

THE GOSPEL TO ALL NATIONS

Luke 24:36-53

Key Verse: 24:47

... and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

In today's passage, the Risen Christ appears to his disciples to show them that he is alive. He commissions them to preach the gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Then Jesus is ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. And that is the end of Luke's gospel. Of course, the work of God did not end then. In fact, Luke wrote a sequel to this gospel, the book of Acts, to record how God continued his work of salvation through the apostles and the Holy Spirit. May God help us to listen to the words of the Risen Christ today so that we can find a clear direction to be his witnesses to all nations!

First, Jesus appears to his disciples (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."* The two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus went back to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and other disciples huddled together in a room, and told them, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." They told them how they recognized Jesus when he broke the bread (35). While they were still talking about this, Jesus stood among them. His appearance was supernatural. He stood among them when the door was locked (Jn 20:19). He was in his resurrection body with no limitations of time and space.

What did Jesus say to his disciples? He first said to them, "Peace be with you." This was a common Jewish greeting at that time. But it had a deeper meaning coming from the Risen Christ. Before he died, Jesus prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus died as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." At that time, the disciples did not have peace. In fact, they were troubled (38). But Jesus said, "Peace be with you." They could have peace, knowing that their sins were forgiven. This was the point of his suffering and death. They had eternal life in the kingdom of God. Do you have peace in your heart? Do you want peace in your life? Of course! Not the kind of peace you have one moment and then goes away the next moment. The peace Jesus gives is eternal. If we want everlasting peace, we must come to Jesus! Only Jesus can give us such peace.

How did the disciples respond? They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost (37). This was a logical reaction, if you think about it. Jesus came into the room through the locked door. No real person could do that. They didn't recognize him. His appearance was no longer that of a suffering servant. Perhaps he looked more like when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:29). Peter, James and John had seen

the glorious image of Jesus on the mount. They should have remembered this glorious image of Jesus. Most of all, they should have remembered the words of Jesus who told them that he would rise from the dead, and that he would meet with them. But they did not remember his words, and they did not recognize him.

How did Jesus help them? He 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?” (38) The disciples did not remember the Scriptures concerning his resurrection. So they did not recognize him. They probably recognized his voice and asked in their minds, “Could this be the Lord who is standing before us?” Then they shook their heads, remembering the vivid image of the blood covered body of Jesus on the cross. They saw how his dead body was taken from the cross and laid in a tomb. They were troubled and doubts rose in their minds. Perhaps they thought he was only a hologram. They doubted, even after the two disciples testified about him. Why couldn’t they believe that he was real? It was perhaps because Jesus was no longer with them personally, as he had been before his death. He did not eat with them. He did not travel with them. They believed him when they saw him, but when they didn’t see him, doubts arose in their minds. This is true with many of us. Jesus does not live with us physically. So he may become like a distant relative whom we see only occasionally. He may not seem real to us. But Jesus is with us everyday. He is real. We can be with him everyday by talking to him in prayer and listening to him through our Bible study. The disciples probably doubted also about the Risen Christ because of their past failures and denials of him. Let’s see how he helped them further.

Look at verse 39a. *“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!”* There were unmistakable marks on his hands and feet, the marks of huge nails that had pierced his flesh when he was crucified. His nail marks testified to them that it was really Jesus. Those nail marks also 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.”

Look at verse 39b. *“Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”* Jesus invited them to touch him. He was not a ghost. He was not a hologram. He was not merely a spirit. His body was real. His resurrection was real. He had flesh and bones. God had raised him from the dead and made him alive again. When they saw his nail-pierced hands and feet, their doubts began to fade away. They remembered how much Jesus loved them. They were not afraid any more.

Why is it important for us to believe the resurrection of Jesus? It is because his resurrection is the first-fruit of our resurrection from death (1Co 15:20). 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” His resurrection signaled the resurrection of all mankind. 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 what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to

be condemned.” The resurrection of all mankind 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.

