

The Gospel Will be Preached to All Nations  
Luke 24:36-53  
Key Verse: 24:46-47

"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.'"

Last weekend we delved more deeply into the events and meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the two pillars of the New Testament and Christian faith. Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sins. Jesus was laid in a tomb. Then Jesus rose again from the dead on the third day. This is the gospel--the good news that has been preached from then until now. It is the gospel that will be preached until Jesus comes again. This is the good news that saves all who receive and believe it. May we all live every day with this good news in our hearts, in our feet and on our lips.

First, the empty tomb of Jesus (1-12). Although we will not study these verses in detail, it is good to review the events at Jesus' tomb. Jesus' dead body was taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. Mary Magdalene and several other women saw where his tomb was and how his dead body was laid in it. Then they went home for a day since it was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Early on Sunday morning, they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body. When they arrived, they found the tombstone rolled away from the tomb entrance and the body of the Lord Jesus was gone. Two men in gleaming clothes (actually angels) said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" The women went back to the Eleven apostles with this great news. But the apostles did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

Today too, the resurrection of Jesus Christ sounds to many people like nonsense. Many skeptics have tried to explain away Jesus' empty tomb. Some say that Jesus never died in the first place. But Jesus died on the cross. This was witnessed by Roman soldiers, by Jewish opponents, and by followers of Jesus. Others try to argue that someone stole the body. But the Romans and the Jews had nothing to gain by stealing the body and then concealing it, and Jesus' disciples would not have proclaimed it with joy to their deaths. So stealing the body makes no sense and still would not explain the resurrection appearances of Jesus. Some propose they looked in the wrong tomb. That also would have been easily corrected by both friends and enemies of Jesus. There really remains only one logical conclusion to the empty tomb: Jesus Christ rose physically from the dead. Among all great men in history, only Jesus Christ rose from the dead. All the others were buried and decayed. The resurrection of Christ, the Holy One, was foretold by David in Psalm 16:10b. It reads, "...nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Peter quoted this in his Pentecost sermon (Ac 2:31). Jesus' tomb was empty, because Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again. Jesus is alive today, seated at the right hand of God the Father. From there, he will come again to judge the living and the dead. All who believe in Jesus, love and obey a living Lord, who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Christians do not worship a dead leader, but the Savior and Judge who is alive and who is coming again. Jesus will bring salvation to all who are waiting for him.

Second, risen Jesus teaches the Bible on the road (13-35). Luke's gospel has one of the most interesting and surprising appearances of the risen Christ, who appears to two men as they are walking away from Jerusalem. Again, I don't want to study this section in detail, but just note a few things. Luke records these two men, even though we only know one of their names--Cleopas--as the first ones to encounter the risen Christ. And they didn't even recognize him for an hour's walk! Why did Jesus appear to these two men? It's not clear why risen Jesus chose to appear to these two men, but we can see a few things from his time with them. We see that Jesus turned their sorrow into joy and their lost hopes into new hope. They left Jerusalem sad, but after meeting the risen Christ, they became joyful, bold witnesses of Christ. Also, though their hopes in Jesus were dashed when Jesus died, the risen Jesus gave them new and living hope in the kingdom of God. Here I have to ask an important question. In what is your hope? If your hope is in something in the world, it is a dead or dying hope, because everything in this world dies some day: whether it's wealth, or position, or pleasure, or another person--all of these perish, spoil and fade away some day.

Gary Habermas is a top scholar in defending the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He rarely loses a debate regarding the plausibility of the resurrection. But what really put his faith to the test was not academic but personal: his wife died

of stomach cancer, leaving their four children for him to raise alone. His students asked him, "Believing the resurrection really makes a difference doesn't it?" In the midst of his human sorrow, he wanted to ask God, "Why?" But he kept imagining God's reply, "Did I raise my Son from the dead?" The powerful certainty and truth of the resurrection has comforted and cheered him continually in the realization that he will see his wife again, along with Jesus.

