

When Jesus Draws Near

by Doc Greenway

Jesus draws near to us in our times of need and teaches us to walk by faith and not by sight.

Duration: 30:53

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Malachi 3:16, Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:19-32

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story of his father taking him for a walk on a dark night and teaching him to hold on to his hand. The speaker reflects on the importance of holding on to the Lord in times of darkness, suffering, and misunderstanding. He emphasizes the power of Jesus joining our company and how His presence can warm cold hearts. The speaker also discusses the idea that walking with the Lord is like a climb, where things that once seemed important no longer matter. He shares a story of visiting a non-Christian home where a tragic accident had occurred and feeling unsure of how to help. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the importance of faith in God's word and the need to prioritize facts and faith over feelings.

Transcript

Let's make preparation to begin. I'd hate you to have a dry sermon. Luke 24 and verse 15, reading from the Orthodox version this time, and it came to pass that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

One of the lessons we have to learn as Christians, and sometimes we learn it fairly early in the piece, is that we can never prove that God is light unless we have been permitted to walk through the dark. And sometimes there's a real test of faith. You know, it's only as we come through this experience that we can appreciate that God is truly light and rejoice in his presence.

I know that the dark place may be anything. It may be illness, severe illness, as in my own case. And when you're going through it, it's not very pleasant, anything but.

But praise God, when you come through it, then you can realize afresh and with perhaps a new impetus that God cares. God is looking after you, that his people are concerned, and that they have given themselves over to him in prayer. And you realize afresh how good the Lord is, and how mightily he has manifested himself to you, even though it was at the time very unpleasant indeed.

And so this morning we want to look at these two disciples on the way to Emmaus, but occupy our thoughts with what Jesus did on this roadway. How he came to handle the situation. Here the disciples were walking in darkness because they had allowed doubt to come in.

You see, if faith is really the windscreen wiper of the mind, as I've often described it, then when you push it to one side, there's nothing left but darkness. The faith of these disciples was being tested, but unfortunately they were failing in the test. And then Jesus stepped into the circumstances and made all the difference.

All right, what did Jesus do? The first thing he did was this. He joined their company. That's verses 14 and 15.

And as they talked together of these things which have happened, and while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. It's always encouraging to know that difficulty and perplexity never drive him away, but they seem to attract him, to draw him near. That's a very comforting thought, isn't it? Our perplexity is never a barrier to his presence.

It just seems as though because there's a sense of need that it attracts him to us. And that's the kind of savior we have, the kind of master we serve. These two, of course, are not victorious Christians.

They are defeated disciples. You wouldn't think of them as being all-conquering. Here they were, disappointed, disillusioned, despondent, visiting a home where they'd had a tragic occurrence.

One of the boys had been killed on a motorbike, in a motorbike accident. And I felt I'd like to try and help them. I didn't know very much myself, really.

So very green, although as I've often said, green things grow. But I didn't know what to do. I went into this home and I found one of the young women weeping her heart out.

She was the young woman that this boy was supposed to have married later on. And the mother was quite upset. And I felt that there was such a tragic atmosphere in this non-Christian home.

I couldn't say a word. I couldn't think straight even. As I sat there, I began to wonder, what can I do? How can I help? If only I had victorious faith.

If only I was really an overcoming Christian, then I'd know what to do. And as I thought like this, I felt the Lord impressing me to sing. I said, all right, Lord, what shall I sing? And the Lord said, you sing quietly.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

And I began to sing. Now as I sang, I felt as though the door had opened and Jesus had come in, right in the very midst of it. And you know, I was able to pray after that.

It sort of transformed the whole atmosphere, the whole environment. No, I wasn't in a position to claim his presence because of some victorious expression of faith. I had a need and they had a need.

And praise God, he joined our company. Isn't that a comfort, to know just this? We're sometimes asked to believe that it is our virile faith. It is our enthusiasm.

It is the fact that our loyalty is pledged to Christ. This is a thing that ensures that he will be with us. Don't you believe it? The only true guarantee we have is his own promise.

Lord, I am with you always, even at the end of the world, at the end of the ages. He is with us. Don't think for a moment that anything ever makes you worthless to God.

You are special and you are precious in his sight. That's why he joins the company. That's why he walks with his people.

Because of what he is, because of what we are. What else did he do? He veiled their eyes. Verse 16.

