

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.'"

In the last passage we heard the angels' message of the resurrection of Christ: "He is not here; he has risen!" When the sorrowful women at the tomb heard this message and remembered Jesus' words, they believed Christ has risen. Their sorrow disappeared and new joy and new strength filled their souls. They became witnesses of the Risen Christ. When two men of despair met the Risen Christ and studied the Bible with him, they believed that Christ has risen. Their despair and fear vanished and they became courageous witnesses of the Risen Christ. When we believe the resurrection of Christ through Bible study, it burns up all despair, fear and sorrow and fills us with living hope and spiritual strength to carry out our holy mission. May God help each of us to have resurrection faith through Jesus-centered Bible study.

In today's passage the Risen Christ appears to his disciples. He convinces them that he is alive. Then he appoints them as his witnesses to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Finally the Risen Christ ascends into heaven. And that is the end of Luke's gospel. At the end, we remember the beginning, when the angel said that the birth of Jesus was good news of great joy for all the people (2:10b). We remember the key verse, which says that Jesus is a light for the Gentiles (2:32). Through this last lesson we will understand how this is fulfilled. We also find clear direction to be his witnesses to all nations. May God help us to do so.

First, Christ has risen, so shall we (36-43).

Look at verse 36. "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" Luke does not say that Jesus walked up to them, but that he stood among them. His appearance was sudden and supernatural. He was now the Risen Christ in his resurrection body. His first words were, "Peace be with you." This was a common greeting. But it had deep meaning coming from the Risen Christ. He came to give them true peace which comes from the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

How did they respond? They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. They didn't recognize him at first. His appearance must have been different, for he was now the glorious Risen Christ. We caught a glimpse of his glorious spiritual body on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke 9:29 says, "As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning." The glorious Risen Christ is described in Revelation 1:13-16. "...and among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Jesus was now the Risen Christ. But he was still the good shepherd who knew his disciples very well. He knew what they were thinking and said, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" The disciples could not accept the Risen Christ as their beloved Lord Jesus right away. When they saw him, doubts rose in their minds. They must have doubted that it was really him. They must have doubted that he was real. They must have doubted that he still loved them after their failures and denials. Let's see how the Risen Christ helped his doubting disciples.

Look at verse 39a. "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!" His hands and feet revealed his unique identity as their beloved Jesus. It was because there were marks on his hands and feet, the marks of nails that had pierced his flesh when he was crucified. His nail-pierced hands and feet testified to the disciples that it was really Jesus. They testified that Jesus loved them so much that he sacrificed his life on the cross to save them from their sins. The words of Isaiah explain this best. Isaiah 53:5 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." When they saw his nail-pierced hands and feet their doubts subsided and their hearts were moved by the love of Jesus. They were not afraid any more.

Look at verse 39b. “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” The Risen Christ invited them to touch him. It was to show them that he was not a ghost. He was not just a spirit; he was resurrected in the body. He had flesh and bones. God had raised Jesus’ own body from the dead and made him alive again.

Christ’s resurrection is the beginning of the resurrection of all men (1Co 15:20). 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Death is not the end of everything. After death, there is resurrection. Jesus said in John 5:28,29, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” The resurrection of all men will take place at God’s appointed time. But this does not mean that we only experience resurrection power in the future. Jesus wants us to experience his resurrection power while living in this world. Once, Jesus met two sorrowful sisters, Mary and Martha, who were grieving over their dead brother Lazarus. Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25,26a). After that, Jesus raised Lazarus to life. We can experience the resurrection power of Christ in our own bodies. Romans 8:11 says, “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” Once, Dr. Samuel Lee was very sick with pneumonia and seemed unlikely to get up for a long time. It was 1996 and the first Inter-African summer conference was approaching. Then one afternoon, he suddenly got up and said, “I must go to Africa.” With resurrection power, he went to Africa, a difficult place to travel in, and served the summer conference wholeheartedly. He rearranged many parts of the program, including changing the title, and even participated in beating drums and dancing with African shepherds. Last year, Mother Barry went on an extended mission journey and injured her leg. Many worried about her. But she finished a long mission journey around the world by resurrection faith. She even rode an elephant in Indonesia. Our Christian lives should be marked by Christ’s resurrection power while we are living in the body. Resurrection power gives us victory over our sinful natures and our weaknesses. Resurrection power enables us to carry our holy mission to the end. We can experience resurrection power when we have absolute faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection and participate in his sufferings positively (Ro 6:5; Php 3:10).

Though the Risen Christ appeared to them and showed them his hands and feet, the disciples could not believe it because of joy and amazement. They must have felt that it was too good to be true. So the Risen Christ asked them for something to eat. Then they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence (41-43). Jesus always seems to communicate well with his disciples through eating fellowship. It is what they understood best. When he ate the broiled fish they settled down and began to really listen to him. Now they realized that he was risen in the body with flesh and bones.