Do you remember the story of Martha and Mary in John 11? Their brother Lazarus was sick and was dying. The sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus to come quickly and heal their brother. But Jesus who loved them dearly delayed his trip on purpose. He stayed where he was two more days to make sure Lazarus was dead. Why? It was to help the sisters to have resurrection faith. When he finally arrived there, Lazarus had been dead and was buried in a tomb. Of course, the sisters were beyond consolation. Martha complained bitterly, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” What did Jesus say to her? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:25-26). Then Jesus raised Lazarus to life. We can experience resurrection today by faith in God who raised him from the dead. 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 because of his Spirit who lives in you.” The power of resurrection gives us victory over our sinful nature. It enables us to carry our holy mission to the end, knowing that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Ro 8:18). This is why Paul said, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (Php 3:10-11).

Even after Jesus showed them his hands and feet, however, the disciples were not totally convinced of his bodily resurrection. They still treated him like an alien. Why didn’t they believe his bodily resurrection? Verse 41 says that it was because of joy and amazement. Huh? They probably thought it was too good to be true. One thing we can say is that they still relied on their feelings more than the word of Christ. But the Risen Christ did not rebuke them. He asked them for something to eat. They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence (41-43). Food was something the disciples could relate very well. 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.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus teaches us that the gospel is based on historical facts. The Risen Christ was not a spiritual apparition, something like you see in a Star Trek movie. He was not a hologram. Jesus had a body with flesh and bones. The disciples could see his body with their eyes and touch him with their hands. Christianity is based on truth that can be verified and confirmed by witnesses. Christ has risen! And so shall we.

Second, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached 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.” Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection fulfilled the Scriptures. These Scriptures were given by God a long time before they happened. Many Old Testament scriptures 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 (Ge 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 the sinful humanity and restoring paradise.

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 time and again, and patiently endured their slow learning. Now they were fully prepared. So he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. They could see that how the whole Old Testament scriptures converged on the person and work of the Christ.

What did the Risen Christ tell them when they opened their hearts to his teaching? Let us read together verses 46-47. *He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the 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 all sinners. Whoever hears the message, repents of his sins and believes in Jesus as the Savior receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Sin is a universal problem. Jesus is the universal solution. God loves all people and wants all people 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, as certain as his resurrection from the dead. At that time, however, the disciples were very weak. They couldn’t even go out of the house because of fear. The task of world mission seemed impossible to them. But they were completely changed when the Holy Spirit came upon them. They had no fear as they preached the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. When Peter preached the gospel in Jerusalem, three thousand people accepted his message and were baptized (Ac 2:41). The disciples carried the gospel to Judea and Samaria. The gospel continued to spread to all nations. In the 1980s, God tore down the Iron Curtain of communism to deliver the gospel to Russia. The work of God is growing in China, Africa, and South America. Still, there is much work to be done. For example, Japan has a population of 127 million people. It is estimated that only 1 to 3 million persons are Christian. Many young people there suffer from meaninglessness. Many of them make suicide pacts on the Internet. They really need the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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. Jesus said, *“You are witnesses of these things.”* We are called to be Jesus’ witnesses. We are called to preach the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection to those who are still in sin. We are to share our own personal testimony of what Jesus has done for us. At our Bible Café last week, one of our Bible students spoke about how Jesus calls each of us to be a fisherman—that is to fish for people. Every believer is called to be Jesus’ witness. The original Greek word for witness is “martus” (μάρτυς) from which the word “martyr” comes from. This sounds scary. To be a witness is to be a martyr. But Jesus assures us in 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 enables us to testify to Jesus boldly and joyfully to any person. When the Holy Spirit is with us, we don’t have to fear anything or anyone.

Third, Jesus ascends into heaven (50-53)

After hearing Jesus’ resurrection message, 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 were full of joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

In this passage, Jesus appeared to his disciples to help them to believe in his resurrection. Our Lord Jesus lives, and so shall we. Because of his resurrection, all our sins are forgiven. We have eternal life in the kingdom of God. And we are called to be his witnesses. May God empower us through the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses! May God help us to serve world mission by sharing the gospel with one person at a time!