

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Road to Emmaus

Many of us have heard of Jim Valvano, the famous basketball coach of North Carolina State. He later became an ESPN Sports announcer with Dick Vitale. In June 1992, Jim Valvano was diagnosed with bone cancer. In April 1993 at the young age of 46 he died.

In an article of tribute,<sup>1</sup> Dick Vitale tells the story of Jim Valvano. As a salute to his dear friend, Vitale recounted how Jim faced life with enthusiasm and courage and how this remained true as he faced the painful battle of bone cancer. At one point he related how the night before a planning meeting with ESPN Valvano took repeated doses of pain killer, suffering from what he described as “a tooth ache running through his entire body.” And yet, the next day at the meeting, you'd never know of or see Jim's pain.

This is an accurate picture of many of us this morning.

Today is Easter — a time of celebration and joy over the Resurrection of Christ. And many of us have come here with a disposition that reflects this day. We are joyful, happy, enthusiastic, and excited. And yet, for some, the smiles and expressions of joy are merely external.

This past week was spent in pain and sadness. We have entertained questions of fairness, purpose, meaning, and of God's love. These things have been consuming your mind. In fact, for some, last night may have been spent attending to a “tooth-ache that ran through their entire body.” And yet, because today is Easter, you've made a concerted effort to forget about the problems and to get with the flow. Easter is supposed to be a happy day. And so, in spite of your pain, you've decided to be happy — or at least portray it.

This morning I want to speak to all of us, but especially to those in the later group!

God has addressed your situation! At another time and in another place there were some who spent Easter much like you are today. They had a void of joy and were in much pain. They were defeated. They were down-cast. They were quite hopeless. They were traveling upon what our passage has identified as, “The Road to Emmaus.”

Luke 24:13-14, “And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.”

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<sup>1</sup> Reader's Digest, April '94

These verses intimately link this account with the resurrection of Christ with the simple words, “that same day.” As the disciples walked, they shared their heartache, confusion, misery, and grief with each other. And yet, little did they know that “that very day” Christ had risen. And so they traversed the road to Emmaus.

And what is this road?

In the days of Christ it was a literal road that led from Jerusalem to the small town of Emmaus. It was traveled in our text by two followers of Christ who were in despair as they had just witnessed the crucifixion of Christ a couple of days back. It nevertheless can be viewed as a road frequented by any and all who have been victimized by this world.

“The Road to Emmaus” as it is much more than just a road that led to a small town in the days of Christ, but it is the road of human experience shared by ALL!

And yet I don't want to end here — for this would be too burdensome. I want to discuss with you “The Divine Solution” for all who travel this difficult road.

But FIRST, let's talk about the road to Emmaus as a human experience shared by sll...

## The Human Experience

Since the fall of Adam all of human experience has been marked by sadness.

Luke 24:15, “And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.”

As the disciples walked on the road, Christ overtook them and began walking beside them.

Luke 24:16, “But their eyes were holden [prevented] that they should not know him.”

It could have been that Jesus was in a totally different form than when He walked the earth.<sup>2</sup> Or it could just be that God blinded their eyes to seeing Christ.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the disciples did not recognize this apparent stranger as Christ. Furthermore, there were many traveling the road, hastening back to their homes after the Passover celebration. Christ would have been understood to be one of these people.

Luke 24:17, “**And he said unto them, what manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?**”

This was a common approach in Jesus' ministry. Christ did not ask because He lacked information. Rather, He asked in order to arouse interest.

Luke 24:17, “And he said unto them, what manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, **and are sad?**”

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Mark 16:12

<sup>3</sup> Compare John 20:14 to 21:14

This question, so unbelievable since the crucifixion of Christ apparently was the talk of the region, made the disciples stop. And as they stood there, their demeanor was seen. They looked gloomy, sullen, depressed, or downcast. They had the reaction of one who frowns indignantly. This is the term used of the hypocrites who are said to have “put on a gloomy face.”<sup>4</sup> And this bears the meaning quite nicely.

And thus, the truth of Jesus' death had taken these disciples to a very low point. They were at a point of hopelessness and gloom. They were at a point of indignation. They were at a point of sadness and mourning.

The Christian life is not a path of ease. There are times when the Christian finds himself on another path, a path of mourning. And this is the first characteristic of those who travel on the road to Emmaus: Deep Sadness!