But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. Now, it would have been a very simple matter for him to have revealed himself, so that they might recognize him. But this is not his purpose.

And often there is as much cause for wonder at divine reticence withholding as there is for divine revelation enfolding. God's timing is always perfect. The Lord we serve never makes a mistake.

There are no emergency acts with him. There is never anything he does to try to remedy some unforeseen situation. Never.

He knows the end from the beginning. And praise God, he knows the way that we take. Why did he veil their eyes? Why did he withhold from them this vision of himself? Why did he do it? Very soon his bodily presence would be removed from them, and he would have to learn to walk by faith and not by sight.

And we too must learn this lesson. Sometimes his presence with us is unrevealed. We cannot discern his face and his form.

Sometimes his presence with us is unsuspecting, so that we say, as in the case of Jacob, surely the Lord is in this place, but I knew it not. But at all times his presence with us is unailing. I will be with him.

Certainly I will be with him. What a wonderful promise that is. He veiled their eyes to teach them how to walk by faith and not by sight.

Plant a grapevine in your garden, and alongside it put in some stake of, say, oak or remu or pine or anything, and by and by the tendrils of that vine will cling to what you put there. But if you put nothing at all there, they'll still cling downward to cling to the very earth itself. For it's in the nature of the tendrils to cling.

And here Jesus is attempting to unwind the tendrils of their affection and their love away from the visible, historic Christ, and to wind them around the unseen Christ. And this was a very difficult thing they would have to learn. And so it is for us, very difficult indeed to have to walk in this way, and belong to some sign, some evidence, some proof, some form, something tangible.

It's not an easy way, but it's the Christian way. Not by sight, but by faith. And then he heard their conversation, verse 17.

And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk under sand? What are you talking about? What is the thing you're saying? You know, whenever we make Jesus the subject of conversation, it isn't long before he joins the company. So far as these two were concerned, nothing was further from their thoughts than that he should be interested in what they were saying. For they were not outstanding leaders, they were not great apostles, they weren't acknowledged

pillars of the church, they weren't the heavies.

But he was prepared to manifest himself to them, and to show them that he was listening to what they were saying. We only know very little about these two disciples. We know that one was called Cleopas.

They were ordinary men with a problem, but they belonged to him. And again I say it's consoling to know that he always listens when we speak. Well, that depends, I suppose, about what we're talking about, doesn't it? It can be very embarrassing to know that he's always listening.

Remember Malachi the prophet said in Malachi 3.16, Then they that fear the Lord speak often one to another, and the Lord hath not heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before him for them that fear the Lord, and that put upon his name. He heard their conversation.

And then he considered their problem. He considered their problem. That's verses 18 to 24.

Their problem was threefold. Firstly, they had a past tense deliverer. When they referred to the things which had come to pass in these days, Jesus asked what things? Verse 19.

And they said the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet, mighty indeed and worthy. He was a mighty prophet. His words were mighty.

His deeds were mighty. He used to be like this. Their eyes were upon the past, what he had once been, as they said.

If only they had known it, Jesus was just the same yesterday, today, and forever. And far from being eclipsed, he had more power now than ever before. For he had said, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened, limited, constrained, held in until it be accomplished? But their eyes were upon the past.

Secondly, they had a past tense dependence. They said, verse 21, we trusted in him. We used to believe and hope in him.

If only they could have said, well, things are confused just now and perplexed in our thinking. We can't make certain things out. But don't you forget, we still trust in him.

We still believe in him. No, it was a past tense dependence. And thirdly, they had a present tense doubt.

This is implied in verse 24. And certain of them that were with us went into the sepulcher and found it even as the woman had said, by him they saw not. And that's all they had.

The woman said, the angel said. They had a report of a report, statements at second and third hand. That's all.

The apostles who ran to the sepulcher certainly did not see their role. And so, we trusted in him that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel. But now this trust was all over and done with.

They had a present tense doubt. How badly mixed up they were. They had a past tense deliverer who was the mighty prophet.

They had a past tense dependence, we trusted in him. They had a present tense doubt. Him they saw not.

No wonder they were discouraged. It's no wonder we become discouraged when we pass through such experiences as this. And yet he is always there, waiting to make himself known.

Then he rebuked their unbelief. Verses 25 and 26. And he said unto them, O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and went into his glory? Now Jesus goes to the very root of the matter. They had unbelief in the truthfulness of the prophetic scriptures. The Old Testament prophets are predicted Messiah's ministry.

