

A DEAD IDOL OR A LIVING GOD



It's another Easter and all over the country people are going to church. It's the day of the biggest crowds of the year. And that's very appropriate. Because this is the day when we come together to sing about, and think about, and talk about, and praise God for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The test, however, comes when church is over. Did we go to a museum? Or did we in some way meet Jesus alive from the dead? If we went to a museum to pay our respects to a dead idol of a dead tradition, then next week it'll be back to normal.

But if somehow in our churches, in our gatherings...we encounter Jesus alive from the dead. We will be so changed by this encounter and so refreshed and renewed by it... that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and so forth we'll be different.

Next week, we'll all be back. And not only will we all be back, but we'll have half the town with us, and they won't be able to get in the door, and this is for sure.

People might be very skeptical about this, but if something genuine happens, it will become obvious.

Because when we meet Jesus alive from the dead, we don't just go away with happy memories.

We go away changed.

How are we changed?

I'll try to describe something spiritual in physical terms.

In the center of the heart of each of us there is a room. And in that room, there is a throne. We ourselves never occupy that throne. It's impossible. But we do determine who or what sits on that throne inside us.

Whatever sits on the throne inside, in that room, rules our life.

If fear sits on the throne, we're ruled by fear.

If lust, or greed, or ambition, sit on that throne those are the things which dominate our lives.

If a golden calf or a silver Cadillac sits on that throne, then the spirit behind that idol controls us.

In the beginning that throne was occupied by God.

When Adam and Eve walked in Paradise, there was a flame burning on that throne in their inmost heart, which was the presence of the Spirit of God himself. And by that flame they were able to walk and talk with God, they knew him, they rejoiced in him. But when they chose to trust the deceiver and turned away from God.... that flame went out, the throne became empty, and the room became like a vacuum.

And ever since that, the throne has been up for grabs, it's been the scene of a battle.

And the whole history of the human race since then has been one thing after another, getting hold of the throne inside the heart, men and women all the time, striving with each other lust, greed, envy, vanity, murder, bloodshed, war.

Jesus came in order to make it possible for the throne inside the heart of man, once again, to be occupied by the presence of God.

***In him was life and the life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

John 1:4-5

And that light is intended to come from him to the inmost part of each of us.

He came that they may have life and have it more abundantly.

Jesus began to gather around himself some disciples, followers. And the amazing thing that happened to these men and women as they came around Jesus was that the other things which occupied the throne in their heart began to fall away. All the lust, and the ambition, and the greed, and the ego, and the fear, and the death, that ruled these men and women before disappeared.

And in a wonderful way, even while Jesus was with them in the flesh and blood, He was on the throne of their hearts.

This presence of Jesus on the throne of the hearts of these disciples was a *reflected light*.

It was as if behind the throne there is this giant mirror and in front of the throne is this huge window and as long as the window opens on Jesus, the light of his word, and the light of his countenance shines through... that light, bounces off the mirror and in a wonderful way the image of the Lord himself sits on the throne.

When the disciples became offended by things that Jesus said or did and turned from him, of course the light went out. But for those who continued to walk with Jesus, the light of his presence on the throne in their hearts was not an illusion, it was real.

By the light of the presence of the Lord sitting on the throne in Peter's heart, he proclaimed the Kingdom with power. By the light of his presence, John healed the sick, Andrew cast out demons. There was life there.

Then came Good Friday. And as these men and women watch Jesus hang on that cross and die, that flame, that presence, that light burning in there, in the throne in their inmost hearts went out too. And that inmost room became shrouded in darkness, and as they watched Jesus die, even the mirror behind the throne smashed into a million pieces. The Sabbath, which followed was the most desolate day of their lives.



Then Jesus rose from the dead.

Before any of these disciples knew what was going on, Jesus stepped forth from his tomb, alive, never to die again. In a body as different from the body that had died on Good Friday as day differs from night.

He was sown in corruption; he was raised in incorruption.

He was sown in weakness; he was raised in power.

