

# 50 Living with Hearts Ablaze

*“They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.’” (Luke 24:32-35)*

They ran down the road like those who know the privilege of carrying the Olympic Torch. The flame they carried, however, was burning within their heart.

It was not that long before that they had just walked this road. At the beginning of that journey, the flame in their heart was barely flickering and beginning to fade. As He walked with them, His teaching began to rekindle that flame. Then, as they sat at the table with Him, He broke bread and their eyes were opened. They recognized Him. In the breaking of the bread, He made Himself known. Then He disappeared. He was still present, just no longer visible to them.

Filled with joy and wonder, they sat there looking at each other. I would not be surprised if they weren't thinking, “What just happened? Did you see what I saw?” Then the question recorded in Scripture: *“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

A fire had been set ablaze within their hearts. This fire would not be extinguished. As is fire's nature, this fire would consume them—not in a destructive way, but in a purifying fashion. This fire could not be contained. It had to spread. How can you possibly keep this inside of you? They went back to their friends. They had to know.

Those who have recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread know the need to tell someone the Good News. Those who have learned of Christ as He is revealed in His Word understand the urgency of going and sharing the Good News with friends and neighbors. How can a believer be silent?

The four lepers understood how good news compels one to not be silent. In 2 Kings 6-7, King Benhadad of Aramea had laid siege to the city of Samaria. The people were starving. Some people were so hungry and desperate that they were killing and eating their own children. Who can imagine the horror of a situation like this? In Chapter 7 we read of four lepers at the city gates. They realized that they would die anyway, and so they decided to go for broke and surrender.

*“Why stay here until we die? If we say, ‘We’ll go into the city’—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let’s go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die” (vv. 3-5).*

They entered the camp of the Aramean army to surrender. In the meantime, the Bible reveals that God had caused Benhadad and all of his army to hear the sound of hoofbeats and the rolling chariots of a mighty army

coming. Frightened, they reasoned that Israel had signed a treaty with Egypt and that the Egyptian army was coming to Israel's aid. They fled for their lives, leaving behind tables full of food and other treasures. These four lepers walked into the enemy camp to surrender and no one was there. They went into the tents of the enemy and saw tables full of food. They were starving and so they feasted. Later they found silver and gold and fine clothing. They began to carry it away for themselves. Then after a while they said to each other,

*"We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace" (v. 9).*

So they ran back to the city and told the people the good news. The people thought it was too good to be true. They sent spies to investigate. Sure enough, the enemy was gone. The starving city came out and there was enough food for everyone.

How can you keep that kind of news to yourself? Even more so, how could these two men in Emmaus keep the Good News to themselves? They have news that will do more than satisfy the bodily hunger of a city. They have news that will satisfy the spiritual hunger of a world. It is unthinkable that they would not want to immediately tell everyone they knew.

They returned to Jerusalem: "It is true! The Lord has risen!" Out of breath but full of joy, they excitedly shared with the eleven and those gathered what they had seen and heard.

*"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a*

*ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you; everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high'" (Luke 24:36-49).*

The fire that was burning in the heart of these two men was beginning to spread. There in that locked room, Christ unlocked the storehouse of God's riches. Peace, joy, hope and a sense of purpose are the gifts of God at Christ's expense. He had paid the price. Now, they could be at peace because Jesus had overcome the world.

There is a great visual reminder of this in Rockefeller Center, New York City. At the entrance of the GE Building (formerly the RCA Building) is a huge statue of Atlas struggling to keep the world on his shoulders. Across the street in Saint Patrick's Cathedral behind the altar is a small statue of Jesus effortlessly holding the whole world in one hand.

Peace is not easy when we strive to balance the world on our own backs. But we don't need to. Jesus invites us to cast the weight of the world into His hands where He holds it with ease. Along with peace, the

disciples were overcome with joy. So joyous were they that they had a hard time believing at first. *“And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement . . . .”* Have you ever had trouble believing the Good News of His love and grace for you because of the sheer joy of it? The joy of the believer is one of the most influential and convincing proofs of faith. Malcom Muggeridge was a Marxist before he became a Christian. During the Cold War he traveled to Russia to write a story about the Communist party and the decline of religion in that atheistic regime. After conducting a series of interviews with officials in the Kremlin, he attended a Russian Orthodox Easter service. The church was packed. At the close of the service the priest announced, “Christ is risen!” and the people shouted back, “He is risen indeed!” Muggeridge looked into their faces and instantly realized that they were right and Stalin was wrong. He said it was the reality of their joy that tipped the scales of his soul toward Christ.

The reality of Christian joy is compelling. The joy of the believer, be it in persecution or in times of suffering or in great celebration, is one of the most winsome qualities of the Christian witness and life.

The room was ablaze. It was ablaze with peace and joy like they had never known. What fueled all of this was nothing less than hope. Everything that was written about Jesus had come to pass. Everything Jesus said was fulfilled.

