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The Transfigured Road

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in January 1965.

I turn you to one of the most familiar parts of the New Testament, the 24th chapter of the gospel by Luke. The gospel by Luke, chapter 24 at verse 13. I think we must read it again.

"And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was threescore furlongs from Jerusalem. And they communed with each other of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, while they communed and questioned together, that Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. And He said unto them, What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk? And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said unto Him, Dost Thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days? And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how that the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass. Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb; and when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not. And He said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. And they drew

nigh unto the village, whither they were going; and He made as though he would go further. And they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. And He went in to abide with them. And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to meat, he took the loaf and blessed; and breaking it He gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while He spake to us in the way, while He opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them."

This chapter, as you see, is the story of a transfigured journey. There are many things in it, and of course the supreme thing is that of the risen Lord. That embraces and covers everything, but I am not going to speak about that particularly this morning, I have it on my heart to speak about this transfigured road. The journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, six and a half miles, was undoubtedly taken by those two in a spirit of complete bewilderment with their situation. It proved to be a great turning-point in their lives; but when they set out on this journey, no doubt they had come to feel that they had come to an end of everything. All that had happened spoke of an end. In the past, there had been much in the past, that held elements of great hope and expectation; they had made a genuine, sincere committal of themselves to that hope, to that expectation. True, there had been much to take them completely out of their depth and to be very perplexing perhaps, to allow for questions at times, and some fears - it was all so much, so big. But by and large, it had stimulated a great hope. Now that had all ended in a great disappointment and things were apparently in ruin. All seemed to have ended in disillusion. The only course seemed to be to get right away from the sphere of it all, to seek solitude in this country village, well away from the city. And so these two decided to take that course, "Let's get away, right away from everything; perhaps we'll get a better perspective if we do. Let's get away!"

And we can imagine the dialogue on the journey - perhaps the longest six and a half miles that ever two men trod. As one said: "Well, Cleopas, what do you think about it all? Have we made a great mistake? Have we been deceived? Have we been on a wrong road? It seems that something like that has happened to us." And the other would say: "Well, brother, it does seem like that, it's true. But we can't forget, can we? We can't forget everything; we can't just write everything off like that. Do you remember..." and then he would call to mind some of those wonderful times with the Master - His words and His works. And so they talked, and tried to get to the bottom of this mystery, to explain this great problem.

And as they went on, we know the rest of the story, they were suddenly conscious of Another joining them on the road, a stranger, whose presence they had not been aware of, until He drew up alongside and interrogated them as to the subject of their conversation, which was evidently one causing them a good deal of distress. Then they stood still and looked at Him; "Are you only a visitor in these parts? As one who has been and going, don't you know what has been happening?" And still He drew them out. You know, it is one of the master-strokes of our great Master, to draw us out sometimes. It is a great thing to be drawn out, to have to explain your own trouble and problem. Take that as a lesson. And so He drew them out, until they had no more to say.

And then He started to say... and as He took up the Scriptures which which they were so familiar, there was a new movement inside, the dying embers began to glow; a new ray of hope broke out in them. New light was breaking, their hearts were warming; perhaps some sense of shame was creeping up inside for their foolishness. Let us be quite sure about this, that our Authorised

translation is not correct here: "O *fools*, and slow of heart..." Jesus did not say that. That is a word that is used on another occasion by Jesus, that: "If anyone call his brother a fool, he is in danger of hell fire" but that is not the word that Jesus used, it is the same word that Paul used to the Galatians: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you...?" (Gal. 3:1). And our Revised is correct: "O *foolish* men", it was not hard, cruel, un-understanding - that is the point we want to get at this morning. "Oh foolish men, slow of heart to believe".

Well, the arrival at Emmaus eventually, the day far spent and these men couldn't let Him go like that. "Come in and abide with us, the day is far spent; it is dangerous to go on tonight, and we want more of You." So He went in, and sat down to meat with them. And as they sat down to meat, He took the loaf, and brake and gave to them... "their eyes were opened...!"

