
Witness to the Risen King

A sermon on Luke 24:45-53 by Coty Pinckney, Desiring God Community Church, Charlotte, NC, 2/18/2007

Jesus is risen from the dead!

That's the main point of this final chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The man who was humiliated, whipped, mocked, crucified, and buried is *alive!*

Last week we looked at five pieces of evidence Luke presents to substantiate this claim – five reasons why we, his readers, must believe this central truth:

- All of Scripture points to Christ
- Jesus Himself prophesied that these events would happen
- The tomb is empty
- The evidence of his risen body, with flesh and blood, bones and skin
- The evidence of the disciples themselves – their transformation from skeptics to become willing to die for the truth that Jesus is the risen King.

Let me elaborate on that first point. There are individual passages that speak directly of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. But we claim much more than this: All Scriptures speak concerning Him. For as Jesus says to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus

25 "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Jesus says something similar in today's text:

44 "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." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

Thus, Jesus says that the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Him. *All* the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Jesus. The entire plotline, the entire storyline of the Bible refers to Jesus. This we emphasized last week.

But in 46-47 Jesus explains yet more what He means:

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-47)

The Old Testament speaks of the necessity Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection – *and* the Old Testament speaks of calling *all nations* to repentance and forgiveness. Once again, the point is not only that there are specific verses that speak of God's passion for the nations. Rather, the claim is that the entire storyline of the Bible concerns God's redemption of those from every nation.

Indeed, we could outline the entire Bible in four sections:

- Creation: Genesis 1 and 2;
- Man's rebellion and the consequences for all nations: Genesis 3-11
- God's plan of redemption, bringing the nations to Himself: Genesis 12- Revelation 20;
- God's plan fulfilled: Revelation 21-22

God works in history to glorify His Name through bringing all nations to Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. Thus, the entire

Bible focuses on Jesus, and the entire Bible focuses on God's mission of calling the nations to Himself for the glory of His name. That's the story of the Bible.

So God is bringing those from every nation to Himself. How is He accomplishing that?

This is an amazing fact: Not only does God redeem wicked, ungodly rebels, but He uses those same redeemed rebels to accomplish His great task! He uses *us* to fill the earth with knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). He uses *us* to declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples (Psalm 96:3).

The books of Luke and Acts show how God's promise of the Messiah/King and His heart for the nations come together in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, followed by the filling of His disciples with the Holy Spirit as they spread the Gospel to all nations.

In today's text – in these final verses in the book of Luke – Jesus gives this task to His followers: He sends *them* to the nations.

Today, we will first look at the task itself, making sure we understand it. Then we will consider three aspects of the task that Luke brings out in this passage.

The Task

Jesus describes the task with these words in verse 47: "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations." Let's consider the task word by word:

Repentance

Repentance includes turning away from evil, from wickedness, from idolatry. As Ezekiel 18:30 says, "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin." Similarly, John the Baptist comes "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). So Jesus is saying in part, "John, my forerunner, proclaimed a message of repentance, of turning from evil. You must proclaim a similar message."

But repentance means more than turning away from evil. Repentance also means turning *to God*. We say not only, "Committing murder is bad. Committing adultery is bad. Worshiping an idol is bad." But we say also, "God is great! He is my hope, my rock, my life, my treasure, my joy!" Thus repentance means turning *away from evil*, and *hating it*. And repentance means turning *to God and loving Him, rejoicing in Him*.

This is God's intention for the nations, as Psalm 67 says so clearly:

**The peoples must praise you. All the peoples must praise you.
The nations must be glad and sing for joy! (Psalm 67:3-4a, own translation)**

That is true repentance. Have you truly repented?

Forgiveness of sins

God is the moral authority in the universe. He ensures that every sin is paid for, that no one can say, "John hurt me and no price was ever paid for that sin!"

So God never grants forgiveness without a price. God's forgiveness is always based on atonement, on the covering of sin. The Old Testament sacrificial system pictures this beautifully. In the book of Leviticus, after the description of an animal sacrifice, again and again and again we read something like, "the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven" (Leviticus 4:26).

Thus, as we saw a few weeks ago, when Jesus says on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," He is saying, "Father, save grant them saving faith! May they trust in the very blood they shed!" Jesus paid the penalty. Jesus is the only true atonement. Forgiveness is only in Him.

So do you see what is behind this word "forgiveness"? God does not – He cannot - simply say, "I forgive you." Forgiveness comes only by the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, for those who trust in Him.

Do you trust Him? Do you trust in anything else?

Should be proclaimed

Jesus says that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be "proclaimed", or "preached", or "publicly announced", or "heralded." All need to know these truths! They cannot remain limited, bottled up in one particular group of people. The disciples are to spread this message to rich and poor, to young and old, to educated and uneducated, to rulers and slaves. All must hear the call, "Repent! Turn! Forgiveness is available freely in Christ!"

We today have same task today. So our church mission statement says, "We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things."

