

Part 88: The Gospel Accomplished and Announced

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Legend has it that, a few hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Greek mathematician, Archimedes, took a bath. While the event itself wasn't particularly noteworthy, what he discovered in that bath was.

Archimedes had been thinking on ways to record the relationship between weight and volume. While he sat in his bath, he noticed the lower he sank into the water, the more water that spilled out of his bath. He concluded then, what is now called the Archimedes principle, that the volume of water displaced is equal to the volume of the object in the water. With this information, not only could he discern materials by their volume, but the displacement theory helped them figure out how to build boats capable of holding more cargo without sinking.

As all this came together in his head, it's said he hopped out of the tub, and ran back home, naked, through the streets of Syracuse, Greece yelling: "Eureka! Eureka!" Translated into English he rejoiced, "I've found it. I've found it."

In a similar, but hopefully more clothed manner, this is the cry of everyone who comes to know the gospel, "Eureka, I've found it, I've found it." We say this not because we've discovered some theory of science, but because we've discovered the very meaning of joy, hope, salvation, and life itself.

Luke opens his book telling us that this moment of profound clarity is his goal: "I'm writing (**Luke 1:4**) that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." His goal is certainty, but certainty about what: the things! What a wonderfully biblical word—the things!

He has written this whole book to make "these things" clear and as he concludes today, he drives home his point. These things are the things that Jesus has done. It is what Christians call, "the gospel," the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God.

If you're new with us this morning, or new to Christianity, maybe you've wondered what the gospel is? Maybe you've wondered why it matters and what it changes? Luke answers all those questions for us today as he not only closes out the narrative of Jesus' resurrection, but he closes the whole of the book. He wants us to leap up and say, "Eureka, I've found it. It's been here the whole time."

But in order for us to have such a deep treasure, we need, like Archimedes, to understand the significance and value of what we have found. This is our main point today: **The gospel is about the person of Jesus and the plan of God to save sinners.**

Jesus is about to leave his disciples, but before he does he gives them clarity about who he is, what he's done, and what he's going to do. We will see this in three ways: first we see, **Faith in the Person of Jesus**, then we will see **The Gospel Plan Accomplished in Scripture** and lastly **The Gospel Plan Announced by the Church.**

Last week, we met two men, who after meeting Jesus on the road ran back to tell the other disciples in Jerusalem. But upon arriving, we find the Jerusalem believers had also come to the same conclusion and beat these men to the punch saying, “The Lord is risen indeed.”

Our passage today begins as they are together marveling at this news, and Jesus shows up: **(Luke 23:36-37)** "As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!' But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit."

Here encounter our first point this morning: **Faith in the Person of Jesus.**

Last week we saw we must have faith, this week we see that faith must be in Jesus, and you're probably wondering when I will stop saying the obvious. But notice the subject of their shock. These people were just rejoicing that the Lord was alive, but now he appeared before them and they were startled and frightened.

They aren't shocked that Jesus is alive, they are shocked at how alive he is. Being reasonable people, they try to make sense of what they are seeing. They weren't naïve to believe in a dead man coming back to life in physical form, so they tried to make sense of it by claiming he was a ghost. A claim still incredible, but more believable than a dead man who is now physically alive. It's the immediate physicality of Jesus which has them, “shooketh.”

But faith in Jesus is faith in the full reality of the gospel, not just the morals or meaning of it. For kids, or those who grew up on the church this is so important to remember. We cannot forget how astounding this resurrection and physically alive Jesus was.

But kids, you hear stories of monsters, you watch movies of mythical creatures. But Jesus is not one of those. Jesus is real. And he's really alive. And as he appears physically, and as he ascends physically alive we have the wonderful comfort of knowing that Jesus is right now really in charge. He is really ruling. He is really loving. He is really caring for us.

The gospel is supernatural, but it is not unnatural. That's the beauty of the incarnation. It's the dance of what is so other than us, breaking into what is just like us. Because Jesus was fully God and fully man, it vindicates and validates our material world while also showing us there's more to it. And this tension is hard to grapple with.

