

April 7, 2024

“Burning Passion”

Luke 24:13-34 (25-34)

Intro:

Music in movies or TV shows is there to enhance the visual aspects of scenes by drawing viewers into the majesty and emotions of the moment. I’m sure you can all recall a moment in a movie where the combination of what is being portrayed and the music behind the scene lifted you to an emotional response you weren’t expecting.

I can think of several of these music moments, but the one that first jumps to mind is found in “The Fellowship of the Ring”, which is the first movie in the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy, based on the books by J.R.R Tolkien. The emotional scene for me is right at the end of the Fellowship’s journey through the mines of Moria. There is a great chase, the fearsome Balrog has made its appearance and the Fellowship is now running for their lives across the bridge of Khazad Dum. It is here that their leader Gandalf makes his last stand and is pulled down into the endless chasm of Moria. The music swells with strong and fast drumbeats, but once they reach daylight outside, the music suddenly shifts. While the Fellowship is gasping for breath and overcome with grief over Gandalf’s fall, a high-voiced line in the musical score emphasizes and draws us into the danger, the relief, and the utter sadness and despair that they feel.

It sounds like this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9pNBe_fh9M

I will admit, it catches my emotion and my imagination every time.

Or perhaps you can relate better to those books that capture your interest and imagination in such a way that you find yourself unable to pull away and close the book. You get so caught up in what is happening that you are compelled to keep turning the pages and reading on, even though you have been reading for far longer than you planned to.

Coincidentally, *The Lord of the Rings* are those books for me.

Those are great moments of enjoyment, are they not?

Let me ask you, when was the last time you had that level of experience when reading or listening to the Bible...

The Narrative:

It is late in the afternoon on Easter Sunday, and many in Jerusalem are still reeling from the events of the last few days. For those people, the shock that Jesus had been arrested and crucified was still very fresh and almost unbelievable – in their mind he was a great teacher, a miracle maker, and had brought to them the hopes of the long-anticipated Messiah. We know this because Cleopas and the other disciple say as much to a stranger on the road to Emmaus. Their grief is real. Their confusion is real, and doubly so because there had been a report from some of the women that the tomb where Jesus had been laid, was as of that morning empty!

I'm sure this would have been an interesting conversation to be witness to. Here are two people talking to another man who is clearly behind the times and needs to be brought up to speed. Meanwhile, this stranger (we know he is Jesus), can't believe that these two are so foolish that they don't believe their own scriptures, the ones that tell about what needed to happen to the Messiah that they had been hanging their hopes on.

From that moment, the stranger - Jesus, takes them through all the passages in the Scriptures that talk about the Messiah and what he would experience. It was the greatest Bible study ever. They walk and they talk – well, Jesus talks and they mostly listen. But I can imagine that every now and then they would have asked a question, or attempted to put in their own two cents on what was being discussed. However the Bible study played out, it is clear that it was the most riveting and engaging study that has ever happened. They end up walking all the

way to their home in Emmaus, and it probably only seemed like moments. But a fair chunk of time had passed as it is now time for supper.

Jesus probably didn't just quote verse after verse at them. I imagine that He opened up the story before them and drew them into it. I imagine that when he spoke from Moses' writings that they were drawn into the Exodus experience. When He moved to the prophets, they would have time-leapt with him to the heights of temple worship, to the lows of Babylonian exile, experiencing those stories and cultural memory as though they had been there themselves.

And in those moments along that road, as they listened to Jesus telling the story and connecting the passages together to form a clear picture and explain what they had just experienced, something was stirring within them. Their emotions were ignited and engaged.

At the point where Jesus revealed himself to them, their response wasn't, "Oh look! There's Jesus!" It was "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

The experience they had with Jesus was through the explanation and engagement of the Scriptures. It was an experience unlike any they had ever had before. A burning passion for those words was ignited within them. I propose to you this morning, that it was at that moment that the scriptures finally came alive for them. Sure, they would have been familiar with them, but now the words were living and stirring within their hearts. Scripture, from this point on, meant something more for them than just words on a scroll or that were spoken during worship.