There is one more thing I want to note about the risen Jesus' talk along the road with these two little-known disciples: Jesus did not try to convince them with physical evidence. Jesus tried to convince them with the word of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, which Christians now call the Old Testament. Jesus had a Genesis to Malachi Bible study on the road with these two men. Can you find Christ throughout the Old Testament? Try it some time. Jesus Christ is the offspring of woman in Genesis 3:15 who would crush the serpent's head. He is alluded to in Abraham's sacrifice of his one and only son, Isaac, and receiving him back on the third day. He is the Passover lamb, sacrificed for us. Listen to this prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14, "...there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

Finally, while Jesus was breaking bread with the two in Emmaus, their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 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?" Here we see that burning-heart Bible study leads us to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose again from the dead.

Third, the risen Christ appears to his disciples (36-49). We will look at this section more carefully. The two from Emmaus had just come back to Jerusalem and were talking with the Eleven apostles and some others. The Lord had also appeared to Simon, which Luke mentions but does not expound. Why did the risen Jesus delay appearing to the apostles, rather than going to them right away? Consider this: the women received the angels' message: "He has risen!" and went and told the Eleven. Then the two on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus and ran back to tell the Eleven. It seems then that Jesus was preparing the Eleven apostles with the testimony of others first. Look at verse 36. "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" Jesus gave them peace for their fearful and restless hearts. Sometimes I feel a distance from my children, perhaps because they might see me as a legalistic trainer with high expectations. Jesus is not legalistic like I am. Jesus blesses his people with peace--peace with God and peace with others. Remember the angel's words at his birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." All people really want peace. Many people pray for world peace. I have heard that many Jewish people believe that the Messiah will bring world peace. I also heard of a recent peace conference with people excited about peace, although they weren't quite sure how to bring it about. How can we experience this peace? Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Where Jesus is Lord, in one's heart, in one's family, there is peace. Jesus gives grace and peace to his people: peace with God, and peace with people.

How did this gathering of disciples respond to the risen Christ's greeting of peace? Did they receive it? Verse 37 says they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. Once when Jesus walked on water they had a similar response, thinking they saw a ghost. When people can't explain some supernatural phenomenon, they often conclude it is a ghost or a spirit. But the risen Jesus was not a ghost. How did the risen Jesus try to convince them? 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." Risen Jesus showed them the nail scars in his hands and feet. Jesus gave them permission to touch him. Risen Jesus had a physical body, although it was glorified and immortal. Still, the disciples did not believe it because of joy and amazement. They were really slow to believe, even though they had seen so many miracles of Jesus, even the raising of 3 dead people by Jesus. So, to further demonstrate his bodily resurrection, risen Jesus 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. Risen Jesus did not need the fish to survive. But he ate it to prove the physical reality of his resurrection. This, together with the fact of the empty tomb, destroys any notion that Jesus only rose spiritually from the dead. Jesus rose bodily from the grave.

So we have seen two evidences of Jesus' resurrection thus far: the empty tomb and the physical evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection. There is another major evidence of Jesus' resurrection: the Scriptures. The Scriptures foretold

both his death and resurrection. Let's read verse 44 together. "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." Actually, Jesus had directly predicted his death and resurrection to his disciples at least three times before it happened. The first time was immediately after Peter confessed Jesus as "The Christ of God." Jesus said in Luke 9:22, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Again, before it happened, Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them in Luke 18:31-32, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." But his disciples were quick to forget his words.

Not only Jesus' own words, but the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms also foretold his death and resurrection. For example, Psalm 22 is perhaps the most amazing prophecy of Jesus' suffering and death. This psalm, written by David 1000 years before Christ, begins with words that Jesus echoed from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) Psalm 22:7-8 speaks of his mockery and verse 18 to the casting of lots for his clothes. Isaiah 53, written around 700 B.C., is perhaps the greatest prophecy of the meaning of Jesus' death. Isaiah 53:5-6 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Verse 45 says, "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Paul spoke of a veil over the hearts of unbelievers, that is only taken away in Christ, whenever anyone turns to the Lord (2Co 3:14). In a similar way, the disciples' minds were opened when they saw the risen Christ and believed the resurrection. For example, before his death Jesus had publicly said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days." After the resurrection, the disciples understood that Jesus was not talking about the temple building, but Jesus' own body as the temple which would be resurrected on the third day.

