

“You Are Witnesses of These Things”

Luke 24:36-53

Key verse 48

“You are witnesses of these things.”

What are you planning to do this afternoon? Perhaps do some praying, then get some food with the lovely people around you? Play with your kids? Write a reflection on the passage? Maybe no idea, play it as it comes? It’s good to have a plan, but would you call that a vision? How about this: my son Matthew turned 3 yesterday. When I saw his picture on Facebook, I had a vision that in a short time I would be done with diapers until grandkids come! That is a compelling vision, and I’m motivated to work towards that. But let me tell you another vision: **“Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations!”** That is the vision of the Risen Jesus Christ. We’ll plumb the depths of that vision today, and see its scope, its direction, its hope and why it is so compelling. Do you have a vision for your life? What is the grand narrative shaping your world, your family, your decisions? Most important, what I pray everyone here may see, is how Jesus’ vision includes each of us: young and old, male and female, married and single – everyone here may find their place, their calling, their compelling vision for life in this vision of the Risen Christ. How? **“You are witnesses of these things.”**

First, “Peace be with you” (36-44). **“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”** Peace is a repeated theme in Luke’s gospel, appearing more in Luke than any other NT book¹. From the beginning Luke shows this peace, or “Shalom” is a purpose of Jesus’ coming. To herald his birth, the angels sang in the heavens the chorus: **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Lk 2:11)** The peace that Jesus came to give is not a momentary cessation of hostilities, but a comprehensive blessing from God that comes and overrules all areas of our lives, especially the fear of death (Jn 14:27). This peace is given to all who follow Jesus the Rising Sun, who came to guide our feet into the path of peace (1:78-79). This is Jesus’ broken hearted longing for his people, then

¹ “Peace” appears 13 times in Luke. Matthew (5), Mark(2), John (6). Romans (11) and Acts (6).

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and now (19:42). But those who reject Jesus will not experience this peace, but rather division (12:49-51). Looking around at our world, what we need most is peace that comes from Jesus. The Risen Jesus visited his disciples and said to them, **“Peace be with you.”**

The disciples weren't really experiencing peace at that moment. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost (37). Their fear is understandable; their entire world had been set to chaos, as everything they hoped and expected came up short (21). Risen Jesus didn't want them to have a peace that comes from suspension of reality. For example, Eastern meditation, drawing you away from your reality into some kind of “limbo.” “Become one with the universe” or “there is no spoon.” That isn't the peace Risen Jesus gives. The peace that Jesus gives is to be in our present reality, not through escaping, but recognizing that he is with us. **“He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.” (38-43)** The Risen Jesus didn't ask them to suspend or overcome their doubts, but helped them to touch and see, even sharing a meal with them, that they may know for certain he indeed has risen from the dead.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body is crucial to our faith, everything hangs on it. It proves that this is the same Jesus who died for our sins, and is now risen to life. It proves that death could not keep its hold on him (Ac 2:24), and is a defeated foe (1Co 15:55-57). This gives us a real foundation for peace with God. To all who have run to Jesus, accepting his blood shed for our forgiveness, we have peace with God through him (Ro 5:1). If he had remained dead, we may wonder, “Maybe not everything could be paid for by Jesus' blood.” Perhaps only a portion. But since justice has been fully met, there is no more debt, or wages, for sin to be paid. The bodily resurrection of Jesus proves all our sins have been paid, and this gives us peace with God. Just as Jesus' body was real and tangible, so our hope is secure. Jesus doesn't want our hope to be vague or wishful thinking, but

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tangible and real. As always, Jesus leads the way. We too look forward to a bodily resurrection. In view of that, our bodies are a seed, and we look forward to the new body, as we look forward to a new earth. This gives us a powerful and tangible peace, a hope, that endures.

Jesus’ peace also gives direction: Jesus is often seen telling those whom he ministered to, **“Go in peace.”** (7:50; 8:48; 24:36) Recently Sam Toh left his career at CPS, losing his stable pay and good benefits, in order to obey Jesus’ calling to serve a most important ministry among High School students. Such decisions are really not easy. But he found a peace in this decision, because he is following Jesus’ call on his life and family. They find real peace knowing Jesus is with them, and leading them.

So why doesn’t Risen Jesus appear bodily to everybody like this? 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.’”** Risen Jesus knew their memories and the magic of that moment would fade. But one thing that never changes is the word of the Lord. The peace we have with God is not something rooted in our subjective experience alone, but rather we have a peace that cannot be shaken because it is rooted in the unchanging promise of God. On this foundation we build a life of peace. When it shakes, we don’t need to escape the world, but escape to the word, and let it be our foundation.

My key verse this year is Colossians 3:15, **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”** This teaches me that in my situation, no matter what it is, I have a choice to make. Will I let the Living, Risen Jesus rule in my heart with his peace, or not? I’m only three months into learning what this means, but generally I’ve found that I often believe the lie that if I could only control my situation: either through self-discipline, or changing my children’s behavior, helping friends and family, then I would have peace. But such peace is untenable, since the reality is I have very little control over even the most basic of things that have deep impact on my time, resources and my heart. Just this week, we had a flat tire, and a hole in the roof. But Risen Christ is on his throne. His words tell me nothing happens

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outside of his plan and will. Even hardships are his plan to discipline me, to give room to find and allow his peace to reign. Knowing that Jesus is in charge, that everything is going according to his plan, this brings peace.