But they prophesied suffering as a prelude to glory. The two on the way to Emerus accepted the glory path, but not the suffering path. Isaiah 63, yes, but not Isaiah 53.

They couldn't accept that. They were the old-fashioned modernists, you know. They couldn't believe all that the scripture taught, only the things that really suited them.

Glory, yes, they could accept that, but suffering, no, that wasn't in the picture at all. And so he rebuked their unbelief with a rhetorical question. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory? So we too must believe that the only way through to the radiance of an Easter morning is by way of a Gethsemane grief and a Calvary passion.

There isn't any other way. Try as you may. This is the path the Master trod.

Shall his servants perish still? The darkness, the suffering, the misunderstanding. What do we do in such circumstances? We try our very best to hold on to the Lord. When I was a very tiny boy, I can recall my father taking me for a walk one night, a very dark night.

And he said, well, hold on to my hand. I did my best, so I've only managed two of his fingers, but I gripped hard for all of his work, and I kept on stumbling all the time. My father said, that's not much good, is it? All right, he said, so you hang on to me, I'll hang on to you now.

And this big warm hand came over my small hand. I didn't stumble anymore, but I was able to walk in the dark. Don't do your best, hang on to the Lord, let him hang on to you.

His power is mighty, and his love and compassion may fail man. The disciples didn't understand this lesson. And then he opened their understanding, verse 37.

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. Beginning of Moses at the penitent, the first five books of the Old Testament, and all the prophets, the prophetic books, he expounded when through the words, is the literal meaning, in all the scriptures, those are the writings of the Jews, including the Psalms, the things concerning himself, particularly his suffering, as the prelude to his glory. And so here Jesus is testifying to the divine authority of Old Testament scripture, and to his personal acceptance of its teaching.

In the Old Testament, the new is contained. In the New Testament, the old is explained. Other books have the power to inform the mind, but God's book has the power to transform the life.

That's why it's so different. That is why the Bible is so important. Jesus claimed that the scriptures testified of him.

To the Jewish leaders, he said, you search the scriptures continually, and dare they which testify of me. But of course, in their case, prejudice had blinded their eyes. And you know what prejudice is, don't you? It's supporting opinion without visible means of support.

And that's what they had. So though they were continually reading the scriptures, they couldn't see, they couldn't perceive the Messiah, the Christ of God. The written word bears testimony to the living word, and the living word bears witness to the written word.

This is why, as Romans 10, 17 teaches us, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. There are so many who center their faith in experience, in happening, and especially in what is ecstatic and out of the ordinary, as though this must be the foundation of their faith. And if they've got this kind of thing, well then they've got tremendous faith, or so they would have you believe.

There used to be a servant of God, a friend of mine in the old country, who was often used in the ministry of healing. But he did believe that there had to be tremendous demonstration when he prayed. And if he didn't take grace well, he would do his level best to make it take place.

He was conducting a few meetings on one occasion, and in the prayer line there was an old lady to whom he went. He was a Scotsman, and he said, what's the matter with you, woman? She said, eh? What's the matter with you, he said? Eh? She said, you're very hard of hearing. He said, do you want to be prayed for? Well, I don't mind if I do.

Do you want prayer? Oh, I may as well have prayer. So he looked at her, and then he laid his hands on her, and of course then came the demonstration. He shook her, and shook her, and shook her.

And a tremendous power, brother, you know, a sort of heavy thing for the electric. And after he gained his breath, he said, well, he said, well, how do you feel now? Well, he said, I ain't feeling no worse. That in itself was a minor miracle.

The positive answer of faith, to the questionings of doubt, is always, it is written, not what we feel, not what we experience, but what God says in his word. Fact first, then faith in that fact, then feeling, because we have expressed faith. But please, not the other way around.

Then having opened their understanding, he renewed their vision. Verses 28 to 31. And he drew nigh unto the village where they went, and he made as though he would have gone further.

But they constrained him, that's a powerful word. They laid hold upon him, mentally, I suppose, and by persuasion, and said, please stay with us, for the day is almost gone. And Jesus went into their home, and at the supper table, as the honored guest, he took the bread, and when he broke it, gave it to them, immediately their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

He renewed their vision, and they understood who he was. It was not until he had opened their understanding, though, it wasn't until then that he granted them a vision of himself. Now, the strengthening of their faith came first.