The risen Jesus had more to say to his disciples. 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." The risen Christ told them that they would be his witnesses. They were the ones who were to carry the gospel message to all nations. If not them, then who? What were they to preach in his name to all nations, that is, to all peoples and cultures on earth? Luke says, "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations." What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from sin and self to God for salvation. For example, for one who trusts in his own goodness, effort, determination or relative righteousness, he must admit that he cannot save himself and rather trust Jesus for his salvation. One sinning sexually must repent and resolve to live a pure life by God's grace and help. One young woman testified that she once believed her own plan would lead to happiness. But she repented and accepted Jesus' way and command ahead of her own idea. Then she experienced the freedom of forgiveness--freedom from her shame, guilt and condemnation. The forgiveness of sins comes to those who repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and who commit themselves to Jesus as the Lord of their lives. Acts 10:43 says, "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." So many people are trusting in their own goodness to get to heaven, but their own goodness will not be enough. It is pride that hinders them. 1 Peter 5:5 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." And Romans 10:13 reads, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" But, according to Luke 18:13-14, God will forgive one who prays, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 summarizes the gospel excellently: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried...he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This is the gospel of salvation for all who believe. This is the good news that we must hold firmly to and that we are to proclaim faithfully and with love to a perishing and hopeless world.

The disciples were to proclaim this gospel "beginning at Jerusalem," which is right where they were. If they did not spread the gospel, then who would proclaim the gospel? All who have hope and faith in Jesus Christ are privileged and obligated to proclaim the good news to those around them, right where they are. We are now among the students of Chicago, especially the students of Northwestern, UIC, Northeastern, Loyola, Oakton, Truman, and downtown campuses. If you do not share the gospel with them, who will? Let us each share the gospel with the people around us, beginning right where we are each day.

Risen Jesus had one more thing to say to his disciples. Look at verse 49. "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." Here, Jesus was telling them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They needed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live as witnesses of Jesus in a hostile and unbelieving world. We also each need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus, to love him and to live as his disciples. How can we receive the Holy Spirit? We must repent of our sins, believe and obey Jesus, and ask our Father in heaven for the gift of his Holy Spirit (Ac 2:38; 5:32; Lk 11:13).

Fourth, Jesus ascended into heaven. Luke records the departure of the risen Christ. If Jesus had not ascended into heaven, he would still be walking on earth today, for he could never die in his resurrection body. While blessing them, Jesus left them and was taken up into heaven. It sounds other-worldly that Jesus went up into the skies. But recall that the prophet Elijah was also taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. Jesus now sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. There are many promises in the Bible that Jesus will come again in power and glory to judge the living and the dead, and he will bring salvation to all who are waiting for him. This is our hope. This is our faith.

So what are the proofs of Jesus' resurrection? The empty tomb, the physical evidence of eyewitnesses, and the prophecies in the Scriptures. There is one more: the changed lives of those who believe. Through faith and hope in Christ, the women's sorrow was turned to joy and the men's fear was turned to courage, peace and love. Through faith in Christ, Paul was changed from a murderous hater of Christians to a sacrificial, father-like shepherd for the church of God. I grew up in a Christian home. But when my dad died of a heart attack, I confessed 8 months later, "I don't really believe in God. I don't know what I believe." A few days later, the joy of Jesus' birth came to me. A few months after that, the truth of the resurrection came into my mind and heart. I understood for the first time personally: "There is no hope in this world, because everything in the world dies some day. The only living hope is Jesus Christ, because he rose from the dead." Jesus became my hope. Since then I have shared the gospel with others, especially with Northwestern students as a Bible teacher and prayer servant. From time to time, I depend on my own strength or wisdom. At such times, I fall under some element of death, like laziness, lust, pride, indifference, anger, etc. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior! (Ro 7:25) I still believe this is the message of salvation that must be believed and preached: Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. For those who have faith and hope in Jesus, it is our privilege and obligation to share it with all the people around us, beginning right where we are. And this gospel will be preached in his name to all nations, until Jesus comes again. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.