And yet, it doesn't stop here.

## A Road of Disappointment

The road to Emmaus is marked by disappointment.

Luke 24:18, “And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?”

The tone of this question verges on sarcasm. “You've got to be kidding me! Every other visitor to Jerusalem knows what happened there, but you don't?”

Luke 24:19, “**And he said unto them, What things?** And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”

With marvelous tact, Jesus gives Cleopas a full opportunity to unburden himself.

Luke 24:19-21, “And he said unto them, What things? **And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel:** and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.”

This is not a reference to the saving work of Christ. Rather, this is in reference to the prevailing view of many Jews in Christ's day. For most, the Messiah was understood to be a military leader who would conquer Rome, save His people, and thus redeem Israel from their oppression.<sup>5</sup> And with this view, you can just imagine the DISAPPOINTMENT of all who followed Christ.

“But we trusted”<sup>6</sup> is in the past tense. It is something that they USED to do. From the perspective of these disciples, far from being the Messiah, Jesus turned out to be no different from many other Jewish leaders who rallied the Jews to rebel against Rome or Greece, and yet who were ultimately shown to be

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<sup>4</sup> Compare Matthew 6:16

<sup>5</sup> Compare Luke 1:68, 2:38, and 21:28

<sup>6</sup> Alternately rendered “But we were hoping” (NASB) and “but we had hoped that” (NIV).

FALSE Messiah's through their death. AND JESUS WAS NO DIFFERENT. What a Disappointment!

Through these few verses Luke graphically portrays the disappointment of the disciples. Just one week before, it appeared that the people had finally received the Messiah.<sup>7</sup> And yet, now, not only were the people wrong, but so also were the Disciples!

And this you must see is part and parcel of the Road to Emmaus. NOT only is it associated with Sadness. It is also characterized by **disappointment**.

And yet, it doesn't stop here.

## A Road of Confusion

The road to Emmaus is marked by confusion.

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

This is an important reference. You will recall that Christ Himself predicted that He would rise again on the third day.

Matthew 16:21, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

These two disciples reference this with a hope and anticipation that is shrouded in CONFUSION. Notice what they say.

Luke 24:22-23, “And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.”

This was the women's claim —that Christ was raised — but it was hardly credible. After all, if Christ rose from the dead, would it not be expected that the announcement would first be given to His disciples? And further, how can you believe the report of a woman? After all, the Law system in which most Jews boasted excluded women from serving as witnesses. And thus, the report of the women could hardly be taken seriously. We see this attitude when Luke writes, “And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11). And yet, to make matters even more CONFUSING, there had been some interesting reports coming from some of the Disciples.

Luke 24:24, “And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.”

The reference here is to Peter and John.<sup>8</sup> Though they went to the tomb and found everything as the women had said, they were disbelieving for there was ONE piece of evidence still missing — Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Matthew 21

<sup>8</sup> Compare John 20:1-10

Christ.

And so, not only is the road to Emmaus associated with sadness and disappointment it is also characterized by confusion.

."Some say this."

"Others say that."

"The evidence seems lacking."

"And we don't know what to believe."

Dr. Hendriksen described it in these terms.

"Their Master [is] gone. Their friend... departed. Their plans wrecked. Their hopes shattered. They are perplexed, baffled. They despair. Like men whose none too sturdy vessel is froze solid in the Arctic ice pack, with ice..., cold, bleak, barren, stretching in every direction for hundreds of miles. Ice, screeching, roaring, grinding. Will they ever see their dear ones again? ABANDON HOPE, ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE!"<sup>9</sup>

## **The Road to Emmaus**

Have you been there?

Though 2000 years separate us from this account God's people nevertheless still travel this road! We have ruined dreams. We have broken hearts. We have pain and suffering. We have unanswered questions. We have a numbing sadness.

These are all adjectives that describe the tragedies and pain that accompany life in this world. And though Christ may be your Savior and Lord these things are and will be an unavoidable part of your life here!

And when your life is so characterized, it may well be said that you are on the Road to Emmaus.

And I have no doubt that there may be some traveling this road today. You have been overrun with sadness. You have been overrun with disappointment. You have been overrun with confusion. You are to the point where you perhaps have even despaired of life.

Yet let me encourage you! In the midst of this gloom, there is hope!

