

Luke 24:36-53 With His disciples and the Ascension

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Today, we'll complete our systematic study of this Gospel by considering the last two sections of Luke 24, vv.36-49 & vv.50-53.

Section 1, vv.36-49: With His disciples

I'll read these verses from the English Standard Version:

“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Words

I want to use two words in this part of my talk, which, because of their exaggerated use in present day speech, I normally try to avoid. They are excited and absolutely. Especially the latter because it's so often used when it's obvious to others that whatsoever is being spoken about isn't absolute. You absolutely know what I mean! But you'll understand why I use them as we progress through this story about the risen Lord's meeting with His disciples late on the first Resurrection day. In fact the first word, excited, was used by last week's speaker about Cleopas and his companion being in (quote) “a very excited frame of mind” when they hurried back to Jerusalem after their encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Their hearts had burned within them while He'd talked to them and explained the significance of His death and resurrection from the Scriptures. They'd realised that their hopes of Him being the Christ had not been dashed after all. Theirs was that proper excitement of godly Jews who looked for Messiah to redeem Israel. Their Messianic hopes had been revived!

Back in Jerusalem

We pick up Luke's narrative at v.36. They'd arrived back at Jerusalem and had started comparing notes concerning His resurrection appearances with the apostles and the other disciples who were with them. As they talked together and discussed the implications of Christ's resurrection, the risen Lord appeared among them. He didn't burst in through the door, He miraculously came and stood in their midst. He greeted them, "Peace to you!" No doubt His timing was perfect - just before they all got carried away with the idea that He would now set about delivering Israel from Roman occupation and establishing His kingdom. After all, Roman soldiers had executed Him, but He had conquered death. So His disciples could justifiably be confident that He must now be unstoppable! But the Lord intervened to redirect their aspirations and appoint them to be His witnesses to all the world.

Jesus appears

However, His sudden appearance among them caused much consternation and they thought they were seeing a ghost, that is, a disembodied spirit. He calmed them with the question, "Why do you reason and doubt in your hearts what you see, when your spiritual intuition ought to discern at once that it's Me?" But they were startled, and fear gripped them. That's why He continued with words of reassurance, "It is I myself. Touch me and see." They must have immediately recognised His voice.

Important matters of the Christian Faith

Two very important issues concerning Christ's resurrection arise out of that incident that evening.

1. Resurrection is an essential element of the Gospel.
2. His resurrection guarantees ours.

Resurrection is an essential element of the Gospel

By manifesting himself to the whole group, the witness of those who'd previously encountered Him that day, was verified. They all reported the same story - they'd seen Him to be physically alive again. We know how important this is from the reaction of absent Thomas:

"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"" (John 20:24-25).

How gracious of the Lord to grant Thomas that request:

"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (vv.25-29).

If you are a believer in the physical death and physical resurrection of Christ, you can count yourself among the blessed. According to the great resurrection chapter, 1Corinthians 15, the Gospel stands or falls on reality of this fact:

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in

accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ...And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ...[It] is futile and you are still in your sins" (vv.1-5, 14 & 17).

Yes, we are absolutely certain that the Gospel is true!

Second issue: His resurrection guarantees ours

To begin with they supposed Him to be the spirit of a dead Person, who didn't possess a real body. But when the disciples actually touched Christ's resurrected body, they realised that they were wrong. They did, in fact, encounter a real living Person who was out from among the dead: "Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (v.39). He showed them his body, particularly his hands and his feet, which bore the marks of His passion. They saw that he had the shape, the features, and the exact resemblance, of their Master. Yes, in resurrection He has a real physical body, albeit in a new condition - a body of flesh and bones. Not a body of flesh and blood, but physically identifiable with His former body. He demonstrated this by eating the grilled fish they gave Him. The apostle Peter later preached that they'd been chosen by God to witness to Christ's resurrection, because they ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:41).

His natural body was sown in death. But He was raised out from the state of death by the glory of the Father (Romans 6:4) and given a spiritual body (1Cor.15:44). 1Cor.15:44 contrasts the natural and the spiritual conditions of a person's resurrected body. It's part of the explanation given by the apostle Paul in which he answers the questions, "How can the dead rise? And with what kind of body do they come?" (v.35). Our faith is that:

"Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [because] flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (vv.49-50).

The Gospel gives us this absolute guarantee for it's an established fact that Christ has been raised from the dead and that He's the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, that is, who have died (see v.20). At the Rapture:

"[He] will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Philippians 3:21).

"We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Yes, we're absolutely certain of our future resurrection to be with, and like, Christ!

The things concerning himself

In Luke 24:44, the risen Lord reminded the apostles of what He'd taught them before His death. Several times He'd explained what would happen to Him at Jerusalem. He first mentioned this before then also after the Transfiguration, which was followed by a display of kingdom power:

"And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marvelling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying" (9:43-45).¹

Perhaps they'd been distracted by the manifestation of the glory and power of Christ's coming kingdom? So in 24:45, He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said that

everything written about Him must be fulfilled. He taught them what He'd taught the two Emmaus disciples earlier in the day – it was necessary that the Christ should suffer death before entering into his glory. He then went through the Old Testament Scriptures to reveal to them the things concerning himself (vv.44-46, cp. vv.26-27).

The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, v.44

The Lord doubtless alluded to this threefold division the Old testament by the Jews.

