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Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us . . . fix our eyes on Jesus, . . . who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:1, 2, NIV.

Walking to Emmaus

Digest

N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).¹

Editorial Note: In his book, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, N. T. Wright “poses a double-edged challenge: to grow in our understanding of the historical Jesus within the Palestinian world of the first century, and to follow Jesus more faithfully into the postmodern world of the twenty-first century.”² The following digest is drawn from chapter 7, “Walking to Emmaus in a Postmodern World.”

“IT IS THE AFTERNOON of the first Easter day. All sorts of strange things have happened in the morning, and the disciples still do not have a clue what has been going on.

The Emmaus Road Then

“As the day wears on, two of [the disciples] set off to go home to Emmaus. They are joined by a mysterious stranger, who engages them in conversation about the new events. If we are to understand this . . . historically, it is vital that we grasp the central point, stated in . . . [Luke 24:21]. ‘We were hoping,’ say the two of them, ‘that he was the one who would redeem Israel.’

“ . . . [Then,] ‘beginning with Moses and all the prophets, . . . [this mysterious stranger] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ . . . [In his account he showed how] he became the suffering Israel on behalf of the suffering

Israel; he went into exile — Israel’s exile, the human exile from the garden, the exile of the whole cosmos — to redeem those who were in exile. And in so doing he became on the cross, in the resurrection, on Easter morning, the very embodiment of Psalm 43:3:

‘O send out thy light and thy truth;
Let them lead me;
Let them bring me unto thy holy hill,
And to thy tabernacles.’

“ . . . [T]his is what God’s light and truth look like when at last in response to a thousand years of prayer they come forth from God’s presence to lead God’s people to his holy hill and to his dwelling, back from the place of tears to the place of hope and joy. Where are God’s light and truth in this story? Are they not there, incognito, on the road, leading the disciples to understand the Scriptures, strangely known in the breaking of the bread?

“The Temple, the place where God has promised to dwell with his people, is quietly but decisively replaced — by Jesus himself. . . . Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you so disquieted within me? Hope in God — in the Word made flesh, in the God who wept in Gethsemane and who became God-forsaken on

“The Temple, the place where God has promised to dwell with his people, is quietly but decisively replaced — by Jesus himself.”

Calvary, in the God who comes to you incognito on the road, who comes as light and truth to lead you to his holy hill and to his dwelling, who prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies, who makes himself known in the breaking of the bread. Hope in this God and you will again praise him, your help and your God.

The Emmaus Road Now

“Let me end with a parable, returning once more to the story of the Emmaus road. This parable functions against the background of one of the great symbols of modernist secularism, Matthew Arnold’s poem, ‘Dover Beach.’ There Arnold describes from his late-nineteenth-century perspective the way in which what he calls ‘the sea of faith’ has emptied; the tide has gone out; all we can hear is the ‘melancholy, long, withdrawing roar’ of the distant sea, leaving us in the gloom where, all too prophetically, ‘ignorant armies clash by night.’

“Two serious-minded unbelievers are walking home together, trying to make sense of the world of the mid-1990s. The dream of progress and enlightenment has run out of steam. Critical postmodernity has blown the whistle on the world as we knew it.

“Our two unbelievers walk along the road to Dover Beach. They are discussing, animatedly, how these things can be. How can the stories by which so many have lived have let us down? How shall we replace our deeply ambiguous cultural symbols? What should we be doing in our world now that every dream of progress is stamped with the word *Babel*?

“Into this conversation comes Jesus incognito. . . . ‘What are you talking about?’ he asks. They stand there, looking sad. Then one of them says, ‘You must be about the only person in town who doesn’t know what a traumatic time the twentieth century has

been. . . . We had a war to end wars, and we've had nothing but more wars ever since. We had a sexual revolution, and now we have AIDS and more family-less people than ever before. We pursued wealth, but we had inexplicable recessions and ended up with half the world in crippling debt. . . . Our dreams have gone sour, and we don't even know who 'we' are anymore. . . .

“Foolish ones,’ replies Jesus; ‘How slow of heart you are to believe all the Creator God has said! Did you never hear that he created the world wisely? and that he has now acted within his world to create a truly human people? and that from within this people he came to live as a truly human person? and that in his own death he dealt with evil once and for all? and that he is even now at work, by his own Spirit, to create a new human family in which repentance and forgiveness of sins are the order of the day, and so to challenge and overturn the rule of war, sex, money and power?’ And, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, and now also the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, he interprets to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”³

Endnotes

1. N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*, is available from Barnes & Noble at www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-challenge-of-jesus-n-t-wright/1119005402.
2. N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), overview, at www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-challenge-of-jesus-n-t-wright/1119005402.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-173.

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