## **The Divine Solution**

God has provided a solution that is available to any and all of God's children who traverse the difficult Road to Emmaus. It is immediately addressed by an understanding of the Word of God.

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<sup>9</sup> From Hendriksen's NTC on Luke, page 1063

Luke 24:25-26, “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”

This reveals the first issue. The disciples had a problem. It was not their circumstances. It was not the evil days in which they lived. The Romans weren't their problem. And the death of Christ wasn't the problem. Rather, their problem was THEIR unwillingness to believe the Word of God. They weren't taking God at His Word!

See, the emphasis in these two verses is “ALL that the prophets have spoken.” From this we see the MAIN error into which those on the Road to Emmaus fall — they read the Bible selectively! Just as the Jews in Christ's day selectively took God's word as they willed, concentrating only on the parts that promised deliverance for Israel,<sup>10</sup> so also, the disciples heard from Christ and read from God's word only what they wanted to hear and read! They didn't read the WHOLE counsel of God. They hadn't listened to everything Christ told them — especially Christ's teaching on His call to die.<sup>11</sup> They had overlooked the parts of God's word that spoke about suffering. They ignored the parts about trials. They skipped the passages on difficulties. They didn't believe what the Bible said about heartaches. In their spiritual deficiency, the disciples had accepted ONLY what they wanted. They read only what fit into their little world.

And in this context of error, we therefore notice the first solution that God gives to those on the Road to Emmaus: An opportunity to really listen to the Word of God and so understand it! As such we read this:

Luke 24:27, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

What a lesson to have received from the Master. Wouldn't it have been great to have been there?

The “Law” and the “Prophets” are in reference to ALL the Old Testament. Thus, the disciples received a theology lesson by the Savior directly from His Word! And this time, Christ's teaching stuck!

And it stuck not because God supernaturally imparted it to them. It stuck because the circumstances of the Road to Emmaus made the disciples receptive!

And so, if you gain any insight from this text into life on the Road to Emmaus, don't miss this point. The medicine that heals the broken heart of those traveling the Road to Emmaus is not something that God directly supplies but, something that the Road itself supplies — a readiness and eagerness to receive the Word of God!

Psalm 119:71, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

See, this wasn't the first time the disciples heard Christ's teaching. Rather, this was the first time the disciples listened! This was the first time they put aside their preconceived notions of how God's kingdom must be, and learned how it really is! This was the first time they allowed God's Word to speak without fitting it into a mold.

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Luke 24:21

<sup>11</sup> Compare Jn. 12:31, 32; Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; 22:37).

Brothers and Sisters, whether you are on the Road to Emmaus today, or whether it lies ahead, always bear in mind that the Road to Emmaus is more easily traversed when you allow God's word to Speak! See the very thing that aggravates the sorrow and disappointment of those on the road is a misunderstanding of God's Word and a refusal to believe it!

I urge you this Easter morning; cultivate a life that listens to God's Word. Don't approach God's Word with a mandate as to how God must and must not be. Learn to receive God's Word not selectively, but wholly. And then believe it; rely upon it; live it!

It is better to learn this today before the trip begins, than later to struggle on the Road to Emmaus because you have refused to hear and believe!

We see the first solution given to all who travel the Road to Emmaus: An understanding of God's Word.

## **The Resurrected Christ**

And yet, this is not all that is given to us to help us on the road to Emmaus. Ultimately our fears are addressed by the resurrected Christ.

Luke 24:28-29, “And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.”

Traveling late in the evening involved danger from various sources — robbers, obstacles upon the path, and even wild animals. These potential dangers were probably used by the disciples to convince their new-found friend to stay with them, “it is getting toward evening.”

Now, in some English translations<sup>12</sup> this sounds as though Christ's intention to go on was merely a show, a little game whose end was to manipulate the disciples into a specific course of action. Yet, the Greek doesn't bear this out. Rather, this text indicates that Christ would have kept on going! So the disciples bid Him stay. In fact, they are so taken back by this incredible stranger that they not only beg Him to stay, but we read this:

Luke 24:30, “And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.”

When Christ first joined them, the disciples probably were not at all pleased to have this stranger intrude on them. But by now, for a very understandable reason, they could not think of letting Him go. And thus, this total Stranger (Christ) was apparently asked to perform the duties of the host by giving the blessing for the food.