Any vision granted to our sight is the reward of faith, not the basis of faith. Because they needed to be weaned away from the old dependence on the physical presence of Jesus, he vanished from their sight. They would have to walk by faith.

There was no dodging of this, by faith and not by sight. Praise God for any momentary manifestations we may have of his face and form. But we must lean not on them, but on himself, and on his word.

How is he not said, Henceforth the world sees me no more, but you see me. A perpetual vision of Jesus Christ, which is not physical, not material, but spiritual, and yet, thank God, factual. The world will not see me, but you will see me.

Certainly I will be with you, he said. How much this perpetual vision of Jesus means to us this morning. This ability to see beyond the visible and perceive the invisible.

This must be the basis of our faith. Fanny Crosby's great hymn, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine. Well known, isn't it? Do you know how it came to be written? Mrs. Knapp, who was a composer of many wonderful gospel tunes, played this tune over to Fanny Crosby one day and said, Fanny, what is this tune saying to you? And she said, it is saying very clearly, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine.

And then she went on to say, you know the day will come when I shall behold him as he is. She had never seen the light of day, she was blind, but she firmly believed because of the perpetual vision of Jesus given to her in the spirit. One day she would truly behold him, just as he is.

And that is the kind of faith and vision that we need to have. Then he warmed their heart. Verse 32.

Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? Did not our hearts, did not our hearts, that as they walked together with him, they were fused into oneness? They weren't frozen together in unity, they were melted together in unity. Their hearts were warmed by the Lord, by his presence. And how true it is that when Jesus joins the company, cold hearts begin to burn.

Every time. Have you found, as I have, that every walk with the Lord is a sort of climb? It's something that demands a lot of you? That many things you once thought were very important don't seem to matter anymore when you walk with him? Strange experience, isn't it? Reminds me of the American tourist in Switzerland who said one morning, I think I'll climb this mountain today. So he got ready with all the American equipment and the gear, two cameras and ropes and what have you, and he started on his journey.

As he climbed higher and higher, he began to dispense with some of these things. Couldn't take it on. Till when at last he stood on the mountaintop itself.

He had nothing of his gear left. It was all left behind. Isn't it like that with you and me? You begin your walk with the Lord and you seem to think so many things are important.

But because it's a climb, eventually you begin to know the things that really matter. You learn to spend your time for what at last time. You learn to evaluate things in terms of eternity, not in terms of the present.

That's how they should be. But there is one thing with which you can never dispense, a warm heart to walk along. And in these largessean days of warmness, how much we need to preserve this.

Our hearts burning toward the Lord. Let our heart burn with us while he talked with us in the way. We warm their heart.

And finally in this story, he revived their testament, verses 33 through 35. And they arose the same hour and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together. And them that were with them saying, the Lord is risen indeed and has appeared unto Simon.

And then the two told them of their experience on the road to Emmaus. The walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus had taken all day. The journey by night from Emmaus to Jerusalem was a totally different matter.

It seemed as though joy had given wings to their feet. Their doubts were gone. Their fears were banished.

Their gloom was dispersed. And the flame of faith was burning again. And they must speak out what they know.

They started the journey to Emmaus in doubt and disappointment and despondency. But Jesus himself drew near and went with them. And as a result, they are back again in Jerusalem and they are changed men.

Why? Because he joined their company. He veiled their eyes. He heard their conversation.

He considered their problem. He rebuked their unbelief. He opened their understanding.

He renewed their vision. He warmed their heart. And he revived their testimony.

May he do that for us this morning, especially if we are on the Emmaus road. Especially if we are perplexed and puzzled. Especially if we think we are worthless to God.

We are of no use. Remember on the Emmaus road he is waiting to greet you and to meet with you. Trust him.

He will never let you fall. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you so much this morning for your love, your companionship, your willingness to draw near to us, whatever we may be and wherever we may stand.

Help us to trust you, Lord. To trust you when we cannot trace you. To believe when we cannot understand.

Still to say we are hoping in you when there is no reasoning at all that seems to do any good. We pray again that you will help us to walk with you day by day and hour by hour until we see you face to face and are forever with you. We ask these things for your namesake and your glory.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/27/SID27115.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/doc-greenway/when-jesus-draws-near/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net