Allowing what is written in the Bible to shape and direct my perspective, worldview, and life decisions takes labor. In studying this passage, when I got to verse 44, I wondered, “Why didn’t Jesus just tell them all this from the beginning?” Just as the disciples needed to undergo this process, so must we. We can’t skip the process. Jesus explained this in Luke 6:47-48, **“As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”** We all want such peace, but this comes only through the word of God.

I know a guy who is blessed and loved by God. One evidence of God’s blessing is that God helped him to marry a godly woman, by God’s grace alone. One wise person said, “Marriage is for the sanctification of man.” But when he tried to enjoy marriage with his own expectations, he experienced some really hard times. He found his wife is nothing like him at all. For two years, he came to Bible study, hoping to get God to bless him without him changing. This year he recently turned a corner in his life of faith. He has been holding on to Luke 6:47-48, realizing he needs to come to Jesus, hear his words and put them into practice, not just to get God to change his wife, but to make him into a holy man. We call it holy matrimony, because God is using it to make us holy. This process can’t be skipped. But as we hold on to God’s word, seeing his power and hand in these situations, we find real peace. Risen Jesus says: **“Peace be with you.”**

Second, “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (45-53). Look at verse 45. **“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”** The Risen Jesus had to open the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. Was it because the disciples didn’t have enough Bible study? I don’t think so. The disciples had been taught the Bible all their lives. The Jews diligently studied the Scriptures, but they rejected God’s Messiah. They didn’t understand what the Scriptures said about the Messiah,

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because over the generations they had come to their own understanding about what it said and taught. Over time, tradition and legacy took the place of divine inspiration. Jesus wanted them and us to be new wineskins, to receive a new understanding, have a bigger vision, so he opened their minds. Have you had mind-opening encounters with the Scriptures, where you had to change your own thinking, repent and turn to God newly? Or is Bible study just traditions taught by people? As Pastor Kevin shared last week about burning-heart Bible study, we all want to experience this. The limitation isn't the Bible, but our minds, that need to be more flexible, less rigid, and be opened. It is a sad thing that Jesus and his followers are viewed as narrow-minded, when God, who created all things, is so broadminded. If my understanding of Scripture is limited to moral platitudes, legal boundaries and behavior management through self-discipline, I'm probably not getting the point. This may lead to a controlled life of self-discipline, like the Pharisees, but won't inspire me with passion, or give new direction each day, or revive my heart with burning desire to see each day as a new day. But that is what I want, and what Jesus wants his disciples to see: not a religion, tradition or legacy for them to adhere to and follow, but a vision that inspires, motivates, and gives direction for their whole life.

What is Jesus' vision? Let's read verses 46-47. **“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”** Vision is so important. Presidential candidates are trying to woo support through sharing their vision for our nation, that they hope to carry out in a four year term. But the Risen Jesus' vision is not so small. Jesus vision is worldwide and covers every generation. Men fashion their vision based on their own subjective perspective, and is usually motivated by fear and anger. But Jesus' vision is the very plan of God, written and recorded for thousands of years and written in the Bible. Jesus fulfilled the first part of this vision as the Messiah by his suffering death on the cross and glorious resurrection. The Bible talks about this work all throughout, as we saw last week. But Jesus' vision didn't end with his completed work. Using the word “and” Jesus connects gospel ministry as part of his gospel, not a follow on thing. The gospel message extends all time and space, including the time after Jesus' ascension, pointing to his victorious return. What vision did the Risen Jesus see and plant in his disciples?

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Firstly, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins”. Jesus saw the great importance of his finished work on the cross would meet the real need of every person in every generation. We need many things. But what we need most is the forgiveness of sins. We understand why in many ways, but simply speaking, we are under God’s wrath for sin. We suffer wages of sin, such as guilt, fear, and shame. These have shaped our character, society and culture in many ways. The trouble is, there is no solution to this problem. Education, money, and democracy won’t solve this problem. We try to treat it through temporary measures to find peace, like pleasures, ambition, hard work and many ways. But nothing really works. What is worse, our pride tells us we can do it alone. But Jesus accomplished for us the way of salvation on the cross. The way to receive this isn’t complicated. Simply repent. Turn back and follow God’s way.

Secondly, “Will be preached in his name”. Jesus saw that the means of this life-saving gospel work would be through proclaiming the way of salvation in Jesus’ name. Sometimes we want to preach this gospel on the foundation of our knowledge, or another’s interesting interpretation. But Jesus saw God’s plan was for it to simply be proclaimed in his name. For the past 2000 years, that is how the gospel has advanced, as one person shared the gospel message with another by the power in Jesus’ name.

