

Luke 24:50 - 53 The Ascension of the Risen Jesus to Glory

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from them. 52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple, praising God.

This morning we finish the gospel account of Luke. Just for the record, a few statistics for you. We began Luke's gospel on 9 - 03 - 2018, so 3 1/2 years almost exactly, and this is the 156th and final for this series message from the gospel of Luke.

What a blessing it is to be concentrated week after week on the story of Jesus himself as told by first person witnesses.

On our web pages you will be able to find all of the gospel of Mark, vs by vs, all of the gospel of Matthew, vs. by vs. and after this morning all of the gospel of Luke, one verse at a time.

So that means of the four first person accounts, we have studied all but the gospel of John in an expository verse by verse setting. John is like a great dollop of desert to look forward to some day, but not now.

I considered going straight from Luke's account of the acts of Jesus into Luke's account of the acts of the apostles under the power of the Holy Spirit, and we may end up there before too long. It's logical in a way.

But I feel the Spirit has been leading me to dive into the meat of the Apostle Paul, and I'm leaning towards working through Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, as a unit and walking through the heart of the meat of Paul's letters to the churches. I'm open to input positive or negative.

So let's turn our thoughts to these final short verses in Luke this morning, a very short account and easily understood, as long as you're OK with

someone defying gravity and floating up into the heavens as men gaze until the speck disappears from sight and is seen no more.

Luke is the only gospel writer who covers this event for us. Mark 16:19 has this account; *So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*

But those words are missing from all of the oldest and best manuscripts of Mark's gospel. It seems Mark didn't get around to finishing his gospel, it ends abruptly in Mark 16 vs. 8 in all of the best manuscripts. Like he was writing away, well meaning to finish, and something happened that delayed that, and he just never got back to it.

We have at least two different endings that are believed to have been added later by well meaning scribes to put some kind of ending on an obviously unfinished manuscript. And if that's the case, and excellent trustworthy scholarship seems to think that's the best likelihood, that means the Mark 16 verse is based on information solely from Luke.

And Luke covers this not just once, but twice for us, the more complete account being in the beginning of the book of Acts. Let's look at Luke's **Acts** chapter one account;

Acts 1: 1 *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus **began** to do and teach, 2 until the **day when He was taken up**, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

6 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying,

“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; 11 and they also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Luke repeats the great commission that we looked at last week, and Luke repeats the ascension into heaven two times. And Luke has a purpose, both times, in our passage this morning and in these opening words of Acts, and the main reason that Luke dwells on Jesus leaving is because Luke's single purpose is to tell the continuing story of Jesus.

That story begins with Jesus in the flesh walking among men, and it continues to this day in the age of grace, in which Jesus no longer physically walks with men, He has sent His Holy Spirit to dwell with men and in men. The saga continues in the lives of individual indwelt believers, almost from the day of the ascent until this day we are together.

Actually there was about 10 days after Jesus ascension into heaven until the Holy Spirit came down upon the church in a great display in Acts 2 at Pentecost. But Luke's purpose is to seamlessly tell the story from before Jesus, with all of the announcements of angels and John the baptist, through the 3 year ministry of Jesus, and then the story of the formation of the church of God, first at Jerusalem, then in Samaria, and then by the time he finishes the book of Acts, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

That's Luke's purpose, and that's why he dwells on the ascension into heaven, because the Holy Spirit will not descend upon the church until Jesus ascends into heaven. Jesus has to go up before the Holy Spirit comes down. Luke is hammering this out in good order.

And that's why I said there is a certain logic in just ending in Luke chapter 24 vs. 53 and going straight on to Acts chapter 2. Jesus goes up, the Holy Spirit comes down and the church of God is off and running. That's Luke's obvious purpose here. Jesus got His part done, we need to move right into the explosion of the church as God indwells believers and it's like a whole bunch of little Christ's moving out over the whole earth.

That's what the term christian meant when the believers at Antioch were first called christians. It was actually a derisive term thrown out dismissively by the onlooking world. Those "little Christ's" over there. But those of us who are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit wear that nomiker proudly. That's exactly what I aspire to be. A christian. A little Christ.

Jesus had to go up so that millions of little Christ's indwelt with Him, could cover the earth and take the message of forgiveness in His name to every tribe and every nation. We're still at it. Seemingly losing ground, locally. It's like the Holy Spirit is concentrating south of the equator in our time frame. Never-the-less there is an unbroken line of activity from then to activity now.

