

Luke 24:13-53: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0:00] Luke chapter 24 verses 13 to 53. That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?

And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them named Cleopas answered him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days? And he said to them, What things?

And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.

[1:02] They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.

And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther.

Stay with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

[2:04] And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven, and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon. Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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. 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 sin should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[3 : 23] 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. 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. In Luke chapter 24, we encounter two people travelling from Jerusalem, returning from the feast, having lost Jesus three days ago, not realising that Jesus had to be about his Father's business. Of course, we have heard a version of this story before, back in chapter 2 verses 41-50. Jesus feigns complete ignorance of the events that have just occurred. As this prompts them to share the events, he will reveal that they are the ones who are unaware of what has happened.

The restraining of their eyes is associated with their slowness to believe, much as the restraining of Zechariah's mouth. Jesus declares himself in all of the scriptures, from the Pentateuch to the prophets, and they still don't recognise him.

Jesus finally reveals himself in the act of taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing the bread, in the ritual of the supper. The story of the road to Emmaus takes a liturgical shape then.

[4 : 41] The word is opened up, and then Christ is recognised in the sacrament. The pattern here is the pattern of Christian worship. Christ draws near to us on the first day of the week, he opens the scripture to us, he makes himself known in the breaking of bread, and then sends us forth with joyful tidings.

The moment that their eyes are opened to him, he disappears from their sight. The eyes of the disciples open upon his absence. But now it's an absence filled with life, hope, and promise. Their hearts burned within them upon the road, and the fire in their hearts might be in anticipation of the fire of Pentecost. The opening of the eyes of the disciples is reminiscent of the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve at the fall, but on this occasion it's blessed.

There is a threefold opening in this chapter, the opening of the tomb, the opening of the scriptures, and the opening of the eyes. And all of these are related. Before the risen Christ revealed himself, the scriptures were a closed letter, and the perception of the disciples was limited.

As Christ opened the tomb, he also opened closed eyes to perceive his presence and his purpose throughout the events that had occurred. He opened the Old Testament scriptures, revealing his presence on every page.

[5 : 52] The resurrection transforms our reading of the Old Testament. Luke has been enacting this fact throughout his gospel. Texts whose meaning appeared closed are suddenly opened up to reveal a greater person within them.

As our eyes are opened to see the risen Christ, we suddenly recognize the identity of the one who has been traveling and speaking to us all along in the words of the Old Testament, words concerning himself.

Jesus, the Lord, is the mysterious traveler who has been with Israel all the way throughout its journey. He is the one who appeared in the burning bush. He is the one who appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre.

He is the one who appeared to Moses on the mountain. He is the one who appeared to Isaiah in the temple vision. As Christ opens up the scriptures, the story of the Exodus is seen to be about him. The story of the creation is seen to be about him. The story of David is seen to be about him. The whole of the Old Testament is Christian scripture. And the story of Emmaus follows a pattern seen in two other Lucan stories.

[6 : 53] The story of Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus and the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. In both of these stories, we have the movement of a journey. We have the opening of understanding in an encounter with Christ.

And then we have a movement to the celebration of a sacrament. In those cases, baptism. Jesus' body is glorified and it's not like a normal body. It can move from place to place.

It can evade recognition. It masters both space and other people's perception. But it's still very much a body. It can be handled and it can eat. Much of the Gospel of Luke has been about meals, about eating practices, about dinner companions, about who belongs at the table.

And it's thoroughly appropriate that the fact of the resurrection should be made known through a food ritual and through an act of eating. Following 1 Corinthians 11, our understanding of the Lord's Supper is often focused narrowly upon the context of the Last Supper and the relationship with

Jesus' death.

However, the Lord's Supper is also based on the events in which the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples in the very breaking of bread that we celebrate. As we celebrate the supper, we are enjoying the reality of the joyful resurrection meals as we perform the breaking bread ritual through which Jesus made known his presence to his disciples.

[8 : 07] The fact that Jesus eats fish when he appears to his disciples demonstrates his resurrection body, but it also might have some symbolic import. Animals symbolise people.

God only ate five animals for most of the Old Testament. Cattle, sheep, goats, turtle doves and pigeons. Perhaps we could see some symbol of the inclusion of Gentiles here, although I wouldn't put much weight on it.

Jesus declares to his disciples, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. He's there, but he's no longer there in the same way. He is about to depart, and speaks as if that departure had already been accomplished.

He explains how the entire scriptures, the law, the prophets and the psalms, or the writings, had to be fulfilled in his suffering and resurrection from the dead. But it's not just in Christ's death and resurrection that these things are fulfilled.

