

Luke 24:44-53 The Scriptural Meaning of the Resurrection

We have now arrived at the last section of the book of Luke. Luke tells us that Jesus had appeared to many of his disciples after his resurrection. They had seen him, heard him, and touched him. They had verified with their human senses that Jesus was physically alive after his death. They could testify that they had seen the risen Lord and that he was genuinely alive. They could witness to the facts of this historical event.

However, facts don't stand by themselves. Facts must be interpreted. We have to understand the meaning of the facts. So the next thing Jesus does is to provide scriptural explanation of the fact of his resurrection. The disciples needed to understand the Scripture in light of these facts, and they needed to understand their responsibilities in light of these facts. Jesus provides that understanding and that commission.

One notable part of this passage is the Great Commission as Luke records it. Disciples are to go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and proclaim forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to those who repent and believe. We are still obligated to obey that command today. The Great Commission still stands, and we should be actively working to spread the Gospel in obedience to this command.

This passage has two main parts. In the first, Jesus reminds the disciples of his previous words and helps them understand the Scriptures. And in the second, Jesus ascends to heaven.

- I. Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples. .44-49
 - A. .44 He reminds them of his former words.

Jesus is continually pointing to the authority of his words. He originally told the disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise again. Now he reminds them that he had told them that previously. It's almost as if Jesus is saying "I told you so. You should have expected these things to happen."

App: Just like the original disciples, we need to recognize the authority of God's words. We need to be reminded of what God has said. We are obligated to know and obey what God has revealed to us in the Bible.

The inspired, inerrant, infallible words of God, as recorded for us in the Christian Bible, is the highest authority for faith and practice. We must continually go back to the Word of God to make sure we are understanding it and applying it properly.

And it's the Word of God that informs our understanding of the facts. As I said earlier, facts demand interpretation. Facts do not stand by themselves. We have to discern the meaning of facts. Christians do that by applying a Christian worldview to the facts we observe. We understand the facts we observe by comparing the facts to the revelation of God. We know how to respond to the facts because we already know what God has told us is true.

So we understand our world by comparing it to what God has said. God's word is the ultimate authority, and it's our obligation to remember what God has said.

- B. .44b He reminds them that Scriptural prophecy must be fulfilled.
1. Note that he divides the OT into three categories—law of Moses, prophets, and psalms. This was the common Jewish way of categorizing Scripture. All three parts make up the entire Hebrew OT.
 2. .44end And note that the things said there concerned him. Moses, the prophets, and the other OT writers spoke about Jesus. Prophecy about the Messiah comes from the entire OT. Jesus was living out prophecy.
 3. And so the ministry of Jesus is a continuation of what God started in the OT. Christianity depends on the OT Scriptures; it is a fulfillment or a continuation of the faith of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, David, and the prophets—they all culminate with the ministry of Jesus.
 4. .44 “all things must be fulfilled” – We see again the divine necessity of these prophecies being fulfilled. Cf. vs. 46—“behooved” is “it is necessary” (δεῖ).

What happened to Jesus was not mere circumstance. He didn't just get caught up in events. His death was not a failure of God's plan. What made these events inevitable was that it was the unfolding of God's plan. Prophecy required that these things happened.

App: The fact that God’s plan unfolded precisely as required in the past shows us that God’s prophetic plan will continue to unfold precisely as God plans for it in the future. We can trust that God is moving history toward a particular goal/end point—the 2nd Coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. That outcome is necessary; it cannot be changed or prevented. Prophecy will necessarily be fulfilled in the future as it was in the past. Jesus himself tells us that God will fulfill his promises.

C. .45 He “opened their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”

1. Although Jesus had told them these things before, they didn’t understand. They were believers, but their understanding was still not clear.

John 20:9 For as yet they knew (οἶδα) not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

2. Now Jesus specifically gives them understanding. Literally, “he opened the mind (νοῦν) of them to understand the scriptures.” I.e., opened the mind for the purpose of understanding or with the result of understanding.
3. It suited God’s purposes previously not to allow them to understand. Now it suits God’s purposes for them to understand fully and clearly. They needed that understanding to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to withstand opposition from enemies.

App: Jesus gave his disciples understanding through his direct teaching. He explained how he fulfilled the OT prophecies. The disciples understood the Scriptures because Jesus opened their minds by explaining the Scriptures to them.

Today, we should be actively striving to understand the Scripture. How do we do that? We pray for wisdom and we trust that the HSp will illuminate our understanding.

But beyond that, we come to a proper understanding through a process each of us should be involved in. God opens our minds to understand as we read the Bible, as we listen while others explain it (i.e., right now), and as we diligently study Scripture for ourselves. We follow the rules of proper interpretation to come to a proper understanding of what God has said. That’s how God opens our minds.