Let's consider our verses at the end of Luke.

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany,

In the Acts 1 recount of this, Luke tells us Bethany is a Sabbath Day's journey away. That's between 2/3 and 3/4 of a mile. An easy enough walk even for an old person. About the same as walking from here to Raley's.

Why Bethany? I'll venture a guess and that's worth about as much as the cost of a cup of coffee at Starbucks if you kick in \$2.45. My guess is that

He so loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus that He wanted to say goodbye to them before He left this earth.

We also know from Old Testament Prophecy that when Jesus returns it will be to almost the same place exactly. Because Zechariah 14:4 tells us that;

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

It's also interesting to me, and very telling, that when the Glory of the Lord departed from the temple in Ezekiel chapter 11 it says that the Glory hovered over the portico of the temple for a time, and then went up and hovered over the mountain just east of the temple, that's the Mount of Olives, and then in one of the saddest verses in the Bible, the Glory of the Lord departed from Israel.

Israel truly is the epicenter of God's activity with men, and the Mount of Olives in particular is seen again and again as the point of arrival and departure. We wait for those feet to touch the Mount of Olives, again, and split it wide open forming a valley from north to south.

*50b . . . and He lifted up His hands and **blessed** them.*

eulogēsen A compound of eu, well, and logos, speak. To well speak.

The famous benediction blessing of Aaron on Israel in Numbers chapter 6 immediately comes to mind. Let me read it in context. This is what a blessing from Jesus on His disciples may have looked like. In fact these could well be the exact words;

22 Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 23 “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

24 Yahweh bless you, and keep you;

25 Yahweh make His face shine on you,

*And be gracious to you;
26 Yahweh lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.'*
27 *"So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will
bless them."*

This is exactly how my mind pictures Jesus blessing His little group of true followers as He prepares to depart from them. He may well have said these exact words.

Those words realized are the very definition of the individual believer's relationship personally with the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. It's almost as if Jesus gives the invocation at His departure and then 10 days later the very words become true, individually, as the Spirit descends on these believers in fiery baptism.

*24 The indwelling Holy Spirit bless you, and keep you;
25 The indwelling Holy Spirit make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
26 The indwelling Holy Spirit lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.'*

That has been the experience of my life since August 26th 1970 when I asked Jesus to come into my heart and own me and be my Lord. And I will add, in these times we live in of trouble on every side increasing each day, that promise of peace, individually, from the inside out, has been true and IS true.

Jesus said; *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.* That blessing is as true now as it ever was. We have peace in this world because we are citizens of another place. This world can go up in so much smoke but our Sovereign God has us in the palm of His hand. Peace!

51 And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from

them.

Up He went. Into heaven. Acts tells us a cloud received Him from their sight. I have to admit that as a simple believer who always defaults to the simplest explanation of the meaning of the words that I just figured it was a cloudy day and He disappeared into a cloud.

Thus it is that on days with beautiful white puffy clouds I have often thought, maybe today is the day, Jesus will come in the clouds even as He departed and remove His church, take His believers home to safety and wedding and feast as the world cranks up for the apocalypse.

But now I think this was probably a special cloud like the cloud of glory that traveled with the children of Israel as they marched away from Egypt towards the promised land. That cloud. A cloud of glory that He disappeared into and He was removed from their sight.

And then the elaboration we have from Acts 1. Two angels, two men in white clothing, who say, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*"

He WILL return. But you don't need to keep looking into the sky. They have work to do. Actually they have waiting to do which is much harder than actual work. He had told them not to leave Jerusalem until the Spirit descended upon them. Waiting is torture. Especially if you have the attention span of a 3 year old. Something I have in common with Peter, I think.

Luke simply puts some icing on the top of this cake. He knows the story will continue in the Acts. The church named Luke's second book the Acts of the Apostles, but that's not quite correct. It should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit of Jesus in the Apostles.

52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually

in the temple, praising God

The sad bewilderment that we witness on the day of the resurrection as the apostles and disciples huddle together in a room with doors barred shut and the confusion of Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus has turned into joy and continuous worship. That's where Luke leaves us.

But I want to go beyond Luke's scope just a little bit this morning. Luke has one obvious purpose; Jesus must go up so the Holy Ghost can come down. That's Luke's goal as he moves us logically into the Acts of the Apostles and the formation of the church age that we are currently in.

