

The Transfigured Road

by T. Austin-Sparks

Reading: Luke 24:13-33.

This chapter is the story of a transfigured journey. This journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus was undoubtedly taken by those two disciples in a spirit of complete bewilderment over their situation. It proved to be a great turning-point in their lives; but at the time when they set out upon the journey, they had undoubtedly reached the point of feeling that they had come to an end of everything. All that had happened spoke of an end. In the past there had been much that held elements of great hope and expectation; and to that hope they had given themselves in genuine, sincere committal. True, there had been much, also, that was very perplexing, perhaps allowing for questions at times, and some fears — even to taking them completely out of their depth. It was all so much and so big. But, by and large, it had stimulated a great hope.

Now, that had all ended in a great disappointment and disillusionment; everything was apparently in ruins. The only course seemed to be to get right away from it all, to seek solitude in this country village, well away from the city. And so these two decided to take that course. 'Let us get right away from everything; perhaps we shall get a better perspective if we do. Let us get away!'

The Road Out

We can imagine the dialogue on the journey — perhaps the longest six and a half miles that ever two men trod. One may have 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 like that to me.' And the other would say: 'Well, brother, it does seem like that, it is true. But we can't forget, can we? We can't forget everything; we can't just write everything off. Do you remember ...?' And then he would call to mind one of those wonderful times with the Master — His words and His works. And so they talked, trying to get to the bottom of this mystery, to explain this great problem.

We know the rest of the story. As they went on, 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 much distress. Then they stood still, and looked at Him. 'Are you only a visitor in these parts? Don't you know what has been happening?' But still He drew them out. That is sometimes one of the master-strokes of our great Master, to draw us out. It is a great thing to be drawn out, to have to explain your own trouble and problem. Let us take that as a lesson. And so He drew them out, until they had no more to say.

Then He started to speak. And as He took up the Scriptures, there was a new movement inside: the dying embers began to glow; a ray of hope broke in upon them. New light was breaking; their hearts were warming; perhaps also some sense of shame was creeping up inside for their foolishness. Let us just note, in passing, 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 by Him on another occasion: "*If anyone call his brother a fool, he is in danger of hell fire*" (Matt. 5:22c; also 23:17); but that is not the word that Jesus used here. The word is the one that Paul used to the Galatians: "*O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you ...?*" (Gal. 3:1). Our Revised Version is correct: "*O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe ...*". It was not hard, cruel, un-understanding — that is the point.

At last they arrived at Emmaus, when it was getting late; and these men could not let Him go like that. 'Come in and stay with us', they said. '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, and He took the loaf, and broke it, and gave to them ... *“their eyes were opened ...”*! Now, whether it was His sovereign act in opening their eyes, or the sudden remembrance of what had happened before, we do not know. 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 last supper and seen Him break the loaf, and give. But, undoubtedly, they had been with Him at some meal, or 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 crowds together. There was something about this act that was reminiscent — it reminded them. Or, it may have been His sovereign act of withdrawing the veil, and letting them see. But, however that may be, the point is, *“they knew Him; and he vanished out of their sight.”*

The Road Back

The Return Journey! What a transfigured road that was! Everything was changed. They had gone in broad daylight but it was dark. They returned at night, and all 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 — a going out, if you like. There is quite a lot in that. ‘Let us get away; let us get out; let us go!’ It was an ‘journey outward’, 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 the day, they would be back where they were at its beginning! I am quite sure of that; that was never intended. But something happened! 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 was, after all, alive (it is always this that we have dwelt upon when we have read and meditated on this chapter), there are some other things, I think, lying right at the heart of this story, which may be helpful to us.

‘Jesus Knows All about Our Troubles’

First of all, they discovered that Jesus knew all about them and their trouble, and that, although they were very largely responsible for their situation, He had not given them up. That is a simple beginning of a transformed journey. If only, in time of our perplexity, and our failure, when our hearts are moving in the wrong direction, we would 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 taking this journey in a spirit of wilful abandonment of the Lord. It was simply that they could not understand, and they were reaching out for understanding; and then they discovered that He understood. Let us take that comfort right at the beginning. He did not let them go because they were having a difficult and dark and perplexing time; He never does.

Another Side to the Situation

Then again, they discovered that there was another side altogether to the whole situation, a side which they had never guessed. There always is! If we saw all, we should be saved a lot. Many of our deflections are because we have only seen one side of the matter. It is certainly true as to what happened on that road, and it made all the difference. The Lord Jesus showed them that there was another side to this whole matter, to which they were blind. And 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? If we are the Lord's children, there is something more in this than we can see.

In our human limitation, we do see only one side of things; but if only we could see the other, we should be saved. That changed everything for these men: they discovered that there was another side to this whole matter, and the other side was the much more wonderful side — the side that wrote off all their side as very defective indeed. They discovered that there is, underlying our deepest troubles, a buried meaning which, when we see it, makes 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.

The Need of Living Truth

Further, they found that, although they had a great amount of knowledge, and truth, and teaching — both as to 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 — there was something lacking in their apprehension of truth, something that was vital to their very survival in the day of the ordeal. That is something to learn. The great test came, not just to themselves, but to all that they had received in the past; and the test of the cross at that time was, whether the truth they possessed was 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 that 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 is that the truth that we possess shall not be just truth *as such*, but living truth, that it shall be our very life. The after-history of these men is that it had all become alive! But it only came alive through a very deep ordeal. This whole story circles round that mighty word of His: "*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?*" (verse 26, A.V.). "*Behoved it not the Christ to suffer ...?*" (R.V.). In that He gathers up 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 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.

An Experience of the Cross

It worked like this. Here they are: everything is 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 what I had never seen before. In all that I knew, I had never seen this!' '*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. There is no doubt that

there was some mixture in their position. "*We hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel!*" (verse 21). We know from the Gospels themselves what was bound up with that hope: a place in that kingdom, something to minister to themselves and to their ambition. So the cross had to rid them of all that was mixed and false in their position. It did it by, first of all, taking everything away. When the cross came in, both the right and the wrong went, 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.

That is the story: the necessity of the cross in our lives, to get us on to true ground, safe ground; to explain to us our own problems and our own difficulties. A right understanding of that is a really transforming, transfiguring thing.

The fact is that they had got an entirely wrong or inadequate apprehension of the meaning of the cross. But when He opened to them this matter of the suffering of Christ, and they saw it aright, the whole situation was changed. When they saw it aright; when they themselves, with all their interests, had gone out of the picture entirely, everything was transfigured. 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!

The Lord's Sympathy with Honest Perplexity

It may be that there are some reading these lines, who have decided to leave the situation. Maybe you are going down this dismal road of bewilderment, disappointment, and perplexity, and, you think, of disillusionment. Or it may be that you will be tempted at some time to do that. Read again this story; look into its heart and see. 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, wilfully forsaking Him. If it is in the deepest of perplexities, inability to understand, He is in full sympathy, and will not give you up; He will follow you through. He will draw you out; He will require of you to 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 had seen; it has a deeper secret than you knew. And, in the disclosing of that secret, you will be saved.

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