It's highly unlikely that God will open your mind to the correct meaning of Scripture outside that process. If we don't read the Bible, don't listen as it is proclaimed, and don't pray for enlightenment, the Bible will remain a closed book to us. Or worse, you'll adopt a corrupt or false understanding the Scripture.

- D. .46-48 He commissioned them to preach "repentance and remission of sins" among the nations.

So here we have Luke's record of the Great Commission, the final command Jesus gave his disciples to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel message.

1. .46a The message was scriptural—"thus it is written" – the suffering and resurrection of Christ was in keeping with OT teaching. What happened to Jesus is exactly what OT prophecy foretold would happen. This was no mistake; it was God's plan all along. It was necessary.
2. .47 The message demands repentance. The proper response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is repentance of sin.
 - a) The word "repentance" (μετάνοια) means "a change of mind." Repentance is a change of mind about sin and self. Repentance results in turning from sin and turning to God in faith.

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The proper response to the Gospel—that Jesus died on the cross and rose again—is repentance and faith. That's what Jesus and the apostles preached—turn from sin, trust in Christ.

Many today fail to include the necessity of repentance when proclaiming the Gospel. They put great emphasis on belief, but little or no emphasis on repentance. But repentance is a necessary element of a proper response to the Gospel. And I think many people are false converts because they never repented. They like the idea of forgiveness, but have not desire or intent of turning from sin. But you cannot be saved without humble repentance.

Mark 1:15 Jesus said, *Repent and believe the gospel.*

Acts 11:18 ... *God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.*

Make sure to stress repentance when proclaiming the Gospel.

3. .47 The message (when believed) results in remission of sins.
 - a) Remission (ἄφεσις) is forgiveness, the letting go of sins.
 - b) One of the clearest biblical messages is that we are all sinners. Rom 3:23—“All have sinned...” Our biggest problem is our sin.
 - c) Religion often claims to provide forgiveness of sin. Generally, religion demands that a person participates in all kinds of religious rituals and good works to earn forgiveness.
 - d) The true Christian faith offers forgiveness freely; it’s all of grace. We can’t do anything to earn or merit forgiveness. Jesus paid the price for our forgiveness. The work of Christ on the cross makes it possible for God to forgive us freely, by grace (cf. Eph 2:8-9).

In fact, all you sin—past, present, and future—is forgiven through the person and work of Christ. If you repent of sin and believe in Jesus, you will be condemned for your sin; it’s all forgiven.

Cf. Ps 103:12 “As far as the east is from the west...” The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7). At the moment the sinner repents and believes the Gospel, God grants total forgiveness. That is the essential, fundamental truth of the Christian Gospel.

App: Have you accepted the Gospel message? Have you repented and believed? If you have not repented and believed the Gospel, then you have not experienced forgiveness of sins. That means you are still under the wrath and condemnation of God.

4. .47b The message should be preached “in his name.”
 - a) The word “in” here (ἐπὶ) most often means something like “on, upon, by.” The sense here is “on the basis of.”
 - b) To do something in/on the basis of one’s name means doing it in that person’s authority or through his work. Forgiveness/remission comes through the name/authority of Christ and it’s based on the work of Christ.
 - c) And that’s the one and only way to experience forgiveness of sins. Cf. Acts 4:12.
5. .47end The message should be preached among (εἰς) all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
 - a) The Christian task is to bring the Gospel to all the nations. Christian outreach begins at home, but it does not remain there. It extends to “all nations.”
 - b) The word “nation” is *ethne*, from which we get our word “ethnic/ethnicity.” A “nation” in this sense is a people-group, those who share a primary language, customs, and culture. Within one political unit—a state or country—there may be many ethnicities.

There are currently 193 nations in the world. How many distinct people-groups are there among those nations? Some estimate that there are about 16,500 distinct people groups in the world, and of them, about 6,700 are still not reached by the Gospel. So there is much work still to do in fulfilling this command.
 - c) Jesus intends for the Gospel to go to all the nations and people-groups of the world.

Rev 5:9 ... [*Jesus was*] *slain, and hast redeemed us to God by [his] blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*

App: It’s our responsibility to fulfill this command—to preach the Gospel “among all nations.” We should be actively involved in this great task.
6. .48 The message is verified by valid witnesses.

- a) The disciples were to go forth and bear witness of these things. They had heard Jesus' message, they saw him crucified and buried, and they saw him alive after the resurrection. They could verify by eye-witness testimony that all of these things had happened.
- b) The book of Acts is the record of the disciples following this command. They witnessed/testified regarding the Christian Gospel, and many thousands were saved. That same message has come down to us; we are saved by that same message.

App: I hope and trust that you can convey the message of the Gospel when you have an opportunity. Could you do so? Could you testify to "these things"? If not, you should equip yourself to become an effective witness. Learn how to proclaim the Gospel.