Luke 24:31-32, “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

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<sup>12</sup> The Message, NASB, NASB95, NIV and others render the passage “He acted as if he were going on.” The KJV and ASV state “He made as though he would have gone further.” BBE states “he seemed as if he was going on.” The NKJV states “He indicated that He would have gone farther.” Rotherham states: “and, he, made for journeying, further.”

Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, that which blinded the disciples from seeing their Savior is removed. And the disciples beheld their Lord and Savior! He had been there all the time. It is just that their unbelief and selfishness blinded them from seeing. And before they realized what had happened, He was gone.

And yet, the impact of His ministry would never depart. The impact would be with them forever. And they now knew that His presence would never forsake them.<sup>13</sup> And thus, with hearts set aflame by the wonderful words of Christ, they hasten back to Jerusalem to tell of their incredible encounter with the Resurrected Christ. Their journey on the Road to Emmaus has ended! The time for rejoicing has begun for now the disciples are on the Road to Jerusalem!

This reveals the second and ultimate solution for those on the Road to Emmaus: The Resurrected Christ. All the teaching in the world would have been but mere words unaccompanied by the Savior! However, the presence of the Lord made all the difference. In fact, only the Resurrected Christ answered the multiple burdens of the Disciples as they trod the Road to Emmaus.

And so, not only must we seek the Word of God, but we also must set our hearts on the God of the Word. This must be our passion in life. This must be at the heart and soul of all that we do.

Let us go back to Luke 24:29 and notice something: If the disciples had not invited Christ to stay Christ would have passed on! And the Disciples would have forfeited the inexpressible privilege of fellowshiping with their God!

See, those on the Road to Emmaus who receive the healing balm of grace at the hands of the Resurrected Christ are ONLY THOSE who diligently and unremittently seek the Lord! When Jacob was wrestling with the pre-incarnate Christ, he received no blessing until he begged for it!<sup>14</sup> When the Gentile woman sought Christ's healing touch for her daughter, she received no satisfaction until she pleaded for it.<sup>15</sup> When Christ described the kingdom of God, He likened it to an importunate woman who received satisfaction only after long hours of diligent search and inquiry.<sup>16</sup>

Hear this well Brothers and Sisters. The Resurrected Christ stays with those on the Road to Emmaus ONLY at their bidding. That is why David told his son Solomon "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

J. C. Ryle put it this way in his book *Holiness*:

"To commune with God... will be the holy man's chiefest enjoyments. He will value every thing and place and company, just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David's feeling, when he says, 'My soul followeth hard after Thee'; 'Thou art my portion' (Psalm 63:8; 119:57)."<sup>17</sup>

Thus whether you are on the Road to Emmaus or not seek the Lord. Fight to seek Him. Make the air you

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<sup>13</sup> Compare Matthew 28:20

<sup>14</sup> Compare Genesis 32:26

<sup>15</sup> Compare Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>16</sup> Compare Luke 18:1-8

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, page 37



breathe the breath of God. Hunger for Him. Thirst after Him. For as you make God your one desire, God will “satisfy you.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Are You Christ’s Disciple?**

And yet, I am aware that there may be some here today that have never nor will ever travel the Road to Emmaus. It is not because you have not had difficulties BUT because you are on a different road.

Those that travel the Road to Emmaus are the ones whom the resurrected Christ comforts and encourages. Those that travel the road to Emmaus are only those who are Christ’s disciples.

Notice Luke 24:13 and verses 1-12. The focus here is the disciples of Christ — those who followed Him and learned from Him. Thus, the identity of those on the Road to Emmaus is likewise those who follow Christ. And thus, if you are not following Christ, then you are on a different road which Scripture identifies as the “broad road.” It is far worse than the road to Emmaus; for it is the road that leads to death.

Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

I strongly encourage you today to learn of Christ. Easter is a day of New Life, when Christ rose from the dead. Don't allow this day to pass without participating in the New Life He grants in His death. Though there are many things you have done for which you are ashamed. Christ can forgive you!

Today, come to Christ in prayer. Confess you are a sinner. Confess that you are unable to save yourself. Confess that you have sinned against God. Vow to Christ that you want to turn from your sins. Ask God to forgive you and to give you a New Life through His resurrected and living Son, Jesus Christ!

To remain in your sin is to remain on the path that will end in destruction.

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<sup>18</sup> Compare Matthew 5:6

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 11, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.