

What Hope Is There For Change #2 What Are We Waiting For

Author NT Wright in his wonderful book “Surprised by Hope” suggest that some of the world greatest philosophers Aristotle, Socrates, etc declaration that what you think about death, and life beyond it, is the key to our thinking seriously about everything else – our life, our vocation, our faith activities. Like NT Wright, I affirm this observation by philosophers. In other words

What we are waiting for and what are we going to do (or not do) in the meantime will be determined by our understanding of death, and what happens thereafter.

- If your understanding is of a God somewhere “out or up there” somewhere yet death is death and therefore no after life – how will you live? Perhaps we will seek to consume now
- If your understanding is of God and a heaven and hell but God is angry and out to get us and seeking to put as many people in hell as possible – how will you live? Perhaps chances are you live a life (or in some cases not live) life in fear, failure and anger
- If our understanding is of God where all religions are getting to the same cosmic place where doing good get’s you in and being mean kicks you out – – how will you live? Perhaps you may spend this life on a yo-yo of sorts excited/seeking to do “the right thing” then exhaustive from feeling hopeless and depressed because so much more needs to be done.
- If you understanding of God is that of “manifest destiny” where all things on this earth is yours and one day you will some disembodied spirit – perhaps you will seek by “any means necessary” to take or keep what is rightfully yours.
- But what if your understanding of God is that of Love, mercy and grace – as seen in creation, in sustaining us, in redeeming through Jesus Christ His Son who lived amongst us, died and rose again, in the coming of the Spirit to equip us now in this life and the next – how will you live. Perhaps like this:

7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more; I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:7-11

How do we get there? How do we get to a point as in that great theological movie “Walli” where the ship’s captain and the computer who had been running the ship filled with over fed, over stimulated, over weight, over pampered earthlings and it was time to go back home the robot’s told the captain it was his duty to make sure they survive. His response must be our own

“I don’t want to survive, I want to live.” Are you surviving or living this morning... If you want to live then turn with me to our text this morning we read the familiar account in **Luke 24** of the Road to Emmaus. It is on the dusty road to Emmaus a 7 mile walk from the city of Jerusalem to Emmaus that we read of a Cleopas and his companion, disciples of Jesus. I find the timing of their walk of great interest as it relates to our conversation on HOPE. You see the account of the Road to Emmaus is exactly 3 days after the death of their master, their teacher, whom is identified in vs. 19 as a prophet - our Lord and Savior and Jesus Christ. In fact it is because of the death of Jesus that they are heading home. In the last week, Cleopas and his companion along with the other disciples/followers of Jesus had experience or surely heard about amongst other things:

- Triumph entry into Jerusalem
- The last supper where Jesus had washed the disciples feet
- The betrayal of Judas,
- The arrest, the so called trail and beating of Jesus
- The public Denial of Peter along with the private rejection of others
- The agonizing and gruesome death of Jesus on the Cross
- And most recently they had heard from the women (earlier in the same chapter) – Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James that upon returning to the burial site of Jesus death the found the stone rolled away, the burial tomb empty

Understandably, for Cleopas and his companion the road to Emmaus wasn’t only a road in which to travel home.

- The road to Emmaus was a much-needed escape from the reality of the traumatic past week and a half.
- The road to Emmaus was a much needed diversion from the dealing with what surely would be a troubled future
- The road to Emmaus was a much needed change from dealing with the hopeless present – an environment that would be the “less” in the word “hopeless”

In theological language we could say that Cleopas and his companion were operating under what I would call a **“dangerous theology of retreat”**. A theology of retreat often in the songs we sing – some of my favorites “Soon and Very Soon” by Andre Crouch,

1. Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King
2. Soon and very soon, No more crying there, we are going to see the King
3. Soon and very soon, No more dying there, we are going to see the King

There will be peace in the valley for me some day . There will be peace in the valley for me, oh Lord, I pray . There'll be no sadness, no sorrow, no trouble I see . There will be peace in the valley for me!