And whenever Jesus would come among the disciples alive from the dead and speak to them, as they heard him speak, even before they recognized him, a flame began to burn on that throne in their hearts, which was not reflected but which was there, if they were willing, forever.

Luke describes to us how this worked.



That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

And he said to them, “What things?”

And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel...

And now our hope is gone.

That throne inside us is empty.

Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

(Luke 24:13-27)



Oh, foolish ones, slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Now Jesus is alive from the dead, he's on his way, he's entering into his glory... and we think of this, and rightly so, that he's on his way back to the headquarters of the universe to sit on the throne of power.

“All authority is given to me in heaven and on Earth”.

And that's true.

But it's also true that Jesus enters into his glory, *even at that moment*, as he speaks to these two men.

For as Jesus speaks to these two men....

The flame of his light ignites and burns inside them.

And Jesus is entering into his glory... in their hearts.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:28-32)



And indeed, their hearts burned within them, as he talked with them. Because as he spoke with them and opened the Scriptures, he began to live inside, on that throne... of those these two men.

And he did this every time he appeared.

He ignited that life inside...of these men, these women. And then for 40 days he nurtured this life which he put within them, and watched over it, and taught them the things they needed to know. Then he left and commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they receive power from on high. And then on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit fell, this little flame burning inside their hearts became an immense blaze in them that shook the city....and as they went forth into the world, it shook the whole world.

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road”

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God, does not have life. (John 5:11-12)

To have the son is not to have doctrines in your head.

To have the Son is to have the life of Jesus burning in your heart.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

A living hope!

And that living hope is a flame...is a light...burning on that throne.

The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:26-27

This mystery. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Jesus entering into his glory, by occupying the throne in your own heart.



How do you know when somebody has met Jesus alive from the dead? When someone has met Jesus alive from the dead, there is a burning flame inside them that manifests itself as a life lived in his nature, his mercy, his joy in God, his continuous forbearance with other people.

If these things aren't shining forth from that inner flame, something is wrong.

And this flame that burns within us when we meet Jesus alive from the dead is not a reflected light like so many of us experience. When we are among believers, we feel strong in faith...but then when we are back on our jobs, or at home with our families, or in the midst of all life's problems, our faith leaves, it evaporates. When you have the presence of the Lord burning on the throne in your heart, it's there all the time.

It's a wonderful thing to gather together, to celebrate and rejoice at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And as we come together in his name, he comes into our midst, as he does in countless other places across the earth. He's with us.

But now we're very much like those two disciples on the way to Emmaus. He was walking with them and they didn't know who he was. And it wasn't doing them any good until somehow he ignites the flame within them.

And what we need is not only to have Jesus standing in our midst, alive from the dead.

We need to have the flame of his burning light occupying the throne of our inmost hearts.

And we can have this. Now God knows our hearts. He alone really knows.

But we all too often succumb to the temptation to analyze our brother or our sister's heart. Let's not do that now.

Let's leave our brother's heart alone.

Let's not psychoanalyze our sister's spirit.

Let's just worry about our own.

And thinking about our own condition, our own flame, there's every variety possible.

Some of us have little teeny tiny flames. It's hard to see, but it's really there.

Some have flames that shoot up every six months for about 3 days, then flickers down again.

Some of us, have a little bit of smoke left, we remember the flame that was once there.

Some of us perhaps have never experienced this at all.

But the good news is that for all of us, whether we have a bitty flame or a big flame, or a fat, or a thin flame or no flame....

.... The Lord wants to come and occupy that throne inside us today.



And all we have to do is exactly what these disciples did on the road to Emmaus. They did three things that allowed him to occupy the throne of their hearts.

They acknowledge their need.

They listened as Jesus spoke to them and drank it in.

They welcomed him into their hearts.

They Admitted Their Need

They frankly and openly admitted their need.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel

Now our hope is gone. That room inside our hearts is dark and empty and cold, something is missing. We need to do this too, to admit we have lost our hope.

Far better to admit this than to pretend to ourselves, and to other believers what we aren't.

Far better to admit there's a terrible need in each of our hearts.