I think that's why Jesus appeared and opened up with, “Peace to you!” He knew this tension, but the disciples model our own frequent response: instead of letting Jesus' words make sense of our experience, we try to rationalize it on our own and end up with false realities and unwanted emotions.

This passage is essentially an x-ray into the dynamics of our faith and life. Their surface experience was startled fear and trouble—but Jesus shows them the root of it. **(Luke 24:38)** "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

Sometimes our fear and trouble comes from outside of us. Take for instance the emotions of witnessing a car crash in front of you. It startles us from the outside in.

But Jesus reverses this here, sometimes, as in this instance the source of fear and trouble hearts is caused by what is inside: the doubt of our own hearts.

What were they doubting? The source of their doubts was the immediate physical reality of their hope—it was the sheer presence of aliveness in the midst of a mostly dead world. But notice how Jesus firmly identifies the problem, but then graciously leans into it: **Luke 24:39-43**, "'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 marveling, he said to them, 'Have you anything to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them."

For those who often wrestle with doubt, or assurance of faith, we often mistakenly think that God is hiding from us—withholding the proof that we need. But for those who sincerely wonder and wrestle, here we see that God does play hide and seek, but it is not us who seeks Jesus, but Jesus who seeks us. He desires for us to find proof in the place he knows we need it most—in him.

For these disciples, clarity comes in a moment, but at this time doubt lingered.

That's this moment of tension Luke here describes as "disbelieving for joy." The root of their disbelief was not doubt itself, or fear itself, but instead joy! What are we to make of this? Well, for disciples of Jesus our biggest problem is not necessarily believing that joy of the world is a better joy than what Jesus presents—it's just that we often settle for a lesser joy because it seems to us to at least be a more real, present, or tangible joy.

Here these disciples are overjoyed that Jesus was alive! If there was grief at his physical death, how much more joy ought there to have been at his physical life! Yet because their object of joy seemed so impossible—they disbelieved. They wanted the joy—but the disbelieved because it seemed, "too good to be true." Dead men don't rise. Physical bodies don't appear and reappear.

They tempered their own expectations by refusing to believe the fuller joy that was in front of them. Better to make Jesus a spirit—and have a joy that seems more believable—than a resurrected savior and a joy that seems impossibly real.

We can disbelieve for joy in subtle ways each day. We want joy. And we sing, hear, and memorize passages which affirm that longing—placing it in Jesus. The joy of the Lord is our strength. But sometimes, in the name of joy, we disbelieve. No disciple would say that the joy of hiking is greater than the joy of Jesus—but there are many times where we willingly settle for the lesser joy out of a lingering disbelief that Jesus really brings us joy. When pressed we run to what is less, because it seems more accessible.

We know that the Lord offers us his peace, that his sovereign care and his guiding hand is our refuge amidst our anxieties. We know his providence to be better than our self-preservation. But instead of resting in that peace, we disbelieve for peace, stocking our barns, preparing our calendars as if they provide a bunker for our souls.

We know there is love, deep love, the love of the Triune God held out to us in our salvation. But sometimes, when loneliness and abandonment suddenly appear, we disbelieve for love. We accept and rationalize the lesser of sinful relationships, approval of man, or pornography because it seems more tangible.

But the beauty of faith in the person of Jesus is that he calls us to believe for joy. For there is nothing more real than that which has conquered death.

And instead of chastising a desire for joy, the death defeating Jesus dispenses disbelief by taking a lunch break and eating some fish. Spirit's don't eat. But Jesus did.

And here we see what is often the dearest comfort to my own anxious soul: What seems catastrophically consequential in my own heart is often dealt with in the most common of ways. If you were the resurrected Jesus, and you appeared to your people, and they still disbelieved you would probably launch into a detailed PowerPoint presentation. But Jesus breaks for lunch.