In our world today we also have seen another popular theology that misrepresents the gospel. The opposite of a **“theology of retreat”** is a **“theology of evolution”** the church isn’t unique in this way. A theology of evolution is best summed up in the classic hit of 1970:

**Ooh-oo child . Things are gonna get easier . Ooh-oo child . Things'll get brighter.
Ooh-oo child . Things are gonna get easier. Ooh-oo child. Things'll get brighter**

Some day, yeah. We'll get it together and we'll get it all done. Some day When your head is much lighter . Some day, yeah . We'll walk in the rays of a beautiful sun . Some day . When the world is much brighter The five Steps OR Some day we will be together....Diane Ross

Good music – Motown...but bad theology. It is the evolutionary understanding that humankind at some point in the near future will achieve a state of “nirvana” – be it through education, social programming, or even religious syncretism (all paths leading to the same place). Both theologies are the extremes – Retreat and Evolution encompasses a misunderstanding of who God is, who Jesus is and therefore who and how the Holy Spirit dwells/equips the people of faith.

**Taste and see that the LORD is good; Ps 34:8
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Jn 14:27**

It is in the midst of this environment – a theology of Retreat - we read today that the resurrected Jesus enters onto the road of Emmaus with Cleopas and his companion and walks with them even as they sought to escape, Jesus walked with them even as they sought to be distracted, Jesus walked with them on the road to Emmaus as they sought a much needed change – Jesus met them, and walked with them. Amen?

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "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; 21but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

It is important to note verse 21 and the word “hoped” and the context in which it is used – **“but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”**

- Cleopas amongst others of his day had a hope – a hope that Jesus was going to “take back Israel, perhaps by force, by violence, by “any means necessary”, though this isn’t what Jesus indicated, nor the prophets!
- Cleopas amongst others of his day had a hope that Jesus would be King, as in the line of David and “rule over their enemies”
- Cleopas amongst others of his day had a hope – a hope that God would finally separate the “good from the bad” and the Good would live a “heaven on earth” no pain, no death, no hardship which encompassed people like Cleopas.
- **Cleopas amongst others of his day had a hope. But their hope or better stated - what their hoped rested upon was flawed. Yet for some reason they didn’t dare to hope for a resurrected Lord. To be fair to them the possibility of death being overcome was a hope beyond them – this is why the woman who had come to the tomb had to be wrong. This is why Thomas had to doubt. This is why Peter and the others had to deny Jesus. Why? They feared what happen to Jesus their master; maestro would befall them – death. But what if death was no longer to be feared. What if**

death wasn't the final answer? What if "becoming more more like Christ meant not only in this life but also in our death, our promised resurrection!"

I believe Cleopas and his companion journey on the road to Emmaus wonderfully articulates for many of us here this morning our own theological misunderstandings be it a theology of retreat or evolution. Have not each us at one point recited the very words of Cleopas.

But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to _____
keep me out of debt.....heal me-heal my father.....restore my marriage....

Cleopas and his companion on the Road to Emmaus represent for us our own desires to retreat from our own dashed hopes, retreat from our own depressing disappointments; retreat from our own failed frustrations, retreat from our own fears of the future. The Emmaus road that I am speaking of isn't only 2,000 years ago but is as they say "alive and kicking" for each of us who are today, right now on our journey of hope. Our Emmaus Road where we are dealing with a difficult past, or a unsatisfied present or for others real concern for a unknown future. Like Cleopas our hope, my hope is often flawed bordering on a theology of retreat or a theology of evolution. It is in the environment that Jesus comes along side them and be encouraged this day our Lord desires to come aside each of us this morning and reintroduce all of us to the ***theology of the Resurrection***. Listen to the words of Jesus:

Lk 24:25He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26Did not the Christ^b have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Jesus is telling Cleopas and his companion then and us today – I had to suffer, I had to die, but because of my death all sins have been forgiven in the past and in future in my name, but because I conquered death – death no longer has reign, authority, a hold on this world. And this is part we forget – Christ Resurrection and the power expressed there in is a foreshadowing of our own bodily resurrection when I return! This is why Paul articulates such strong words about this life.....that power now live in me, in us!

7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more; I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ— the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:7-11

Paul recognized more than most that the resurrection power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is available to us in this life and in the next. In other words

- Retreat into a cocoon is not an option
- Evolution or mere optimism is not an option,
- Fear is not an option
- By any means necessary – by force is not an option

Consistently in Paul's letters to the churches you will find in the greeting or in the benediction a reference to "our resurrected Lord" to "the one who has overcome death"

What we are waiting for, what are you waiting for and what are we going to do (or not do) in the meantime will be determined by our understanding of death, and what happen thereafter.

Story of our building.....we cannot retreat Nor can we merely hope this community evolve...

"We come this far by faith