushed to their TV sets.

The next three days were the gloomiest time of my own personal life. We had no sooner sat down to the news than all of a sudden the telecast was interrupted and we found out that the alleged assailant had just shot an officer in a small community five miles away. Then there was a fight at the hospital over Kennedy's body. Finally it was taken aboard the plane where Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as President.

Soon it was Saturday and all kinds of preparations for ceremonies were being made. Everybody was talking about what had happened and important persons were being interviewed. The world actually stopped in its tracks, if you recall. Recently I went back over some old foreign newspapers covering this time that I have and I am amazed today at how practically all activity everywhere ceased and everybody just sat down and tried to evaluate the meaning of what was happening.

Then Sunday morning I ran out for a newspaper. They had since arrested the alleged assailant, Oswald. As I drove back into the driveway my wife ran out and said, "Honey, you'll never believe this! While you've been away these ten minutes some fellow named Ruby sneaked into the jail and shot Oswald." I sat down on the porch and said, "What in the world is going on? I just don't get it!" And there I sat.

Now, can you imagine what would happen if, in the midst of all of that someone walked by and, seeing me in my dismay, came up to me and said, "Hey, what are you so sad about?" I would say, "What!?" He would repeat, "What are you so sad about?" And I would say, "Haven't you heard about JFK?!?!" "No, tell me." And I'd say, "You must be kidding!" Well, this approximates the shock these disciples felt.

But they pull themselves together and start, in their grief, to tell this stranger of the events "We were talking about Jesus..." and, since Jesus is a common name, they say, "... Jesus of Nazareth..." to distinguish him, "...who was a "prophet..." Past tense. And no longer the prophet, but a prophet. Something has happened. Note that the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15 made him a prophet like the living God. A prophet like all the other prophets is what he has become now, since he has died, poor man. He is like Isaiah and Jeremiah, anointed and blessed by God, but certainly not the Son of God now that death has cut short his claim to that title, as well as their belief in him. "...Ah, he was mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people." The depressing key to the conversation lies in the verb "was." "All this is in the past, Stranger. We're simply reviewing for you. We're not even sure why."

"And the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to the sentence of death, and crucified him. But up until the last three days, you know, we were with him long enough that we had started to hope that he would redeem Israel. We bet everything on him. We left our homes and our families and our jobs, and we followed him, because we thought we saw that he was finally the hope of Israel." In this statement we can see their attitude concerning the cross. It wasn't that they didn't still love Jesus. The cross had not destroyed their love for him, but it had cut off their hope, because in the cross all they could see was failure. Failure!

And the world today asks, "Whom do you follow?" "Jesus " "What, the fellow that they hung on the cross?" " Yes." "You poor chump!" "Oh, but he came off the cross." "Now, really." My little son has more insight than the world. My mother-in-law practices a particular religion which keeps Christ on the cross. When we went into her house and he saw the cross he asked my wife, "Mommy, why is Jesus on the cross?" She said, "I don't know why they keep him there." He said, "Didn't he go back to be with his Father?" A four-year-old!

But these disciples couldn't see that. They thought that the cross had cut off their hope. "But we were hoping [we Jews, nationally as well as personally] that he would [past tense] redeem us." "Redeem" never connoted simply "save" or "deliver", but always meant "redeem with- a ". A price had to be paid. There was a cost involved. It would cost something or someone to deliver Israel. Apparently these disciples could not interpret the fact that the price to be paid for their redemption was Jesus of Nazareth.

They continue: "Indeed, beside all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But some women among us amazed us when they told us that on their visit to the tomb they found that he wasn't there..." And they continued to look sad.

Now, there are several insights in this passage which give us spiritual principles for a successful walk with the Lord. I'd like to mention two, among many. The first is a note of encouragement. It is evident from the record that Jesus Christ is presently available to meet us anywhere along our spiritual walk, and at any level of understanding to which we may have come. He will patiently draw us out to a higher level of understanding where he can add new truth which will produce renewed hope. The second is a note of warning. Our Lord will not add new truth to the minds and hearts of his followers until we allow him to pull out the weeds of unbelief. You cannot move on until unbelief is dealt with.

That is where these followers were at this moment. But Luke demonstrates in the next section how much these disciples wanted to believe what Jesus had said in his earthly ministry. The problem was that they lacked an interpreter of the events. They had the facts straight. But they didn't know what to do with them except to continue to repeat them. And each time they recited them there was no new insight, no direction, no hope. Let's read what Jesus says, beginning in verse 25:

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He

explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

He starts with a very stern rebuke. He hits them on their intellectual level, and then he hits them on their emotional level. "'O foolish men' -- men of ignorance. You think you understand, but you don't. You are 'slow of heart', sluggish, unresponsive to truth, 'not reading all the prophets'. You have read some of the prophets, but you have not read them all, because they would have confirmed your faith. 'Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things?' Wasn't it predetermined in the counsel of God before the world began that the Christ, the Messiah, God's Anointed One, would suffer so that men could be reconciled to the Father? And if the Messiah didn't suffer, then men could never come home. And when the Messiah had suffered, then he would 'enter into his glory' and you would enter with him. Was it not necessary?"