Now, whether it was His sovereign act in opening their eyes, or suddenly the remembrance of what had happened before, do not let us read into this what it will not bear. These were not of the twelve apostles; they had not been at the Lord's supper and seen Him break the loaf, and give. But, undoubtedly, they had been with Him at some supper, perhaps at the feeding of the thousands, when He took the loaves and broke them, and gave thanks; and probably on other occasions they had fed together. There was something about this act that was reminiscent - it reminded them. Or I say it may have been His act of withdrawing the veil, to let them see. However, the point is, "*they knew Him*"; and He vanished out of their sight."

The Return Journey

What a transfigured road that was! Everything was changed from the natural to the spiritual. They had gone in broad daylight but it was dark. They returned at night, and it was light! Yes, *the whole situation was changed* - this is the sum of it - *from the natural to the spiritual*. The natural day and night were just a parable.

What transfigured that road? What was it that made that return journey so different from the outward journey? Let us note that it was an 'outward' journey, if you like: a going out. There is quite a lot in that. 'Let's get away; let's get out; let us go!' An outward journey not planned by the Lord. All outward journeys not in the Lord are bound to be very gloomy things, at least. What was it that made the difference in the two journeys? Well, what will transform any such gloomy pathway that we may tread? What made them retrace their steps? I am perfectly certain that those men never thought that at the end of that day, they would be back where they were at its beginning, they would be going back again. I am quite sure of that; that was never intended, but something happened that found them back again. What was it?

Now, of course, leaving this great all-embracing reality that they had discovered that Jesus after all was alive - we have dwelt upon that always when we have read and meditated upon this chapter, there are some other things, I think, lying right at the heart of this story, which may be helpful to us.

First of all, they discovered that Jesus knew all about them and their trouble, and although they were very largely responsible for their situation, He had not given them up. That's a simple beginning of a transformed journey. If only, in the time of our perplexity, our bewilderment, yes, and our failure, when our hearts are moving in the wrong direction, if we realise that the Lord Jesus never abandons anyone who is sincerely, honestly and truly perplexed with *Him* and His ways, He knows all about it.

This may be a word for somebody: *He knows all about it*. I am quite sure that these men were not doing this in a spirit of willful abandonment of the Lord. It was simply that they could not understand, and they were reaching out for understanding; and they discovered that He understood and knew. Let us take that comfort right at the very beginning. He did not let them go because they were having a difficult and dark and perplexing time; He never does.

Then again, they discovered that there was another side altogether to the whole situation, a side which they had never seen and there always is! If we saw all, we would be saved a lot. And many of our deflections are simply because we have only seen one side of the matter. And if anything at all is true of what happened on this road to make the difference, it is this: that the Lord Jesus showed them that there was another side to this whole matter, to which they were blind. And dear friends, we must always believe that about situations, however difficult and perplexing they may be, and whatever amount of evidence there may seem to be for our present course, we must always remember that the Lord sees another side - and there *is* another side - and we must seek to find that other side. What does the *Lord* know about this? What does the *Lord* mean in this? There is something more in this than we can see, if we are the Lord's children.

We do, in our human limitations, see only one side of things; but if only we could see the other, we should be saved. That changed everything for them: they discovered that there was another side to this whole matter, and the other side was the much more wonderful side - the side which wrote off all their side as very defective indeed. They therefore discovered that there is, buried, a buried meaning to our deepest troubles, which, when we see it, makes foolishness, foolishness of the way we have been contemplating and going. 'O foolish men...'. There is a hidden meaning in sufferings and trials and difficulties, a Divine meaning. If only we could get our hand on *that*; if only the Lord would show us *that*, it would make foolishness of this thing which we thought to be so overwhelmingly true, and perhaps right, where we were concerned.