1. The Law, that is, the Torah, the five books of Moses (sometimes called the Pentateuch).
2. The Prophets, consisting of Joshua, Judges, 1st & 2nd Samuel, 1st & 2nd Kings and all the prophets (except Daniel).
3. The Holy Writings, all of the other books of the Old testament, including the Psalms.

There must be many prophecies which were fulfilled by Jesus, but I'll give only a few from each of these parts of the Old Testament.

1. Exodus 12 from the Law. According to 1 Corinthians 5:7 and John 1:29, Christ is the Passover lamb.
2. From the Prophets. The prophet Isaiah contains four 'Servant poems' about Jesus. The final one speaks of the sufferings of Christ upon the Cross and His subsequent exaltation and glory (52:13-53:12).
3. From the Psalms. Psalm 22:1-21 provide graphic details of Messiah' death on the Cross followed by a prophecy in vv.22-31 of His present and future glory. And Ps.16:11-18 is the prophecy of His resurrection quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25-28.

The Commission

In v.46, the Lord introduced another reason why He'd suffered death and rose again. It was to provide salvation and to enable the Gospel to be preached, "...that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations." He told them that they were to take this message to the world because they were witnesses to all things that had happened to Him. But first they must wait for the promised Holy Spirit from heaven to endue them with the necessary power and ability. His commission is also recorded by the other three Gospel writers, there being a different emphasis in each case:

"Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"" (Matthew 28:18-20).

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"" (Mark 16:15-16).

"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld"" (John 20:21-23).

As we have studied Luke's Gospel, many of our speakers have commented that its main theme is the Gospel of God's grace. Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Gentile, and so much emphasis is given that Christ, the Saviour of sinners, can reach the lost. See, for example, the Gospel parables

found in chs.14-16. The themes of repentance and forgiveness occur time and time again throughout this Gospel. It's our privilege to continue spreading this message to the peoples of the world and so continue to fulfil this commission the Lord gave to those first disciples.

Section 2. The Ascension, vv.50-53

“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

Luke's Gospel omits any reference to the Lord's ministry to His disciples in the forty days which took place between vv.49 & 50. However, he does comment upon it in Acts 1:1-11 [and so for context I'll now read this passage:](#)

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The Lord's forty-day ministry between His resurrection and His ascension

The Lord's remaining time on earth was spent in preparing His disciples for life in this world after His ascension into heaven. Each time He appeared to them, He reinforced the fact that He was indeed alive again from the dead. Most importantly, He taught them how the kingdom of God would function during the time-period from His Ascension until the Rapture. Whilst He would be absent in Person from the earth, He would be spiritually present in, and among, His disciples through the Holy Spirit. Equipped with His teaching and by Holy Spirit's power, they would be enabled to fulfil the great commission to take the Gospel out into the whole world. They had to start where they were in Jerusalem; then reach out into Judea and Samaria, that is, the territory that Israel had formerly occupied as a nation; and finally, their witness was to reach the farthest extents of the globe.

The Ascension

V.50-53 identified Bethany as the place where the Ascension took place. Bethany is on the Mount of Olives, the place where Zechariah 14:4 states that Messiah will appear to set up His kingdom. However, Luke was concerned with the here and now and focussed on the fact that the Lord blessed His disciples with uplifted hands as He ascended. This appeals to me as a picture of what the Lord Jesus is presently doing in heaven. He's blessing His people on earth with His high priestly grace to sustain us in our daily lives.

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

One of the main themes of Hebrews is that Christian believers are able, through their High Priest in heaven, to worship God the Father in spirit and in truth.² I see this pictured in vv.52-53, which states this was the disciples’ whole occupation while they waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They were blessing God, the highest order of spiritual worship.³ Perhaps, like Simeon, they presented to God the worthiness of the Christ as:

“[His salvation] that [He] had prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [His] people Israel” (2:30-32).

However, when the Church was formed at Pentecost, they stopped frequenting the courts of the temple and assembled together to worship the Lord Jesus and God the Father in the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers meetings (Act 2:42 with 20:7).

Jesus Christ, the Man in heaven

The Ascension is a foundational truth of the Christian Faith. As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus came to earth and became a Man, who also is God incarnate. A perfect Man, who lived out God’s will in His life upon earth. After His death and resurrection, He ascended into heaven, where He lives in the power of an endless life. V.51 states that He was carried up into heaven, offering or presenting himself to God as a Man who is worthy to be there. Hence Acts 1:2 & 11, state that He was taken up, that is, received up - accepted by heaven. Mark 16:19 adds that He sat down at the right hand of God - it’s right that He’s there and He has every right to be there! Christianity takes its character from Christ where He is at God’s right hand. He’s there as a Saviour for people to call upon to receive salvation. He’s there as our Lord, for us to obey. We receive all our spiritual blessings from Him there. It’s because He’s there and it’s through Him there in the heavenly sanctuary that we can worship God the Father. And because He’s there we can boldly access the throne of grace in order to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our times of need.

What wonderful themes on which to finish our studies of Luke’s Gospel! The path of endless life for Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, took Him through death on the Cross, resurrection from the grave and ascension to glorification at God’s right hand in heaven, where He’s engaged in His high priestly office (cp. Ps.16:11 with Hebrews 8:1). He left His people on earth worshipping God Him but soon to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel of God’s grace to the whole world.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, talk number T1225, on Luke’s Gospel 24:36-53.

Footnote

1. Also 9:20-22 & 18:31-34.
2. For example, Hebrews 8:1-6, 9:11-15 & 10:19-21.
3. For example, Ephesians 1:3-14 & 1 Peter 1:3-5.

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