Do you proclaim this message? Do you spread such a passion?

To all nations

The word "nation" in Greek is *ethnos*, from which we get words like "ethnic" and "ethnicity." The phrase "all the nations" is common in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. While the phrase occasionally means "non-Jewish individuals," most commonly it refers to "non-Jewish ethnic groups." Certainly that is its meaning in this passage. Jesus is not saying, "This message should be proclaimed to every individual," but "to every ethnicity, to every people group."

"All the nations" here has the same meaning as the wonderful phrase that appears five times in the book of Revelation: "Every tribe and language and people and nation." Consider that phrase. How do we define one such group? What are the distinguishing characteristics?

The groups are separated from each other by language, culture, and heritage. Within each group, there is no linguistic or cultural barrier that hinders the spread of the Gospel. A thriving, evangelistic church in that group could reach all individuals like themselves with the Gospel. But if people only speak the Gospel to those like themselves, the spread of the Gospel will stop long before the entire world is reached. For those who belong to other groups, other tribes and languages and peoples, are different. Their language differs, their customs differ. The only way to spread to Gospel to such people is by someone *crossing a cultural or linguistic barrier with the Gospel*.

That's what a missionary is: Someone who crosses a cultural barrier to spread the message of repentance and forgiveness of sin in Christ. Only through missionaries can the promise to Abraham be fulfilled: "All the families of the earth shall be blessed in you" (Genesis 12:3).

So this is the task Jesus gives to His disciples – and through them to the church across all generations: To proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to every people group in the world! To establish a thriving, evangelistic church in every tribe and tongue and people and nation. In this way, through missionaries, God will fulfill His promise to Abraham, He will fulfill Psalm 67, He will fulfill His plan of redemption.

So Jesus says,

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

That's why we are still here! The task is not yet complete! But we – this generation – can complete this task at long last. In our lifetimes, we can accomplish what all history has been pointing

towards since man's fall: The crossing of every cultural barrier with the Gospel, no matter how strong; the planting of a thriving church in every people group, no matter how many centuries in those people have walked in darkness, no matter how much persecution faces those who believe, no matter how many threats missionaries face, no matter how many centuries they have been immersed in false religion.

That's the task. That's *our* task. What are you doing to complete the task?

Jesus says, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations." The next few verses elaborate on three aspects of the nature of the task. First:

What a Privilege!

In verse 48, Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things." Jesus is not making a statement of fact here: "You saw me live; you saw me die; you have seen me risen. You are eyewitnesses." While true, that is not His point. He has just said, literally, "it is necessary that repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed to all the nations." The words "be proclaimed" are in passive voice. The actor is not stated. Repentance is to be proclaimed by whom? The question is ringing in the air. Then Jesus says, "You are my witnesses." In Greek, the word "you" is emphatic. The point is unmistakable: "You are the ones who must proclaim! I entrust you with this Scriptural truth, with this message from all Scripture. So you must proclaim it!"

Indeed, in Greek there is no verb in verse 48. It literally reads, "You witnesses of these things." In English, we must supply the verb. Most translators have opted to insert "are." But given what we have just seen, a better choice would be "must be." "It is necessary that repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed to all nations. Who's going to do that? You! You must be my witnesses!"

Jesus says they are witnesses "of these things? Of what things?"

Surely what they saw with their eyes is not irrelevant. As we saw last week, the fact of Christ's resurrection is absolutely key. We proclaim not philosophy, not something some smart man once proposed. Rather, we proclaim Jesus crucified for sins and risen from the dead! As we saw last week, the evidence of the disciples' eyewitness accounts is a vitally important part of our proclamation.

But Jesus is referring to more than what they have seen. Once again, this sentence: "You must be witnesses of these things" is linked to His previous statements. What has He just said?

Verse 45: "He opened their minds to understand *the Scriptures*." Verse 46 "Thus *it is written* . . . repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all nations."

Thus, "these things" refers to *the storyline of Scripture, the plot of the plan of redemption*. Even the eyewitnesses give their evidence to corroborate the truth of Scripture.

Do you see the implications for us? If Jesus here were only telling the eyewitnesses to fulfill the task, there would be no command for us. But we all have access to the truths of Scripture. We can all proclaim the storyline of the Bible. We can all herald that all men of every nation should repent unto the forgiveness of their sins in Christ. We are witnesses of the truths of Scripture. We too *must be witnesses*.

This is the amazing fact we pointed out in our opening comments. God need not have chosen to accomplish His plan of redemption through sinful, fallible men and women like us. But for His glory, that is the choice He has made. If you know Jesus as Savior *you* are His witness, you *must be* His witness. He chooses to fulfill His plan of redemption through *you!* How are you doing in being a witness of Jesus?

This is a great privilege – and a great responsibility. You should feel overwhelmed with the responsibility. I think disciples did. So

Jesus goes on to tell them: "Don't try to fulfill this on your own – you won't succeed! But a promise is coming!"

What Power!