We will always wrestle with the seeming tension between the joy of the realities of the gospel, and the realities of the world. But when we are stirred to startled fear, and anxious assessment, Jesus calls us deeper. He sets us at his table, he proves his reality, and soothes our souls.

When we disbelieve for anything, come to the table of Christ, submit yourself to what he has said—even if it seems too good to be true—to wonderful to make sense in our world—and you'll find that he is risen indeed. "Eureka, you'll say. For this is the real stuff of joy."

This would be wonderful if all of us could sit physically with Jesus. If only he would say to us, "here is my body!" But Jesus continues to show us where we might find our own certainty as he transitions to now say, "This is my word."

It's important to notice that Luke, nor any of the other gospels, record anyone touching Jesus when he presents himself as proof. That's not because he wasn't real, but it again reminds us that the greatest proof we need is in Jesus' word. It is in his word he says, "See, here I am. Do not be alarmed." In the midst of our own uncertainty we might cry for all the physical proofs, but what we ultimately need to believe is God's word—nothing makes sense outside of it. The word of the Lord proves true and he is a stronghold for those who take refuge in it.

For the third time since his resurrection, we are pointed back to God's word. And here we see our second point: **The Gospel Plan Accomplished in the Scriptures.**

After vindicating himself, he vindicates the Old Testament scriptures: **Luke 24:44-47**, "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 the nations, beginning in Jerusalem.'"

Part of Jesus' continuing validation of the events of the gospel is his constant reminders that this was and is the plan of God. If you are waiting for salvation from God—it's here in the person of Jesus. This is where God has placed it. Jesus speaks specifically here about the Old Testament and its three parts, the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms and says all of it is about the things of the gospel.

This profound statement helps us in three ways as we come to understand the weight of the gospel and the role of scripture.

First, he tells us that ***The Bible is Christ-Centered.***

It's all about him. The whole of the Bible is fulfilled in him. I've been to some big box stores before where the associates wear little badges that say, "Ask me about our warranties." Well, Jesus here is saying that when we open up our Bibles, to any page, it is saying to us, "Ask me about Jesus."

We talked a bit about this last week. And it can be intimidating to read the Bible like this. And we need to do it responsibly not carelessly. But the best place to start seeing Christ in the Old Testament is to read the New Testament. Start with the book of Hebrews and 1 Peter and let God's word teach you to read God's word in light of Jesus. Notice how they grab onto Old Testament themes and develop them in light of Jesus.

But we also see that ***The Bible is Christ-Dependent.***

Jesus reminded them of his words, but he also opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. Anyone can study the Bible. But only Christians can know the Bible. Why? Well, first it's because we are the only ones who take the Bible at its word. We don't just read it, we believe it! We don't just acknowledge that it claims to be written by God, we claim to know and to believe that God through the works of the Son.

But secondly, as Jesus models here, we need God's help to know and understand scripture. But because of what Jesus has done, and because of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, we never have personal Bible reading. We always read in the company of the Triune God. We are to do good study, but we are also to ask Jesus to help us so that we might know and apply his truths rightly.

Lastly, we see that ***The Bible is Christ-Demanding.***

Notice how Jesus put it: "it must be fulfilled," "he should suffer," "it should be proclaimed." Last week we saw, "it was necessary." The Bible is not FYI, the Bible is an emergency bulletin in the midst of war.

The Bible demands that in order for it to be good news, Jesus had to die. He had to suffer for our sins. He had to be raised back to life.

If Jesus didn't come, then we are still waiting on good news. But the Bible as a whole says, "He has come." That's what Jesus is saying here, "I have done it." And it's saying that if you want that good news too, you've got to see what the Bible screams: We need Jesus, and we need to believe it by faith. We need to repent, we need to be forgiven and that only comes only in the name Jesus.

If you're not a Christian in here today, or even if you claim to be, notice how Jesus defines faith in his name in verse 47. The good news of the gospel is faith that if we repent, and turn from our sins, we will receive forgiveness, in his name. Faith is repentance. And the fruit of repentance is forgiveness in Jesus name because he paid your debt of sin. That's what he came to do.