*“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms’” (v. 44).*

They could trust the Word. It had not let them down. Christian hope is not mere wishful thinking. Christian hope is the certainty and assurance of what cannot yet be seen but is known without a doubt through the

Word of God. As John Maxwell describes it:

What Does Hope Do For Mankind?

Hope shines brightest when the hour is darkest.

Hope motivates when discouragement comes.

Hope energizes when the body is tired.

Hope sweetens while bitterness bites.

Hope sings when all melodies are gone.

Hope believes when evidence is eliminated.

Hope listens for answers when no one is talking.

Hope climbs over obstacles when no one is helping.

Hope endures hardship when no one is caring.

Hope smiles confidently when no one is laughing.

Hope reaches for answers when no one is asking.

Hope presses toward victory when no one is encouraging.

Hope dares to give when no one is sharing.

Hope brings the victory when no one is winning.

The hearts of those in the room were on fire. It was a fire fueled by the peace that Christ was giving them. It was fueled by the fullness of joy that is only found in the emptiness of a tomb. It was fueled by a hope that God’s Word cannot be stopped. Fire like this, however, is all consuming. It cannot be contained. Jesus does not want it to be contained.

*“You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (vv. 48-49).*

Their mission was to the world. They were called to carry that flame burning within their heart to a world lost in darkness. It is the mission before you and me today. What is

the fire burning within your heart? I believe that within each of us there is a flame we carry wherever we go. What fuels the fire?

A.W. Tozer once wrote, “To derail us, all Satan needs to do is minimize our passion for two things—the person of God and the place of God” (Alcorn, p. 6). I believe that. So often God does not have my full attention or devotion. My passion for Him can so quickly get minimized and marginalized by the demands and expectations of so many others. So often the place of God is not my first love. God takes on second or third place all too quickly when my day or my week is full of other demands. The world and the things of the world have a way of dampening that fire.

The resurrected Christ places before us a mission that deserves and demands our all. He is not looking for lukewarm Christians, but those who are red-hot for His mission. His mission leaves each of us with a choice: “We face a choice to be worldly Christians or world Christians” (Minatrea, p. 5). Jesus prayed about this very thing in the Garden:

*“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15-18).*

It is an awesome task. It is an even more awesome privilege that He has entrusted to us. One message—Christ the Lord! Do you know of any other way, any other truth, any other life? One mission—Ablaze!—dedicated to sharing the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people by the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Yes, it seems like a huge undertaking. As I wrote at the beginning of these devotions, my first reaction to the Ablaze! Initiative was to laugh in disbelief. So did Sarah and Abraham when they heard that they would have a baby about the time they were getting

ready for a retirement center.

On our own, it is impossible. We will never even get out of the gate. We do not have to do it alone. We cannot do it alone.

*“You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:48-49).*

Ten days after Jesus ascended, the Spirit came as promised upon these timid, confused disciples. The world was transformed. It wasn’t due to them. It was and is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who first disturbed them out of their comfort zone and then empowered them to carry the flame of the Gospel to a dark and cold world. That same promise is given to you and me and the Church today. It is time for the Church to celebrate anew the gift and blessing of Pentecost—the outpouring of the Spirit upon His holy bride, the Church.

Let the celebration begin by rededicating ourselves to responding to His Great Commission, first by *learning* and *praying*. Then, let us put our learning and prayers into action by *telling* and *giving*. Pray on behalf of His bride that she might be disturbed out of her apathy and comfort zone and be known as a *sending* Church, where believers are missionaries as much as they are members, *going* wherever God sends them. Then as the lost souls are saved and lives transformed, let His Holy Nation, the priesthood of believers, join with God and all the company of heaven, *celebrating* over each soul that returns home.

To God Alone Be The Glory!

**Prayer:** Father, in the Resurrection of your Son, you have lit a fire within my heart. Your Spirit has ignited me with His love, peace, joy and hope. Help me carry that flame into the lost and darkened world that I enter into now. In all that I do and in all that I say, may your name be glorified and honored. Through Jesus I ask this. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** Throughout the day today, and every day for the rest of your life, ask yourself, “What is the fire in my heart?” As you are going, carry the flame of His love and make disciples.

**Scripture Reading:** John 1

**From the Book of Concord:** “‘Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God,’ that is, we have tranquil and joyful consciences before God. And in Romans 10[:10]: ‘For one believes with the heart and so is justified.’ Here he states that faith is the righteousness of the heart. Galatians 2[:16]: ‘And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by . . . works of the law.’ Ephesians 2[:8–9]: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.’

“John 1[:12–13]: ‘But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.’ John 3[:14–16]: ‘And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may . . . not perish but may have eternal life’ Likewise [John 3:17–18], ‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned’” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV: Justification, p. 136.91-94).

*Disturb us, Lord,  
when we are too well pleased with ourselves;  
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little;  
when we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore.*

*Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess  
we have lost our thirst for the Waters of Life;  
having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity;  
and in our efforts to build a new earth,  
we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.*

*Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery;  
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.  
We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes,  
and to push us in the future with strength, courage, hope and love.*

*(Sir Francis Drake)*