Jesus says in verse 49:

"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."

That is, Jesus says: "Wait. You must be my witnesses. But hold off a bit. You need to see my Father's promise fulfilled. You need His power."

Jesus refers here to the promise of the New Covenant, as given in Ezekiel 36:26-27

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

We receive a new spirit! Indeed, we receive God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit! *This* is God's promise.

Jesus Himself had referred to the gift of the Spirit earlier in Luke:

When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (Luke 12:11-12)

The disciples obey. They wait until the feast of Pentecost. Then the Spirit comes upon them with power, and 3000 people are saved in one day.

Consider this: Do you realize that even the disciples, even those who traveled with Jesus, needed the Holy Spirit in order to be effective witnesses? Why?

Because of the nature of true conversion. Genuine repentance only comes from an Ezekiel 36 miracle, when God performs a heart transplant, removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. Genuine repentance only comes with the promised Holy Spirit placed within us. That must be a work of God. So Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44)

We are witnesses. God chooses to use us as His witnesses. Nevertheless, it is God who changes hearts. Not our words. Not our methods. Not our wonderful appeals.

As a witness – do you depend on the Holy Spirit? Do you pray fervently for those to whom you witness? Do you trust God to do His work while you are simply faithful?

What power!

What joy!

Apparently there is a time gap between verses 49 and 50. In 50 and 51, Jesus leads the disciples to Bethany, on the far side of the Mount of Olives, and blesses them. Even as He blesses, He goes up into heaven. Luke concludes:

52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Last week, we saw how even with the testimony of Scripture, even having heard Jesus' words on earth prophesying his death and resurrection, even with the empty tomb, the disciples were sad and depressed after the crucifixion. But when the risen Christ appears to them, they are overjoyed. Now Jesus leaves them. Will they return to their sad state?

No! They are joyous! He is alive! He gives them a task. They are His witnesses. He promises them power from God. He has told them He is coming back. So they are joyous in Christ. This joy overflows continually into praise, as they bless God. And so they are ready to invite the nations into enjoyment of God. Again, they

exemplify the promise to the nations: "The nations must be glad and sing for joy!" (Psalm 67:4)

My friends, as witnesses, we bear witness to the *joy* of being in Christ. We are not simply witnesses to a set of propositions – as important as those propositions are. But we are witnesses to the truth of Psalm 16:11: "In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

As John Piper writes:

Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations be glad!", who cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord, I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praises to thy name, O Most High" (Psalm 104:34; 9:2).

Jesus is risen from the dead! What joy!

Conclusion

So, my friends: Do you have this joy?

I'm not asking if you once prayed a prayer or walked an aisle; I'm not asking have you been baptized, or are you a member of a church.

- I'm asking: Do you know the Jesus presented in this Gospel of Luke?
- I'm asking: Do you know Jesus as the holy God who became perfect man?
- Do you know Him as the one who died on the cross to fulfill the plan of God, to pay the penalty for the atonement, the covering of all the sins of those who trust in Him?
- Do you know Jesus as the one who rose from the dead with a real physical body, who then ascended into heaven?
- Do you know Jesus as the one who will come again, physically, suddenly, bodily, with power and great glory?
- Do you humble yourself before this Jesus, saying, "You are holy. I am not. You hate sin. I am a sinner. I am unworthy of your love. Yet I turn from all these false joys, all this world has to offer. I look for my joy in you. Will you in your mercy save even me?"

If you do have that joy: You are a witness. How effective are you? How dedicated are you?

- Do you see the fulfillment of God's mission among the nations as the greatest accomplishment of all time?
- Do you see your life on earth as centered around the fulfillment of that task?
- Do you think of your life as focused on spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples?

God is at work. He is bringing all the nations to Himself, for His glory and their joy. He gives **you** the privilege, the power, and the joy of playing a significant role in the fulfillment of that plan. He gives *this generation* the unparalleled opportunity to complete His plan of redemption instituted in the Garden of Eden, as we plant churches in every remaining unreached people group.

This is the message of Luke. This is the message of the Bible. This is the task of the worldwide church. This is the task of Desiring God Community Churchy.

Christian, this is your task. Your privilege. Your joy.

Will you fulfill it?

Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8)

God says today: Who will be my witness?

What's your answer?

This sermon was preached on 2/18/2007 at Desiring God Community Church in Charlotte, NC. Darrell Bock's *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Baker, 1994) was helpful. For an extensive examination of the meaning of "all the nations," see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Baker, 1993), chapter 5. The Piper quote comes from page 11 of the 1993 edition of that book.

Copyright © 2007, Thomas C. Pinckney. This data file is the sole property of Thomas C. Pinckney. Please feel free to copy it in written form, but only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice.

This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, posted on the internet, copied for resale or incorporated in any products offered for sale, without the written permission of Thomas C. Pinckney, c/o Desiring God Community Church, PO Box 620099, Charlotte, NC 28262.
www.desiringGODchurch.org