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**A Walk To Remember:**

**How To Have A Personal Encounter With Jesus**

**Luke 24:13-36**

1. **INTRO**
   1. I would like to begin this morning by raising the level of anxiety in the room.
      1. There is a phrase that deeply affects every person here and, probably, on the planet: When God is silent. We’ve all had seasons in our lives when we have longed for God to speak and found God to be silent. Even confirmed atheists would admit that if God clearly spoke they would believe.
      2. There was a German scholar/theologian named Helmut Thielicke who lived through the Nazi holocaust[[1]](#footnote-1) and one of his books is titled, *The Silence of God* [[2]](#footnote-2). It was published in 1962 after a period of research and reflection. In a nutshell here’s what Thielicke found:
         1. His research found that, Anxiety is the “secret wound of modern man[[3]](#footnote-3).”
         2. Initially, he thought our natural tendency is to view our anxiety as ultimately related to a fear of death. But, he said, World Wars I & II proved otherwise… [Ex - Russian soldiers were more afraid of pain than death]
         3. Thielicke traces our anxiety to a “fear of emptiness” and that our anxiety can actually be traced to a longing to know where God is. To quote Thielicke, “Where is God in the face of the mass slaughter of war, or the frightening development of [technological weaponry] which seems to press us inexorably towards destruction and final catastrophe?” [hypothesis of his research]
      3. The 4th century theologian and philosopher **Augustine** had a similar take. He prayed, “God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you[[4]](#footnote-4).”
   2. This morning I would like for us to consider how a **personal encounter**, **personal experience**, or **personal relationship** with Jesus Christ will wage war on the anxiety of our lives. We will consider the Emmaus Road passage, what it means – or maybe what it takes – to have a personal relationship with the risen Jesus. Let’s pray…
   3. In **v.15** we find the resurrect**ed** Jesus approaching two disciples who are conversing as they walk on the road; **v.16** tells us, *“They were kept from recognizing* [Jesus]*.”* And in **v.17** Jesus asks them*, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”* And notice the end of **v.17***: “They stood still, their faces downcast.”* Why were they *“downcast”*?
      1. Because in their minds the dream had died. They were on their way home from a long weekend of utter despair. Even after the tomb was found empty (vs. 11-12)!
      2. Their hero and Rabi had been brutally murdered to conclude a city-wide spectacle and one of their best friends had committed suicide.
   4. So, what we have on the road this Sunday morning are two **downcast**, **dismayed**, and **devastated** disciples, who could not recognize Jesus – they had become spiritually blind. It’s important to notice that even disciples can suffer from spiritual blindness.
   5. I would like to spend the next few minutes considering to **two questions**:
      1. **What causes spiritual blindness?** How are we prevented from recognizing and encountering Jesus?
      2. **How do we encounter, experience, and have a personal relationship with Jesus?**
2. **BODY**
   1. **What causes spiritual blindness?** 
      1. **We tend to think that our greatest need is a change of circumstances instead of a change of heart.** 
         1. Notice: [Cleopas] *“He* ***was*** *a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21****but*** *we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”*  Luke 19b-21a
         2. The Jewish people were looking for a *Geopolitical King* to physically liberate them from Roman oppression; instead they got a *Servant King,* intent on liberating the soul. As people, we tend to view our anxiety and stress as related primarily to our circumstances. We think, all we **really** need is a **change of circumstances** – instead of a change of heart.
         3. The disciples certainly had moments of insight and revelation (e.g., Peter in Mat 16), but, in the end, *to find true heart liberation,* we must come to the end of ourselves and **see our need for a Savior**. This is both an initial need and an ongoing need.
         4. We want great coffee, great food, great wine, great sex, more money – what’s next…? None of those things are bad, but sometimes we use those things to temporarily block (or medicate) our inner, ultimate anxiety, our “fear of emptiness.”
      2. A second posture that can result in spiritual blindness is, **We can fail to recognize Jesus in the ordinary**. Like with these disciples on the road, Jesus is closer and more engaged with us than we realize.
         1. **Jesus was extraordinarily ordinary**. In Isaiah’s prophetic writings we read, *“He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him”* Isaiah 53:2
         2. \*Jesus became an ordinary person to show ordinary people like us God’s extra-ordinary love. [Gutter ants?]
         3. Right now, today, I guarantee you that God is active in your life and using **people** &/or **trouble** – **circumstances**, in an attempt to reveal Himself to you – and to draw you to Himself.
         4. God doesn’t take us AROUND trouble, He takes us THROUGH trouble. And here’s His offer: He’ll go with us, he’ll teach us along the way, and we can go in His strength and power.
         5. Remember, even disciples of Jesus can suffer from spiritual blindness. Question: Where are your current **difficulties or (unrealistic?) expectations** preventing you from seeing the active presence of Jesus in your life?
         6. Certainly God can move in spectacular ways, yet unless we are willing to see Him in the **routine** and **ordinary**, we may miss Him.
   2. This brings us to our second question: **How do we encounter, experience, and have a personal relationship with Jesus?**
      1. **We encounter Jesus when we are humble and see our need for full redemption.**
         1. In v.26 we find Jesus giving a summary, or summation, of the gospel: Jesus said, ***“Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”*** [God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful]
            1. This summary statement is a direct response to Cleopas’ statement in v.21: “***But*** *we had hoped that he was the one who was going to* ***redeem*** *Israel.”* In v.26 Jesus is saying that He **had** to die for full redemption to take place. What is FULL redemption?
            2. Again, Cleopas thought he needed a General, he didn’t fully realize he needed a Savior.
            3. Jesus wants to go deeper than our circumstances and heal our ultimate anxiety, which is our separation from God. I have BAD NEWS and I have GOOD NEWS:

**Here’s the BAD NEWS:** God demands perfect holiness to enter into His presence. The tiniest, most miniscule sin will separate you from God forever. To miss the mark by even a little bit is still to have missed the mark. [Some of you have already missed the mark by stealing some of your kid’s Easter candy this morning ☺]

**The GOOD NEWS, it’s actually great news -**-That Jesus the Christ lived a perfect, sinless life, was brutally murdered to take away our sins, descended into hell, and then was resurrected on the third day. As our hearts are AWAKENED to this act of perfect love, we receive the gift of Christ’s righteousness. It is un-earnable, based on what Christ has done – not what we must do.

* + 1. This brings us to the **second point** regarding how we can have a personal encounter, or relationship, with Jesus: **We encounter** **Jesus in the Scriptures.**
       1. *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”* Luke 24:27
       2. They were on a seven-mile journey, which takes about 2-3 hours depending on the terrain.
          1. What we have here is THE most important Bible study of all time. What we learn from this verse is, The whole Bible is about Jesus.

What Jesus is doing in on the Emmaus Road is opening their minds to the meaning of the Scripture.

Jesus seems to be saying, “The whole Bible is actually about Me.” Once we see how the cross and resurrection fit together, we will see the whole Bible is really about Jesus. (The Bible only tells one story. It’s the story of redemption and reconciliation through Jesus.)

* + - * 1. Illus – The Sixth Sense[[5]](#footnote-5), a 1999 movie with Bruce Willis. You can only see that movie twice. The first time the ending is quite shocking. The second time you see it you will become very aware of all the indicators that point to the ending. Once we are captured by the implications of the resurrection will look at every passage in the Bible differently.
    1. **We encounter Jesus as we come together.** 
       1. *When He had reclined at the table* ***with them****, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. 31* ***Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him***. Luke 24:30-31a
       2. Finally, the resurrection becomes a powerful message the minute we are awakened to the reality of the resurrection; notice how the disciples immediately take it to somebody else. Nobody sits on this message when comes alive.
       3. *“And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, 34 saying, “ The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.”* Luke 24:33-34

1. **CONCLUSION –** 
   1. As we draw this to a close I want to return to the German theologian’s conclusions regarding the root of human anxiety and our fear of emptiness:
      1. Thielicke writes that the “positive force, which defeats anxiety, is love.”[[6]](#footnote-6) *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”* 1 John 4:18
      2. “Anxiety is a broken bond - and love is the bond restored. Once we know in Christ that the world has a fatherly basis and that we are loved, we lose our anxiety.” He likens it to holding on tightly to a father’s hand in a dark forest.
      3. In both Matthew and Mark’s accounts of the crucifixion they record the anxious cry of Jesus exclaiming: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34
      4. Yet a closer examination will reveal that even in excruciating death Jesus never let go of His Father’s hand. *“My God, My God…”* Jesus brings His anxiety to His Father. And because He did, so can we.

1. There was an underground evangelical church movement in Germany during WW2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eerdmans 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pgs. 17–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Confessions* (Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. An 8-year-old boy is visited by ghosts and he is too afraid to tell anyone about his anguish, except for Willis who plays a child psychologist. (M. Night Shyamalan) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Pgs. 23–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)