When I see the needs around me, when I understand the things, I am now called upon to live through and do... I simply don't have enough.

“A friend of mine has come on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.”

“I don't have the strength and the life. God fill me with the presence of your Son, renew this in me today.”

Get on your knees. Do whatever you have to do to cry out to God in your need.

If you ask, you receive. If you knock, the door opens. If you seek, you find.

Nothing happens, all too often, because we don't do any knocking or asking.

So cry out.... ask, knock, seek



They listened when Jesus spoke to them.

They still didn't know this was Jesus, but they drank it in.

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

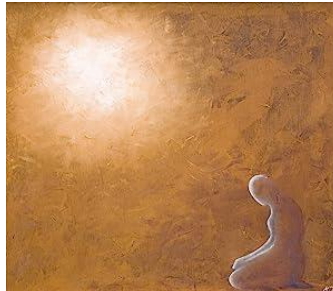
And they drink this in. They listen as he speaks, and even as he's speaking, the flame begins to burn.

And He speaks to us. He opens the Scriptures to us. And He speaks to us not only through sermons, through Scriptures, through hymns and worship, through devotions but he also speaks to us as we sit in silence...

.... as we think.... He Speaks.

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.
The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*

They will ignite you.... if you listen.



God help us to listen with teachable, broken spirits like children.

God help us to lay aside the attitudes that hinder the flow of his word getting into our hearts.

All too often we know all the answers, so it only gets so far and bounces off until we need to stop knowing all the answers and approach him with poverty of spirit. Then he comes in and we begin to live.

They welcomed him into their hearts. They Invited him in.

*So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."
So he went in to stay with them.* *(Luke 24:28-32)*

And those words which they spoke to Jesus are the precise words we need to speak...

"Stay with us".

"Stay with us, it's late, the day is far spent"

It doesn't matter your age... the day of our life on this earth is limited...whether you are 15, 21, 35, or 79....it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.

"Lord Jesus, come into my life and transform these few remaining hours of the day that I have in this world of flesh and blood.... into something meaningful.... into life"

"Please Lord, come in and stay with me"

"Stay with us, for it is indeed nearly evening; the day is far, far, far spent."

When you leave your gatherings, your services, will you have been to the museum to pay homage to a dead idol of a dead tradition?

Or will you have in fact somehow, somewhere met Jesus alive from the dead?

When you do meet Jesus alive from the dead, you will be different. The flame within you, if you had any at all, will be much larger, much steadier, much stronger.

And by that flame you will be able to go out into the world and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

You will manifest the mercy of God and show the forbearance of God to your families, to your neighbors, to your fellow workers, and to the people who give you a hard time...even that supervisor on the job who makes your life miserable. Whatever the situation, you will be able to live in a totally different atmosphere.

You will be living by the atmosphere of heaven which now dwells in you and is aflame inside.

Fall before God and do these three things...and he will go from a dead idol to a Living God burning with light and life inside you.

Admit your deep need of his resurrection life...confess it, acknowledge it.

Listen as he speaks, and he will speak to your heart according to your own need.

And invite him in.



Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.”

Message: Richard E. Bieber- Easter 1983, transcribed and formatted 2023 by Maranatha Mirror [Audio link to this sermon](#)

Featured Art: Daniel Bonnell at bonnellart.com and Kate Austin at christart.co.uk

Prayer- Jesus more than ever, we need to experience you alive from the dead. Forgive us for making you a dead idol. Lord, we ask you once again to become the living God on the throne of our hearts. We've allowed the thrones to become occupied by meaningless things. We don't have what we need to face the work in front of us. Lord, take this time we have left and ignite our hearts again, making our hearts burn within us as we hear you speak. Renew us, reignite us. And oh Lord come in, we welcome you, please, please stay with us. And yes, we want to live in the atmosphere of heaven now, to be filled with your light burning so strongly inside of us that we can't help but ignite and change the lives of those whom you bring to us. Yes, stay with us now, stay with us, stay with many, many before the day is over. Amen.

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN

