

Luke 24:50-53

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Acts 1:9-14

⁹ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." ¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Well, this is it. This is our final look at the book of Mark in our two and one half year series. By now we should have a very basic understanding of the Gospel, one that prepares us **to obey** what Christ said.

We watched as Christ was born and grew. Eventually He began His ministry. We watched as He selected the 12 He was going to disciple. We got to know them one by one. We watched the group dynamics of these common selfish men as they learned how to follow Christ. We were relieved at some points to realize that we are a lot like they were. They weren't super spiritual. They weren't even impressive. And they were all very different.

We saw that the disciples were always kept off balance. They would make suggestions thinking themselves to be very spiritual and they would find out they were completely off base. And then they would blurt out simple expressions from **who they were** and Christ would respond with great endorsements.

We watched Christ disrupt everything having to do with false religion. He took on the leaders, never backing down from their threats. He told the truth to them, knowing it would cause them to try to kill Him. He shut down their money machines twice. And He actually had a few opportunities where **He broke through** to a few of these religious big shots.

We watched as Christ performed miracles, showing Himself to be Lord of the land and the sea, the demons and the angels, matter and time. There was nothing He couldn't do and He did all things well.

We listened to Christ teach, and we recognized even in our own souls that His words have authority. He taught us how things **really are** as opposed to how we are **prone to see them**. He taught us the meaning of true spirituality.

And then, as He put **His money** where his mouth was, Christ took upon Himself all of our sin and accepted the terrible penalty for **our sin** on Himself. He is the only one who ever had the right to say of anything that happened to Him, **"I did not deserve this"**. But He also could **not say** "I didn't sign up for this". He did sign up for it. So Christ died by the will of the Jewish leadership and it was carried out by the hands of the Romans. But ultimately it is **we** who put Christ on the cross. All humanity had a part in the murder of our creator. Because that is what we are like apart from the grace of God. We are prone not to want a yoke on our souls. We want to be our own god. But Christ took our place anyway. And He calls us to Himself, to receive from Him the forgiveness of our sins.

We have gone on this wild ride as the followers of Christ heard the unbelievable reports of Christ's resurrection. And then wonder of wonders, the disciples got to meet their risen Lord. They even had a few meals with Him. And He taught them. He gave them the final crash course needed to take them into the next epoch of time, the last days.

This has all been accomplished. It has now been 40 days since Christ rose from the dead. They had started in Jerusalem. Then they had gone to a mountain in Galilee. And now they are back at Jerusalem.

We will start with Luke's account and then we will go to Acts, since Acts gives more details.

Luke 24:50-53

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

Acts tells us they returned to Jerusalem, so it must be that is where they were staying before coming out to this spot. Remember Bethany. This is where Lazarus and Mary and Martha were from. Also Simon the prior leper must have also lived around here. Bethany was over the crest of Mount of Olives. So you could not see Jerusalem from Bethany or vice versa. The Mount of Olives was a hill that overlooked Jerusalem. It was about 200 feet taller than Jerusalem. From the Mount of Olives one would walk down into the Kidron Valley and then back

up the other side to Jerusalem. The walk could be done on the Sabbath so it was from about one half to three quarters of a mile.

Our text goes into a lot of detail to let us know exactly where this took place. It was a real event in time and space reality.

Luke tells us Christ led them from Jerusalem as far as Bethany. So they would have had an energetic walk. Then as He stood in front of them He lifted up His hands and blessed them. A blessing like this would be God's pronouncement of favor upon them.

Here is an example of a famous blessing.

Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ "The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; ²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace." ¹

You know, as people I think we have a very difficult time having the proper view of Christ and of God. We tend to the wrong extremes.

There are some of us who have a hard time imagining **God actually blessing us**, actually conveying his favor and love toward us. There are others of us that cannot imagine Him **withholding His favor** toward us. These folks would be surprised that God **would not bless us**, no matter how they have lived.

The first tendency would be found in people who can easily picture **Christ as Lord**, but cannot really imagine Him in the **role of Savior**. We cannot imagine that He would truly love us to the place where He would spend Himself for us. God will deal with these kinds of people by calling upon them to believe what He says about His love. God means every word He says about His love for His children.

And it may take a while to get it through our thick heads. But He does **expect us** to take it by Faith that Christ truly does love His children and wants to bless them.

The second tendency is found in people who like the idea of Christ as Savior but have never really grasped the concept of Christ as Lord. They believe that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives, but they do not grasp the Holiness of God. They don't get the idea that Christ saves them to issue in the process of them becoming obedient servants of His, for their good and for God's glory. God will get these people's attention, often when their lives fall apart and they are convicted of their sin.

Whatever the case, here was Christ doing his last act as an inhabitant of this planet for now. And what He was doing was granting a blessing upon His children. That is just like Christ.

⁵¹ Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

So while Christ was in the middle of blessing these people, probably as He was still talking that He was **carried** up into heaven. Acts says He was **taken**. It looks like this is something that His Father **did to Christ** rather than something Christ **did to Himself**.

Isn't it good to know that this same fate awaits us all. We don't know exactly how it works out. But we do know that we will be risen from the dead and we will rise. How and to where? Does it really matter? That it will happen is the most important thing.

We do not need to live like those around us who have no hope, those who don't believe anyone will move in their behalf after death. We have a wonderful and certain hope that **Christ will move us on our behalf**. And just as the Father raised Him from the dead and then into heaven, we too will be raised to a spot of never ending blessing.

⁵² **And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,** ⁵³ **and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen**

The word used for worship here means literally to kiss the hand. It is normally used to show reverence, respect or to make supplication. It is the inferior bowing to the superior. It is showing the homage to one of superior rank.

These people understood the Lordship of Christ. They understood His right to rule their lives. And as Christ raised from their presence, they understood what it all meant. This was the Lord Jesus Christ that was raising. Their lives would forever be lived in to submission of this Master.

We sometimes think we are worshipping God by having good and positive feelings toward God. We might start our worship first by asking ourselves, do we recognize Christ as the rightful master of our lives? Do we view our lives as slaves to dictator Christ? Does He really have the right to tell us how to think, how to live? Does He have the right to say- do this and don't do that. The kind of worship these believers were giving **starts there**. It goes farther than that. It appreciates all of the attributes of our wonderful savior. But it begins with respectful submission.

And look what is coupled with that worship. These people were returning without Jesus to a place they were very familiar with. It may be the same upper room that Christ had communion with them before His crucifixion. They were without Christ but they had great joy. They had great joy because they had seen Christ ascend to heaven. They knew where Christ was going.

Now let's jump to our Acts text to pick up some nuances that Luke left out.

Acts 1:9-14

⁹ **Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

Luke, when writing in Acts gives more detail than He gave in the Gospel of Luke. It is quite likely that is because He planned it this way. If it were written today one might think he did this to sell more copies of his second book, but we know that wasn't Luke's motivation.

While the disciples were watching, Christ was taken up and he disappeared into a cloud. My guess is that this was done for a dramatic effect. Think about it. Christ could have easily disappeared, just like He had been doing lately. But how encouraging to the believers would that have been? God was doing something different here, I think, in an effort to make the point to these guys that Christ is now gone. He isn't going to just pop back in suddenly. When He comes back, it won't be in the center of a locked room with no one's notice.

No, when Christ comes back it is going to be the biggest deal ever. No one's arrival will ever be more dramatic and climactic than Christ's return.

¹⁰ **And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,**

The word for looked steadfastly means that they were just staring into the sky for a long period of time. It is the aorist tense so it is once and done. They looked and they locked on. They fixed their minds on it.

Just think about what these guys had experienced. They were just fishermen for the most part. And they had seen things that no one in earth's history had ever seen. They had been privy to what the God of Heavens was doing on planet earth. They had lived at the spiritual apex of all redemptive history. Wow. Here was the one they loved, respected, and probably feared some, leaving them for the last time. At least for a while. It was the end of life as they had come to know it. It had to be very hard watching Him go. He was their security, their direction, their mentor, their philosopher, their spiritual guide, their corrector. He was all that and more. And He is leaving.

So there they all stand, probably looking up with their jaws gaping.

And here come the angels again. Suddenly the angels are standing there as part of the crowd. I doubt that these fishermen and friends ever really got used to heavenly beings showing up whenever they felt like it. This was probably still a bit eerie to them. Here are the men in white apparel. They may or may not have known they were angels right off.

¹¹ **who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**

Notice that they are addressed as men of Galilee. All of Christ's disciples were from the Galilee region except for Judas who was from Judea. All that are left are from Galilee.

Now the angels ask “Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?” Remember another question angels had recently asked? Why do you look for the living among the dead? That was a mild rebuke and so is this.

This gaze that the disciples were doing was a long gaze, the kind you would have if you were losing someone.

When I read what the angel’s question here I think of Carla when she will ask me, “don’t you have something better to do?” She usually asks this when she thinks my current endeavor may not be as important as some that might be on her list. So the angels might be inferring, why are you wasting time looking at something that is no longer there?

Now the angel didn’t just ask the question. He gives an answer to why the question might be appropriate. He gives them more details to base better decisions on. He effectively tells them something they could better be doing.

This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

We learn several things here. We learn where Christ went. We learn that Christ is coming back. We learn the method of His return.

This is extremely helpful information for the disciples. I would think they already assumed that Christ was being taken into heaven to be with His Father. This confirms that. And they heard that Christ would return. But knowing **how** Christ was going to return is very useful information.

Christ is not going to just show up in one of their meetings some day. It isn’t going to be a casual event. His return is going to be very visible.

Christ had already told them this before, but the review had to be helpful.

Luke 17:22-25

²² Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see *it*. ²³ And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after *them* or follow *them*. ²⁴ For as the lightning that flashes out of one *part* under heaven shines to the other *part* under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. ²⁵ But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

There is nothing subtle about what Christ describes here. When Christ returns, the world will know it.

Matthew 24:30

³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matthew 26:64

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "*It is as you said*. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you

will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Revelation 1:7-8

⁷ Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End*," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

And Zech 14:4 prophesies that not only will Christ return like He departed. He will come back **WHERE** He departed.

Zechariah 14:4

⁴ And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, *Making* a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south.

One thing is for sure. Christ will return.

I saw a bumper sticker that said, Christ is coming back soon. Look busy. While that was intended to be funny, the truth is that **since Christ is coming back** we have a lot to be busy about. And I think these angels were inferring as much. There is much to be done to prepare for the Lord's return. We have a mission to carry out. That is one of the last things Christ told the disciples before He left. So it isn't like the mission **is over** for these disciples or us because Christ left. The truth is the crux of their ministry was just about to begin. Things are going to get very interesting very quickly.

There is an obvious application point here for us. Do you expect Christ to return? Are you living as if He actually will?

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son of Alphaeus* and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son of James*. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers

I hope this upper room was pretty big. That's a lot of people. And they were staying there. Women, how would you feel if you were housing all these people? Notice who is there. We have the disciples. We would have expected that. And the women can't be left out. They were as loyal to Christ as could be. And Christ

has already shown that He likes to sometimes reveal Himself through the ladies, singling out their importance.

We have Mary, the mother of Jesus. John is there to look after her as well. But there is a surprise here. It isn't one I remembered.

Jesus's brothers were here. Remember that Christ's brothers didn't believe on Him early on. Well in First Corinthians we saw that Christ revealed Himself to James, probably His brother. As a result of that, probably, James believed and then so did the rest of His brothers.

If you are in a family where not everyone believes in Christ, never give up. You never know what God may accomplish.

What we have here are Christ's closest followers. What an unlikely group. But here they are all together. And look what they are doing. Look how they are living. And now we will hop back to Luke for some information as well.

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication

Luke 24:53 And they worshiped Him, ...with great joy,⁵³ and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.

This is what happens when God grips the life of a person. This is what happens when they have true faith. This is what happens when they love Christ and they really expect that He is going to come back.

Look at this one statement- **these all continued with one accord**. If you want to see evidence of a miracle, here it is. All of these people shared the same priority, the same mindset. They were unanimous in their decision making. It is hard enough to get that in a marriage between 2 people. Here it is in a church. No wonder they could all live in the same room. These people got pure Christianity at its finest. They were all walking with the mind of Christ. And they hadn't even had the chance to read Philippians yet.

Philippians 1:27

²⁷ Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

Philippians 2:2-8

² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

When Christ is the Lord in the lives of the believers at Ferndale Church, we have this potential, this capacity. We too can place the good of Christ and the good of each other above our own personal interest. And we can know one thing for certain, when that happens, God is at work in those people. That kind of Christianity isn't fake and hypocritical. That attitude is a miracle.

These all continued with one accord in prayer

They were also in prayer. They were talking to God. Why? Maybe just because they missed Him? They missed His presence? These men actually knew what it was to talk to God. They had done it for 3 years. Now they need to pray to ask Christ what to do. They had to ask Christ for guidance. They had to ask Christ for wisdom. They prayed. And Churches who are serious about their mission have always prayed, individually and corporately. We still meet at our house on Tuesday Evenings at 7pm if you want to pray together. But even if you don't want to do it together, it is vital that we are all calling out to God. If the disciples needed Christ, we certainly need Him more.

and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.

This opportunity is not going to last forever. But for now they are going to go where God has made His presence known. But it is interesting. I wonder what they made of the temple curtain being ripped. Did they understand that this was no longer a special building? Maybe they did. But it was the center of the worship for God. That is what the temple has always been for these people. So they go back to the temple and worship Him. But think about what they were probably saying. Do you think these people could worship God without bringing up the name of Jesus? I seriously doubt it. These followers were probably proclaiming the name of Jesus at the religious center of the Jewish nation. They are doing a work to prepare for revival, and they probably have no idea that is what is happening. They were just being genuine with their heartfelt worship toward God. What a wonderful thing.

We cannot end our study of Mark without comparing where the followers of Christ ended up at the end of Mark and where we have ended up.

Here are a group of very divergent individuals. And what has the influence of Christ, even before Pentecost produced in them?

They are continually

In one accord

In prayer

Praising and blessing God

If someone was watching us and listening to our private conversations and seeing what we do when no one is looking, would anyone describe us as being continually:

In one accord

In prayer

Praising and blessing God?

How would they describe us?

If it is different than these people who had just fully experienced the grace of Christ, maybe this is time for repentance. It is time for change. It is time to become again enthralled with our Savior. It is time to direct our lives into the only purpose that exists forever. What do you think?

We don't want to leave this book without ending up where the people in it did.