Yes, it was! It was necessary that the price be paid. It was also necessary that the Father accept his Son's death as the payment in full for all of man's sin and then glorify his Son by seating him at his right hand where he would be King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever.

He had told the disciples and the apostles all about this many times. He had said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." On another occasion, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." And yet the disciples could not bring themselves to accept this. At one point Peter even went so far as to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And Jesus had to tell him, "Get behind me, Satan. Don't get in the way of what God has planned for the Messiah!"

And so he sets out to correct their ignorance and unbelief:

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.

It is so important that they see, finally, that the Messiah was portrayed throughout the Old Testament, and that Jesus is the vital link between the promise and the fulfillment. When you read the Old Testament you are overwhelmed with the unsatisfied longings and the unfulfilled promises, with stories that never end and predictions that never come true. And the Jews read the Scriptures. But their minds became blinded by various prejudices regarding what the Messiah was going to be like.

We have the same problem today. We call it the "God in the box" movement. We put God in the box of our mind. He looks like us, talks like us, dresses like us, and he's our Savior and Lord and we love him. When people tell you, anymore, that they believe in God and Jesus Christ, you have to ask, "Which one? The Jesus of your mind or the Jesus of the Scriptures?" Because the God of your mind is the one who does not cut across your life-style. But the God of the Scriptures cuts exactly across your life-style, because he deals only in truth.

Thus the Jews had set up one type of Messiah--the Shepherd of Israel, who gently leads and cares for his sheep. My, how pleasing. That was true, but only partially. Read the book of habakkuk. His care for his sheep included sending in the Chaldeans to devastate them because of disobedience. We don't like to talk about that. Other scholars through the years had billed the Messiah as the coming King of Glory and King of Righteousness. That too was true, in part. But it didn't take into account that other aspect of the messianic character to which the Jewish people couldn't relate and didn't want to understand--that of the suffering servant of Jehovah, the man of sorrow, acquainted with grief, about whom we read in Isaiah 53, despised, rejected of men, forsaken by the Father as the sins of the world are laid on his shoulders.

But here on the road to Emmaus Christ reveals the total character of the Messiah to these disciples by starting with Moses and teaching through all the prophets.

I have walked along that Emmaus road. And I have often wished, along with many others who have taught on this passage, that I had been at this Bible study. No clocks, just seven miles in no hurry, just walking with the Master, conversing back and forth. What a time to grow in the Lord ! The Lord said to us when he was on this

earth, "Search the Scriptures; they tell of me." I have tried to imagine what Christ might have told them on that day. It must have pertained to two things: "Was it not necessary for the Christ (1) to suffer...and (2) to enter into His glory?" All through the Old Testament both of these elements are continually in evidence, beginning with Moses.

In Exodus Christ is seen as the Passover Lamb; in Leviticus, as the Atoning Sacrifice; in Numbers, as the Smitten Rock; in Deuteronomy, as the Prophet yet to come; in Isaiah, as the Sheep led to slaughter (how did they miss that?); in Jeremiah, as the Branch of Righteousness, executing justice in the land; in Ezekiel, as the Plant of Renown, giving shade and fragrance; in Daniel, as the Stone that smote the image; in Hosea, as the ideal Israel; in Joel, as the Hope of the people, the Strength of the children; in Amos, as the heavenly Husbandman; in Obadiah, Christ is seen as the Savior; in Jonah, as the Resurrection and the Life; in Micah he is seen as the Restorer of the people back to God; in Nahum, as the Publisher of Peace; in Habakkuk, the Anointed One going back and forth for the salvation of all; in Zephaniah, as the one Mighty to Save; in Haggai, as the Desired One of all nations; in Zechariah, as the Headstone of the House of God; and in Malachi Jesus Christ is seen as the Refiner sitting over the fire, and as the Sun of Righteousness who will rise with healing in his wings.

Those are some of the things he might have shared with them. And I didn't even mention the Psalms and Proverbs, and Job and Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes and Esther and Ruth. But in any event he produced the evidence that the Messiah of the Old Testament was also the Suffering Servant, who was also the Son of God, who was also Jesus of Nazareth who had died on a cross three days previously and would do what he promised to do: rise again on the third day and walk among the living.

When Jesus found these disciples they had believed some of the Scriptures. So he started with the Scriptures--it was a good starting point--and he led them into new areas of truth. The fascinating thing is that he was able to lead them into new truth because they had shut up and had started to listen. In the first section they were doing all the talking. Now they allow him to talk, and they are starting to get what he is driving at.