Christ’s bodily resurrection teaches us that the gospel is based on a historical event that happened in time and space. The Risen Christ was not just a spiritual apparition. He had a body with flesh and bones. The disciples could see his body and touch him. Christianity is not like other religions that are based on man-made stories. Christianity is based on historical fact. Christianity is based on truth that can be verified and confirmed by witnesses. Christ has risen! And so shall we.

Second, preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations (44-49).

Look at verse 44. “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.’” Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection fulfilled the Scriptures. These Scriptures were given by God over hundreds of years and through various messengers. But they all pointed to the coming of the Christ and to his suffering, death and resurrection. For example, Jesus fulfilled God’s promises to Abraham by becoming a blessing to all peoples of all nations (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). Jesus fulfilled God’s promises to David as the spiritual king who would reign forever with peace and love (2Sa 7:13). Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah as the suffering servant who would justify many through his life sacrifice (Isa 53). Jesus fulfilled the spiritual meaning of Psalm 118:22 as the stone the builders rejected who became the capstone. In other words, Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection were the fulfillment of God’s will for world salvation. Through Jesus we can see God who rules human history to accomplish his own good purpose of saving men and restoring paradise. Through Jesus’ resurrection, we see that God is living and that God wins final victory.

Look at verse 45. "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." At last, the disciples were ready to understand the Scriptures. Jesus had taught them the same thing repeatedly and endured their slowness to understand. Now they were fully prepared. So he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. They could see the whole Old Testament converge on the person and work of the Christ. Look at verses 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.' Through his suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus became the sacrifice of atonement for sinners. Whoever hears the message, repents of his sins and believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Sin is a universal problem. Jesus is the universal solution. God loves all men and wants all men to be saved.

According to Jesus' words, the gospel ministry would begin in Jerusalem. Then it would spread to all nations. To Jesus, this was certain, just as certain as his resurrection from the dead. At that time, the disciples looked weak. The task of world mission looked huge. But soon after, beginning in Jerusalem, the gospel took root and began to spread. The gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, then to the Roman Empire, to Germany, to England, and to America.

The gospel has continued to spread to all nations. In the central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, there was a beautiful summer Bible conference in which the mighty work of the Holy Spirit was evident to all. God is answering our prayer for the evangelization of Muslim countries. God Almighty, who tore down the Iron Curtain of communism to make Russia a missionary-sending country, is opening the hearts of Muslim people to accept Jesus as their Christ and Savior. The work of God is growing in China, Africa, and South America.

Now we can see that America is being restored as a missionary-sending country. Many Americans have gone into Afghanistan in one way or another. Many are waiting to go into Iraq as soon as possible. In Chicago UBF we are sending short-term missionaries to Mongolia, Ukraine, Ecuador, and Russia this summer. We pray for Shepherd John Peace to be a permanent, self-supporting missionary to Ukraine in this year. Still, however, the task is huge. For example, Japan has a population of 127 million people. Only 4% are Christian. It is a largely secular nation and young people suffer from meaninglessness. A recent trend among Japanese college students and teenagers is to make internet suicide pacts. Our missionaries in Japan need help. We pray for American missionaries to go and join them, beginning with Joe Grady.

Look at verse 48. "You are witnesses of these things." Jesus gave the disciples the task of being witnesses of his death and resurrection in spreading the gospel to all nations. The apostles did this by sharing their eyewitness accounts through their preaching and through the written gospels. The apostles also did this by traveling to other nations to preach the gospel, overcoming hardships and persecution. Finally, the apostles sealed their testimony by giving their lives as martyrs. Those who receive the resurrection message are all called to be his witnesses. Let's read verse 48 together. "You are witnesses of these things." We are also called to be Jesus' witnesses. To witness is to explain the gospel message from the Bible. It is also to share our own personal testimony of what Jesus has done for us. Ultimately, to witness we must give our lives to proclaim the truth of the gospel. This may sound a little bit scary. But Jesus tells us how to do so. 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." The Father's promise is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The Holy Spirit enables us to testify to Jesus boldly and joyfully to any kind of person. The Holy Spirit is the power source to preach the gospel to all nations.

Third, Jesus' ascension (50-53).

After hearing Jesus' resurrection message, and believing God who rules men and history, and receiving his command to be witnesses to all nations, the disciples were changed. They had new strength. They had new vision. They could understand what God was doing and what they should be doing. Then the Risen Christ led them out to the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. The Risen Christ is exalted at the right hand of God in heaven. There he remains until all his enemies are put under his feet. Someday he will come again in glory and power as King of kings and Lord of lords and Judge of the living and the dead. He will come to destroy all unrighteousness and to establish the kingdom of God so that God may be all in all. He will restore paradise and bring his precious children to be with him in heaven forever. Look at verse 52. "Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." The apostles saw God in Jesus. They were full of joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

In this passage we learn that Christ has risen, and so shall we. Through his resurrection, Christ has reconciled the whole world to God by bringing forgiveness of sins and eternal life to whoever believes in him. We, who have received this gospel, are called to be his witnesses. May God use us through the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning on Chicago area campuses.