Now why is Jesus making such a big deal about this? Well, he's about to leave these disciples. But by reintroducing them to the Scriptures they are reminded that they are not without Jesus teaching. The late J.I. Packer spoke of scripture this way: it is **"God the Father preaching God the Son in the power of God the Holy [Spirit]."**

Jesus was leaving, but the gospel message, the word of God, and the presence of the Son in the word was not.

This is important because the gospel accomplished is only part of God's plan. This is where Jesus goes next, and our last point this morning: **The Gospel Plan Announced by the Church.**

Look again at verses **47-48**. You'll see that the scriptures say that the Christ should suffer and that he would rise on the third day, and that repentance is in his name. Scripture also tells us that the message should be proclaimed...but by who?

Jesus? No. Jesus answers that in the very next clause: "You are witnesses of these things." They have been implicated as witnesses, and human history demands to hear what they have seen.

Why did Jesus want to give clarity of faith in presenting his body to these disciples? Why did Jesus want to make sure these disciples read scripture in light of Jesus? Because now being witnesses of those very things which they once doubted—Jesus was going to send them out to be preachers of this truth.

Even though the events of the gospel as it related to Jesus' life, death and resurrection are over--the great story of scripture and the work of the gospel is not yet done. And these people, and us today, find ourselves square in the middle of it.

If you've ever been to a National Park or an amusement park you've probably seen a big map and it's hard to make sense when you stand there as to which direction is which and how to find your way through it. But the best maps have one really helpful feature don't they? The pin that says, "You are here."

Here Jesus says to his disciples: "You are here. You are part of God's unfolding plan. The Old Testament predicted it, my life accomplished it, and now a new chapter is beginning, and it's going global."

As we turn our attention to the book of Acts we will see this unfold. Luke opens his second book by expanding the detail and impressing the significance of this scene.

But for right now it's important for us to see that Luke is buttoning up the account of Jesus' earthly ministry by tying it to the Triune God's plan for salvation. Jesus the Son would send the Spirit, who is the Promise of the Father, so that in his power many more might hear, repent, receive forgiveness, and join this movement that leads into eternity.

Jesus opened the mind of this broad group of disciples in verse 45, but we see that he's also making it clear that their mouths would be opened by witness and by worship. By witness, and by worship, salvation in the name of Jesus will be proclaimed to all nations.

But he also calls them to wait in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. And this is to show that the re-creative new joy was already re-creating the world. If you remember in the opening of Luke's gospel we encounter a mute man, disbelieving that the Christ would come, in a temple void of worship. But where does Luke's gospel end:

Luke 24:50-53, “Then 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.”

From disbelieving for joy, to joyful devotion. From a mute priest in light of a prophesied Christ, to a chorus of praise in light of a resurrected and ascended Lord. From a spiritually dead, rebellious and unrepentant Jerusalem, the salvation of God, cracked the hardened world of sin and joyful life began to reverberate through the whole world.

So we, as the Lord’s church, bear witness by our word and by our worship. What they cannot see of the risen Lord, let them see in the life of the church. Salvation has come—and the church of saved sinners is the proof.

I want to close with the story of John Bunyan’s conversion because it so beautifully captures the way in which we now declare the true reality of real joy in the gospel. He described hearing two women talking about religion—being someone who loved religious debate—he listened but he got more than he bargained for. He said, **“I heard, but I understood not; for [their words] were far above, out of my reach; for their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature; they talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported... They also discoursed of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief; and did condemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good. And I thought they spoke as if joy did make them speak; they spoke with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me, as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbors.”**

But by grace, through faith, we are those neighbors. We are those who are of a new world, and it is our joy to call all who hear—“The gospel is faith in the person of Jesus, the plan of God’s salvation for the ages, and eureka, we’ve found it.”