Lastly, “To all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”. Jesus’ vision isn’t small or limited to one generation or people group. But at the same time, this vision has a definite starting point in their reality, Jerusalem. Being a student of church history is fascinating, to see how Jesus’ vision of the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins has spread all around the world, to nearly all nations so far. Yet each movement had a starting point, in that generation, in that time, a Jerusalem event. Do you see it?

This is the compelling vision of the Risen Christ, revealed in Scripture. It is what God himself has planned and is doing from the beginning to the end of the Bible. But what did this have to do with the disciples? Let’s read verse 48 together. **“You are witnesses of these things.”** Jesus didn’t say, “You are responsible to do all this, so get cracking!” He said, **“You are witnesses.”** This word simply means

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to state the truth as we know it. But the disciples did so with such commitment, even to the point of death, that we get our word “martyr” from the word translated “witness.” To the disciples, the gospel wasn’t work to be done, but a truth to be told and lived. They had this vision in their minds, and it fueled their daily choices. They saw beyond themselves. They found their place in Jesus’ worldwide vision, and this compelled them to live passionately for the gospel, for Jesus, and in their time shook the entire world with this message.

If we have come to believe in Jesus, if our minds have been opened to the Scriptures, we too are witnesses of these things. I don’t know about you, but I’ve witnessed so many amazing things over the past nearly 40 years of life, especially over the past 20 when I’ve actively followed Jesus. Most recently, I saw amazing things at our Easter conferences. Not only at Loyola, but how awesome to see what the gospel has done and is doing at Harper and IIT. Not only my experiences, I can read about what God is doing all over the world through ubf.org and many other resources. What about you? Haven’t you witnessed some awesome things?

Am I letting this vision compel me to live a life that extends beyond myself? Am I planting a vision in my sons that extends to the ends of the earth, with a destination of the kingdom of God? One day Jesus will return, and everything will end. We will go to be with him in that heavenly new Jerusalem. I read an interesting point of view by Chris Braun about applying this vision in our homes: “We often tell our children at home, ‘I can’t promise you that I will always be around. We live in a world of cancer and accidents. But if for some reason we get separated then we’ll meet on the other side.’ In fact, as a family we have a spot picked out where we plan to meet: the 5th tree on the right side, as we face the throne of Christ. Our goal is to give our children a compelling biblical picture of where we are headed².” We pray for revival today. As Kevin said, it begins with me. From this passage, verses 48 and 49 tell me that this revival begins with seeing my place in God’s glorious vision, then obeying by the power of God.

² (<http://chrisbrauns.com/2012/06/church-leaders-must-cast-vision-where-there-is-no-vision-the-people-perish-revisited/>)

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When I was growing up, my parents took me to church, where I studied the Bible and was baptized at a young age. But I didn't understand this compelling vision of the Risen Christ. When the church divided, and we stopped going, I lived only for myself. That is what seemed most important: me, myself and I. Later through Bible study Jesus opened my mind to the Scriptures. Mainly, I found that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). So I began to follow him. One thing that struck me early on, and for which I'll ever be thankful for is that God's vision is beyond me, beyond my family, beyond my nation, but to all nations. I learned this through attending conferences, meeting people all over the world. As a vocal team member, I sang the praises of God to thousands of people. As a minister of the word, I preached the gospel. My first passport was issued in 1998, in a rush to attend the European International conference. Over the ten years I had it, I filled that passport until there was no place left, mostly traveling for world mission. I realize that this vision of Christ in the Scriptures was made known to me through these events, for which I'm grateful. I repent how small my mind and heart has become in many ways. I'm stable, and growing, but lack that passion and zeal I had at first. I used to be inspired for world mission, using time and money liberally. Now I give offerings much more in quantity and regularity, but not as much passion. I used to study the Bible late into the night, now I have a boundary of 9 pm. I realize through this message that it is a matter of vision. I became so small minded and petty, getting worked up and frustrated by small things, since I didn't have this vision. I want to be changed. On April 11 I'm leaving to bless Nikhil's wedding. But mainly I see this as an opportunity for world mission. I don't want my sons to follow my traditions only, maintaining a legacy, without this vision and calling. I'm praying for HBF members through their trip to Uganda to have this vision. This summer, there will be a world mission report in Seoul, Korea. Both Amy and I have attended this in the past. It is a great opportunity to have your mind opened to the reality of Jesus' worldwide vision, and how your witness can contribute. If you haven't gone, please decide, even today. Pastor Ron has asked me and I've agreed to stay back and preach here, so you are all free to go! May God grant us all a revival, and the gospel may go to the ends of the earth in our generation!

Verses 50-53 read, **“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left**

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them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” With this peace and vision from the Risen Christ, the disciples found clear life direction. Their passion for life was restored. This same Jesus, who ascended, will return in the same way. This is our hope. They worshiped Jesus as God. They returned to Jerusalem, obedient to the words Jesus gave them, waiting for what the Father has promised. And they were filled with joy. We gathered today to worship our God, Jesus Christ. We praise him for what he has done. I pray that each of us may have this peace and vision of the Risen Christ today, and through our witness the world will know he is alive, he has a plan for world salvation, and a place for each of us. Jesus says, **“You are witnesses of these things.”** Let’s pray.