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther.

He doesn't force himself in. I have always been intrigued at how Jesus Christ never forced his way into my life. I've never felt invaded by the Lord. I've always felt that I said, "Come in."

And they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." And He went in to stay with them. And it came about that when He had reclined at table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and he vanished from their sight.

I can see them saying, "Come in. I think we're getting it. I think it's coming through. We -just have one small question We hate to bring it up. We're almost embarrassed to ask. I hope it doesn't disturb you, but we must know: Where is the body? Yes, thank you for the bread" And as he gave them the bread, their eyes were opened. Why? Because they saw the nail-pierced hands.

And at that moment they recognized him, and the truth flooded into their minds and emotions, and suddenly they said' "Its you, Lord' You're alive! It's the third day! The Scriptures are true! And we hate to admit it, but the women were right!" And he vanished from their sight. Why? What a moment to leave! It was time for a party! The next verse explains the necessity to vanish:

And they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us white He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

Jesus was teaching his disciples to depend upon the Scriptures for assurance, for joy, for renewed faith, for hope, for confidence, for victory... rather than on his physical presence. They were being taught the value of the Scriptures.

It is the Scriptures that produce hope. Now, it was not the Scriptures alone. They already had some knowledge of the Scriptures but they couldn't do anything with it. But when Jesus Christ took the Scriptures and opened them to them, then they understood and everything came back together. Their hope was restored because they allowed Christ to open their minds and hearts.

So, there are three spiritual principles that we should deal with this morning, two of them by way of review. When we are tempted by doubt and fear to believe that Jesus Christ is not going to do what he said he would do' we must immediately realize that our Lord is just as available to us now as he was to his disciples then. He will meet us on the road of discouragement at whatever our level of understanding, and then he will patiently raise us to a new level where he can add new truth which produces new hope. At the same time we must realize that our Lord will not be able to add this new truth to our minds and hearts unless we allow him first to purge us of our unbelief.

In that connection we come to the third principle: When we allow him to do that, the Living Word will always lead us back to the Written Word, and if we will allow him to do so he then will interpret the Written Word for us and show us that he is the Lord who does what he says he will do.

Many people say, "That's beautiful, but you don't understand. I have no desire to study the Word. Every time I try, I don't understand it.", we must do exactly what the first-century Christians did. They finally stopped talking and started to listen. Some good friends of mine, Ernie and Phil, attended a study camp last year. These fellows were new Christians, and they were sitting there with their Bibles and all the worksheets. The rest of our students, about 200 of them, were just studying away, having an exciting time in sharing the Word. But Ernie and Phil were so discouraged! I asked them, "What's going on?" And they said, "We just don't get it. We just don't understand. We're going to the woods this afternoon, and we're going to talk to the Lord and ask him to make us understand what's going on." Can you imagine these two brand new babes having that much insight? They took off at lunchtime, right after the class. I didn't see them until four o'clock that afternoon. They were coming down the hill into camp, and in their faces I could have read this verse:

"Were not our hearts burning within us...while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

Now both these men are Bible teachers among our students. They went to the interpreter, the Living Word, and the Living Word brought the Written Word to life. Listen, when doubt and discouragement come into our lives because we have forgotten that God said, "I will give you hope," and when we face nothing but anxiety; because we have forgotten that God said, "I will give you rest," and when we are confronted with nothing but failure and defeat because we have forgotten that God said, "Christ always leads us in triumph," then I ask you, based on this Scripture, to go back to the Word and say to the Living Word, "Please open my eyes and my mind, that I might see that you are the God who promised to do what he said he would do, and please forgive me in my moment of unbelief."

Let's ask our Father to remind us to ask the Living Word to interpret the Written Word for us, so that our eyes may be opened and our hearts set burning, because we have seen the truth, and the truth has set us free. John Fischer, will you close?

"Whom can you trust when all turns to dust, And the dreams of men lie battered and crushed? How can you say, This is the way, When the founders of wisdom lie in coffins of clay? Where's the truth that will stand the test of time? Flowers will fade and fall away, But the Word of God is here to stay. Man shall not live by bread alone, But by every word from the mouth of God."

Prayer

Our Father, thank you for giving us the Scriptures. Thank you for giving us evidence sufficient to meet our need to see who you are and what you have done. And thank you most of all for the life of Jesus, which springs from the pages as we read and as we study. And my prayer for us all, for all my brothers and sisters, is that you, through your Spirit among us now, the Living Word, would interpret to us your Written Word, and would cause us to see

you and to understand your truth. And we pray that your Spirit would bear witness with ours that these things are so. I pray for every son and daughter of the truth here this morning that you would enliven our hearts and teach us your Word this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog #481
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August 22,1971

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