They're also fulfilled in the ministry of the church that follows. The Old Testament narrative crackles with anticipation of Christ, and Christ opens our eyes to understand the Old Testament text.

[9 : 09] There is an event of illumination going in both directions. The scripture enables us truly to see the Christ, and the Christ enables us truly to see the scriptures. Christ brings light to the entire preceding narrative, while also being in direct continuity with it.

Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament. However, the Old Testament is also the key to understanding Jesus. Jesus is like the match, and the Old Testament is like the striking surface. Bring the two together, and light and fire results. Without the Old Testament, we would not truly recognize Jesus. And without Jesus, we cannot truly recognize the meaning of the Old Testament. We should consider the way that Luke is using the scripture. He isn't primarily presenting us with direct prediction and fulfillment, but rather with the way that Christ both clarifies and brings to resolution the themes of the Old Testament.

The whole world of the scripture comes into focus in Christ. Once we see Christ, the rest makes new sense. He is David's greater son, who must suffer like his father. This is one of the reasons why the Psalms are especially prominent in Luke's understanding.

[10 : 14] The Psalms present us with the voice of the suffering Davidic king. Luke is also drawing heavily upon the background of Isaiah, especially chapters 40 to 66. The suffering Messiah of the Psalms is also the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy.

He is also the spirit-anointed one who brings the acceptable year of the Lord, and brings ministry to the Gentiles. The church and its ministry also figure into the picture.

Its witness to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem, is an essential part of the picture anticipated by the Old Testament. The second volume of Luke's writings, the Book of Acts, is also a book, then, that fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

Such themes of fulfillment are very important in the ministry of the early church, not least in places like Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost. Christ is the one who will send the Spirit, the promise of the Father.

We should note the explicit presence of all of the persons of the Trinity here. The Spirit is the one sent, the Spirit is the promise of the Father, and the Spirit is sent by the Son. The Spirit is power from on high, power for ministry and mission.

[11 : 22] It's a power that is the power of Christ himself. They are instructed that they must wait in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place from which the word of the Lord will go out. We could perhaps think of Jesus as a new Elijah here.

His ascension, and their being clothed with power from on high, are two sides of the same coin. Just as Elijah's ascension was Elisha's Pentecost, so it is for Jesus and his disciples.

This might also be the third of three instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples towards the end of his ministry. The first being to find the cult that's tied up, and to bring it to Jesus for his triumphal entry.

The second, to find the man carrying the water pitcher in the town. And then this, as the third, to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes upon them from on high. These might be related to the

three signs that are given to Saul at the beginning of the kingdom.

A message concerning his father's donkeys, that they have been found. Encountering men bearing goats, bread and wine. And then meeting with prophets coming down from the high place, at which time the Spirit of the Lord will rush upon him, and he will become a new man.

[12 : 26] This is what happens with the disciples. As the story of the signs given to Saul were at the beginning of the first kingdom of Israel, these signs are the beginning of a new kingdom. And just as Saul was prepared by the Spirit coming upon him, so they will be prepared for rule as the Spirit comes upon them.

Jesus leads his disciples out of the city to Bethany, and there he blesses them. Bethany was the site where Christ's triumphal entry had originated, and he departs then as he is blessing them. His blessing of his disciples might make us think of Jesus as a priest at this point as well. He is taken up into heaven to God's right hand, to act and to intercede on their behalf. Luke has already alluded to Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14, the Son of Man coming on the clouds.

This is the Son of Man ascending into heaven on the cloud, where he will rule at God's right hand until all his enemies are put under his feet. The ascension is a departure, but it is also a new arrival. It's a new triumphal entry. Furthermore, it returns us to the themes at the beginning of the book. The book began with people praying at the temple as Zechariah went in, at the time of incense.

[13 : 35] Jesus ascends to God's presence like the incense, and blesses his disciples as the priest would bless the crowd outside. We might also recall the shepherds. The shepherds are described having seen the sign of the baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke chapter 2 verse 20. The disciples might also be compared to Anna, who was constantly in prayer in the temple.

So a book that began with rejoicing, with the temple, with prayer and blessing, and with the theme of the Spirit, ends where it began. But as it arrives at the point where it started once more, we notice that everything has changed.

This sets things up for the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, the story of the Ascension is largely repeated. The story of the Ascension both closes the story of Christ's earthly ministry, and it also bursts out into the ministry of the Church, as it leads into the story of Pentecost.

A question to consider. Can you think of some examples in the Gospel of Luke, where Luke exemplifies the form of reading scripture that Jesus here teaches?