In other words, the movie opens up and the soundtrack is added to give full life to the scene.

Burning Passion:

So I ask again, when was the last time you had that kind of experience when reading or studying the Bible?

For many of us, the Bible is dry. It is important – yes. It is something that we know we should read daily. And we know that in those pages is the truth about God, grace, and eternal life. But if we are honest, it doesn't seem like much of a page turner. We gain knowledge about God from our reading, but rarely can we describe what is happening as “our hearts burning within us”.

That is a shame.

Maybe there was a time when you couldn't wait to read the next page in the Bible – everything was new and opened all sorts of doors for understanding the new life you had received in Jesus. But over time it lost the luster. Instead of seeing the grand image of God in creation, you began to only see rules and restrictions. Or maybe the story became so familiar that it no longer captured your attention.

I challenge you this morning to find that burning passion again. The Bible is so much more than just a bunch of rules, or lists of names, or messages of doom and gloom. There is passion, adventure, romance, conversation, epic deeds of history, kindness beyond measure, a glimpse into the working of the cosmos, answers to questions we might not have even known we had.... And yes names, and instructions. It connects us to the family of God that we who have given our lives to Christ are now a part of. And it points us to a future that gives us hope and promise.

I recall the first experience I had with the Bible in such a way. It was during one of my weeks working as a cabin leader at KLC, and we were having a massive staff hunt during the day for some reason. I took my Bible and found a spot where no one would find me, and I sat down and began to read (of all places) Second Chronicles. I couldn't put it down. It is entirely possible that I was late in returning from the game. I had to finish the whole book. I had no idea that the monarchy and history of Israel had so much drama in it. I knew a little bit, of course, but the

fullness of it was opened before me on that summer day – good kings, bad kings, consequences, armies, political intrigue, battles won and lost. And through it all was a God who desired nothing more than that His people be faithful to the calling that they had accepted.

How to Regain the Burn:

How do we find our way back to a living and active Word of God that is sharper than any two-edged sword and can pierce into the depths of our heart and passion? Allow me to suggest three ways, although there are certainly more.

The first thing is to spend time with it. Jesus knew all the scriptures that he did, not just because he is the Word (meaning as fully God he was involved in the inspiration of the Scripture writers), but because as one who is fully human, he spent significant time reading, learning and studying, and listening to rabbis teach about the Scriptures. He also spent time with his heavenly father seeking understanding and clarity. When he spoke to others, he communicated not his own words, but the words (Scripture) that his Father had told to him (again, through Scripture). So, spend time reading the Bible.

The second thing is to engage with others in study of the Bible. There are a lot of really good resources and tools to help guide in the study of the Bible. RightNow media has some really good video series on various books of the Bible – watch them and listen for the passion that those presenters have. What things do they say and point out that capture your imagination and heart as well?

You can find a multitude of books that are written to help in understanding the Bible. There are books on different approaches to reading the Bible, and books (commentaries) that explain the language and meaning of the passages you read. You might want to check out The Bible Project on YouTube or its app, if you are a more visual type of person.

Study on your own is good, but study with others is better. So don't neglect opportunities to open and explore the Bible with someone else. It isn't about

someone having the right answer, but rather about everyone sharing and exploring and seeking God collectively and together.

The third thing follows closely to study, and that is to not be afraid to ask strange questions. Look for what you haven't seen in a passage before. Ask questions of it. What doesn't seem to make sense? Don't worry about whether your question or observation is something that would be seen in a commentary, just let that observation guide you to learning something new about God and about the word that is before you. Also, don't be afraid to share those often off-the-beaten-path observations with others you are studying with.

Conclusion:

We are all given the opportunity to open the Bible for ourselves. We are given good minds to learn and understand. We are part of a larger body of believers that together can keep our focus on God and His truth. And through all of this, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit, who if we earnestly seek him, will open truth to us and reveal more of God to us each time we dive into His word.

May we all find our hearts burning within us every time we encounter Scripture.

Let's pray.