Further, they discovered that although they had an immense amount of Bible knowledge and truth, and teaching - both in the Bible, the Old Testament, which they possessed, and in the teaching that the Lord Jesus had given them during these past months and years - they possessed a lot of truth, but there was lacking in their apprehension of truth, *something* which was vital to their very survival in the day of the ordeal. That's something to learn. The great test came, not just to them, but to all that they had received in the past; and the test of that, of the Cross at that time, was whether they had got truth in the mind, in the head, or whether it was their very life. These men discovered that they had very much, but there was something which needed the touch of the Living Hand, the Hand of the Risen Lord, the touch of the Spirit of Life upon it, in order that all that they had should spring into Life, and save them.

What we need, dear friends, is that the truth that we possess is *living* truth, not just truth as such, but that it is our very life. It is their after-history that had all become alive! But it only became alive through a very deep ordeal. This whole story circles round that mighty word of His: "Ought not the Christ to have suffered? Ought not the Christ to have suffered?" In that He gathers up, you see, all His discourse from the Old Testament, showing that the Christ must suffer - He *must!* The Cross is *essential* to everything. It was not until they themselves came right into a deep and terrible experience of the Cross, that the way was opened for all that they held in their minds to become their salvation.

It worked like this: here they are, everything in devastation; it is a terribly deep experience. But, through the very experience of the Cross in their own hearts and lives, they were able to say: "*Now I see...* now I see what I had never seen before. In all that I knew, I had never seen it! 'Ought not the Christ to have suffered?'" The Cross is essential to our seeing. But the Cross is not objective; the Cross is not just historic; the Cross has to come right into our experience and smash everything that is not true. See, there was a mixture about their position, no doubt about that, a mixture about it: "We had trusted that it had been Him who should redeem Israel, save Israel..." but we know what was bound up with that hope, yes we know from the gospels themselves: a place in that kingdom, something to minister to *them*, to *their* importance. Ah, there was mixture and the Cross had to rid them of all that was mixed and false in their position. And it did it by, first of all, taking everything away. Everything away: the right *and* the wrong went, when the Cross came in and they had to start all over again, but this time they are starting on clean ground, on pure ground, they have *seen* the meaning of the Cross. So it was.

That's the story: the necessity of the Cross in our lives, to get us on true ground, safe ground; to explain to us our own problems and our own difficulties are about that; a right understanding of that is a really transforming and transfiguring thing. It does, it just does that.

You see, it all comes back to this, this whole story: they had got an entirely *wrong* or inadequate apprehension of the meaning of the Cross! And when they saw it, or rightly, He opened it to them this matter of the suffering of Christ, and they saw it aright, the whole situation was changed. Everything was transfigured when they saw it aright; when they themselves had gone out of the picture entirely with all their interests, they can go and preach the Cross after this, and say: "In the cross I glory"; whereas, on that day, the Cross spelt anything but glory. What a change!

Now, I don't know why the Lord has put it on my heart to say this, but it may be some have decided upon leaving the situation. It may be that you are going down this dismal road of bewilderment, perplexity, and disappointment, and you've been disillusioned. It may be that you will be tempted at some time to do that. Read again this story; look into its heart and see. Well, if it is an honest and sincere difficulty that you are in, the Lord Jesus has every sympathy with that. He will only stay away if you are rebellious and willfully forsaking Him. If it's in the deepest of perplexities and inability to understand, He is in full sympathy and He will not give you up; He will follow you through. He will draw you out; He will require of you that you tell Him what the trouble is. Perhaps as you do that, you will begin to see that it is not quite so solid as you thought it was. And then He will come back and with a touch of His own hand He will begin to show you that there is something more in it than you have seen; it has a deeper secret than you knew. And in the disclosing of *that* secret, you'll be saved.

But you will know this: that your experience was, after all, what you have talked about so often - the Cross... the Cross... the Cross! You see, you can talk about 'the cross' as a doctrine; we know all about 'identification with Christ' as a teaching; *but* when the Lord brings us into an absolutely *devastating* experience - that's what it is - to discover reality and that which will stand us in good stead in the day of the ordeal.