- E. .49 He promised to empower them to proclaim the message.
1. Witnesses do not go out by their own authority or power. Witness are sent and authorized by someone else.
 2. Jesus promises to send "the promise of my Father upon you." That seems to be linked with enduement with "power from on high." I.e., you will receive the empowerment of the Spirit.
 3. The word "endued" is literally "clothed." The HSp would impart power to the disciples so that they would become powerful witnesses of the Gospel.
 4. That's what happened on the Day of Pentecost, 10 days after Jesus' ascension (Acts 2). God himself would enable believers to be effective witnesses to the nations.
 5. .49b They should remain in Jerusalem until this happens. And the power of the HSp fell upon them not many days later.

App: Even today, we strive to do the work of God through the power of God. We want to be filled with the Spirit, which essentially means that we yield ourselves to God and to his Word. We do the work of God through the power of God, not in our own strength.

Vs. 49 marks the end of Jesus' words to his disciples. He had explained how what had happened to him was all part of God's plan. He had commissioned them to preach his name among all nations. And now it was time for him to depart.

II. Jesus ascends to heaven. .50-51

- A. .50 He walked with his disciples out to Bethany, a town on the Mt. of Olives about 2 miles from Jerusalem. This group might have been as much as 120 people (cf. Acts 1:15).

It's significant that this happened on the Mt. of Olives. The Garden of Gethsemane is there. So the place where Jesus agonized in prayer before the crucifixion is the same area from which he ascends to heaven. And it will be the same place to which he returns in glory.

Zechariah 14:4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west...

We expect Jesus to return to the Mt. of Olives, perhaps to the very same spot where he ascended.

- B. .51 He blessed them—"may the Lord bless you and keep you..."
- C. .51b He was parted from them and was carried into heaven. The Bible tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God right now, interceding for believers. He ascended into heaven bodily, and he will descend from heaven bodily when he returns.

Quote: What a majestic act! How perfectly it completed and rounded out the earthly career of Jesus! No other mode of departure would have left the impression that this one left.... [The disciples] are granted the privilege of seeing his final going to the Father, and they know that the Comforter will soon come down upon them, and their great work will then begin.¹

III. Jesus' disciples carry on. .52-53

- A. We can only imagine the confidence and security the disciples now had. They had seen with their own eyes that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had verified that it was Jesus himself; they heard him, talked with him, and touched him. And now they had seen him visibly rise into heaven. What an incredible set of experiences they had to motivate them to do the work Christ had given them to do. No wonder the disciples said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

¹ Lenski, 1210.

- B. They worshipped (προσκυνέω) Jesus. The word means “to bow down.” The disciples recognize that Jesus is worthy of worship. They recognize that Jesus is more than a great prophet; he is God in the flesh.

App: Christianity teaches that Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. The three Persons of the Trinity share the divine nature equally. Each Person is worthy of worship. It’s perfectly reasonable and proper to worship Jesus.

If any preacher or any ministry diminishes or denies the full deity of Jesus Christ, we should recognize it as heretical. Denying the deity of Christ is one of the great heresies many of the cults share; it’s a notorious mark of error.

- C. .52b They returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They are convinced that Jesus is the risen Lord. Everything he said is true.
- D. .53 They met regularly in the temple for worship.

That small group changed the world because they believed that Jesus rose from the dead. He told them to take the message everywhere they went, and that’s what they did. Today, a couple of billion people identify themselves as Christians because this small group believed the Gospel and took seriously the command to tell others. You can read about the spread of the Gospel in Luke’s second volume, the book of Acts.

One writer noted that Luke began his Gospel describing the joy, praise, and hope for the future were associated with Jesus’ birth. Now at Jesus’ ascension to heaven, we again find the emotions of joy, praise, and hope for the future.² And that should be our experience as well as we finish this Gospel account—joy, praise, and hope for the future.

The last words of Jesus were very important for his original disciples, and they are important to us as well. His last words tell us to believe, understand, and follow the Scriptures. It’s our obligation as disciples know and understand the Bible to the best of our ability, and of course to obey it.

² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 863.

Jesus' final words command his disciples to be witnesses among the nations. Our job is to bring the Gospel to those who are separated from God because of their sin. We are to proclaim a message of repentance of sin and faith in Christ. We should trust God to enable us through his Spirit to do this great work. All of us should be involved in some way with the great task of spreading the Gospel to every people-group.

The disciples were filled with great joy as they worshipped together. Likewise, if we are disciples of Christ, we can rejoice as we worship our risen Lord together.

This completes our study of the book of Luke. I trust that we've gained a better understanding of our Lord and his Gospel. I trust the HSp will use this study to open our minds to the truth, help us to understand it, and to communicate it to others.