But what about Jesus. He IS. And He is some place. He is in Heaven at the right hand of His Father. Psalm 110:1 becomes a quite literal truth;

1 *The LORD says to my Lord:*

“Sit at My right hand,

Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”

Jesus is alive, in a resurrection body that is glorious, and He is sitting at the right hand of God as Satan rages in the nations.

Satan, and the nations who hate God and who rebel against His rule and ownership are now raging against God, and God will put all of it under the glorious feet of the risen Lord Jesus.

In our time we have left this morning, in our 20-20 hindsight as we sit at this far end of the church age that Luke was so anxious to launch into, I want rather to take us to just a couple of glimpses into the risen Jesus as He is today, in heaven and glory.

Turn with me, if you like to read along, or perhaps just listen as we peer into heaven at Jesus in His current state;

I'll begin with John's vision of Jesus in Revelation chapter 1, starting at vs.

4 *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen.*

8 *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

9 *I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” 12 **And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me.** And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. 14 And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; 15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I*

have the keys of death and of Hades.

This is the risen Jesus, now in heaven, ruler of everything. He is the first born of the dead. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He has all authority over everything. Even the nations that rage in hatred against Him. He is ruler over all.

I would bring to your memory the discussion between Jesus and the two travelers on the road to Emmaus. Do you recall His question to them? They're stumble bumbling along in their despair and confusion over the death of Jesus who they had set hopes on that He was the messiah. And Jesus replies;

25 . . . “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

It's a rhetorical question. Yes of course! Jesus did have to suffer and die in order to purchase men by His blood from all of the nations. But He also says it was necessary for Him to enter into His glory.

These men, and likewise us also, have little concept of that glory. We read the words, and try to form an image in our minds. John was struggling for words to even try to describe what He saw. Hair like wool. White and clean. Eyes like fire. Feet like molten bronze. Voice like many waters. Speech like a two edged sword. Vestiture of gold. Robes of pure white wool.

John struggles and honestly, Hollywood has cheapened this description. We were better off forming images in our imagination before Hollywood got involved. Satan working with Hollywood has us thinking, gosh, maybe there are space ships and glowing people from other planets. That's satanic.

This image is of the Glorified Christ who sits at God's right hand waiting while the world rages through it's allotted time while Christ gathers in those

who will belong to Him from among all the tribes and ethnicities on this planet that belongs to Him.

When He is finished with the final number of the church, He will return and remove His bride from this planet, and the 7 remaining years of Jacob's trouble, the apocalypse will begin.

We will be whisked off to glory with new bodies, like unto His glorious body, and will be His bride at His wedding feast, and we will feast at His table while the world will fully rage in all of its fury against Him.

Then He charges out of Heaven in Revelation 19 and judges this world and crushes the nations and sets up His rule on earth with Satan deposed and imprisoned for a thousand years.

26 *“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”* Indeed!

Let me take you to one other post resurrection post ascension view of Jesus in His glorified form after He ascends into heaven and God's right hand. Revelation chapter 5 is the vision of the resurrected Jesus receiving the title deed of the earth.

Full ownership. Satan has stolen it. Jesus will receive it back in full. The roll sealed seven times is the deed to this earth. Listen as I read Revelation ch. 5.

1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” 3 And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. 4 And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it; 5 and one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as

to open the book and its seven seals.” 6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. 7 And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying,

“ Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 “ And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

11 And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice,

“ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying,

“ To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

14 And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

These visions are of Jesus after He leaves this earth in His first incarnation of humility. We too often think of Him as gentle Jesus meek and mild who walked about on this earth in His humility someone just like us who we wouldn't think twice about if we saw Him from a distance.

We long for the day when we shall see Him face to face in His shining blazing glory. John says in his first letter;

1 John 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

When we see Him, we will be like Him. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, a microsecond, we will put off this old flesh and be changed into our glorious new bodies.

Recall in Revelation chapter 5, the myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands who say with a loud voice, Worthy Is The Lamb! . . . that's us. We'll be there on that day. We're included in that number.

We long for home. I want to close our lofty thoughts this morning by reading to you Psalm 110 in it's complete form;

1 The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand,

Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”

2 The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.”

3 Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power;

In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,

Thy youth are to Thee as the dew.

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

*“Thou art a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”*

*5 The Lord is at Thy right hand;
He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.*

*6 He will judge among the nations,
He will fill them with corpses,
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.*

*7 He will drink from the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He will lift up His head.*