

# The Great Story which never ends

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we're going to come to our Bible reading, which you'll find in Luke's Gospel, the very last chapter of Luke, Luke 24, page 885, if you're using the church Bibles.

We're returning to David next Sunday, but for our Easter Sunday evening, we're going to be looking at this wonderful passage in Luke.

Just a quick word to put it in context. Luke has three resurrection stories, and he concentrates on the beginning, the first day when Jesus rose, and on the day at the end of the 40 days when he ascended into heaven.

First incident is when the women go to the tomb and find it empty, as does Peter. It's a passage, in fact, that Willie read this morning. Then there is the great story that follows the road to Emmaus, wonderful, beautiful, moving story.

And it's that story that's just ended as we come to our reading in verse 36. The two on the road to Emmaus, having realized that the stranger is, in fact, Jesus himself, risen from the dead, return with great excitement to Jerusalem and to the other disciples who also believe that Jesus has risen from the dead.

[ 1 : 18 ] So we're going to read from verse 36 and to the end of the chapter. As the disciples 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. He said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do thoughts 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 marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat?

He gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it before them. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.

And 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.

[ 2 : 35 ] And he said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

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.

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. And they were in the temple, blessing God.

And he blessed it indeed to our hearts. Now, perhaps you could have your Bibles open, please, at page 885. And before we look at this, we'll ask the Lord's help.

[ 3 : 41 ] Let's pray. Father, as we turn from the praising of your name to the preaching of your word, we ask indeed that you will open our minds to understand the scriptures, that like the two on the road to Emmaus, our hearts may burn within us, as the living Lord reveals himself through these words by his gracious Holy Spirit.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. A number of years ago, the book at the top of the best-selling lists for a great many weeks, indeed I think a few months, was The Da Vinci Code.

Some of you may have read it. It's a book that is not a bad thriller in itself. Indeed, the first two chapters are rather good. But the point about *The Da Vinci Code* is not only is it ridiculous rewriting of the gospel, telling us that Constantine, the Roman emperor, actually arranged the canon of the New Testament, and that, of course, there is no cross and no resurrection, and that Jesus married Mary Magdalene.

And the only way in which his influence continues is that there are probably descendants of that marriage walking the earth today, probably in France. But it's an appalling anticlimax.

If you've read it, you'll know the story fizzles out. Fizzles out in a kind of banal emptiness. What a difference from Luke's gospel.

[ 5 : 26 ] I'm calling this *The Big Story That Never Ends*. You know, *The Big Story That Never Ends*, which no one on earth has read, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

It's not the first time you've heard that quotation from this pulpit. Probably not the last time, and not just from me either. But anyway, *The Big Story That Never Ends*, because of the cross and the resurrection.

Unlike the *Da Vinci Code*, this story is going somewhere. Something is happening. And just a couple of things before we look in more detail. This is a real historical event.

Or more exactly, two events. Because as I said before I started the reading, Luke takes us right from the beginning, from Easter Day itself, to the ascension.

The day of resurrection becomes the day of ascension. In between, he gives us stories that give us the essence of that event. If you're familiar with Luke's gospel, you know it's way back in chapter 9, verse 51.

[ 6 : 32 ] Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem, where these events were going to happen. And Luke says, When the time came for him to be taken up.

Now that's got two meanings. First of all, taken up on the cross. Lifted up on the cross. As John puts it, drawing all men to himself. All people to himself. But also, this is taken up into glory.

The cross and the glory. He's not just survived death. He's not even just conquered death. He's gone to a realm where there is no death.

And one day, that realm of the new heavens will join with the new earth in the glorious new creation. That's the first thing. It's a real event.

But it's not just a real event. It's not just history. It's a message to proclaim. Verse 47. Forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed.

[ 7 : 30 ] It's a message to proclaim. In his name to all nations. So we're going to focus then on the living Lord. Following on from verse 5 of the chapter.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Said the angels at the empty tomb. We're going to look at this story. It develops in three movements.

First of all, meeting the living Lord. Verses 36 to 43. Meeting the living Lord. Now the scene is an animated conversation about the astonishing events.

The disciples were gathered in the upper room. They were talking about what Mary Magdalene and the other woman had seen. They were talking about what Simon Peter had seen. And just at that moment, as they were discussing, there burst in on them the two disciples who had been with Jesus on the Emmaus Road, telling them the same story.

And suddenly, Jesus himself stood among them. Though no one had seen him come, Aslan stood among them, as one of the *Narnia* stories said.

[ 8 : 40 ] So the risen Jesus is there, the living Lord. Please notice two things about this meeting with the living Lord. First of all, there's a mistaken reaction.

Why are you troubled? Verse 38. I am not a spirit, he says. Verse 39. A spirit does not have flesh and bones.

This wasn't the first time they'd made that mistake. Back in the scene on the Lake of Galilee, when Jesus walked on the water, anticipating, of course, his resurrection power, he had made that same mistake.

They thought he was a ghost. You see, all these stories are telling us something very important.

This is not wish fulfillment. Some of the commentators tell us, and some theologians want to tell us, that what happened was, they were all so desperate to see him, that they imagined they would see him.

None of them expected to see him. None of them really believed he would rise again. That's why in Matthew, we read about the various stories that were told.

[ 9 : 50 ] You know, his disciples have stolen away the body, and so on. And in the 19th century, there was quite a fashionable theory that Jesus had not actually died.

He had simply fainted, and in the cool of the tomb, had come to life again. His disciples had helped him out of the grave. Now just imagine, somebody who had gone through the agonies of crucifixion, to convince his followers, not only that he had survived death, but he was the Lord of life.

That story, that story is absolutely unbelievable. I think, I think the silliness has reached new limits in a book that was recently published on the so-called Turin Shroud.

So you'll have heard of the Turin Shroud, reputedly the burial cloth in which the body of Jesus was laid, and which throughout the centuries kept on appearing and disappearing, and is, of course, in Turin, hence the name.

This book argues that actually the disciples did not see the risen Lord Jesus Christ. They actually saw the shroud, and because his face was impressed on this, they believed that he had risen.

[ 11 : 07 ] Now, like all these theories, that's far more difficult to believe than to believe the simple fact that he is risen. Why was he able to appear in the room?

Without anyone knowing. It doesn't actually say he passed through the closed doors or passed through the walls, but think about it for a minute. As Willie was saying this morning, we'll come back to this shortly, the resurrection body is not something ethereal and ghostly.

The resurrection body is more solid than this. Why do you think the stone was rolled away? Not to let him out, but to show he wasn't there any longer.

This is the power of God. But the disciples were skeptical, as Jesus' disciples, like us, are so often skeptical. So there's a mistaken reaction.

But secondly, there's a marvelous reality. Verse 39. See my hands and feet. It is I myself, a spirit does not have flesh and bones.

[ 12 : 13 ] Those wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified, as we sang. This is the same body which had hung on the cross and lain in Joseph's tomb.

This was the body that stood among them and stood before them. And to remove all doubt, he asks for a meal and eats it. This is, I mean, isn't this the wonderful thing about these stories?

There is the shattering power of God that breaks into and breaks through time and space. There is a simple request. You've got anything to eat. This is so wonderful, the bringing together of the eternal, of the heavenly, and of the earthly.

And this also points to the new creation. Because in the new creation, we'll have bodies like that as well. Philippians 3, verses 20 and 21, says, we await a Savior from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

Now, that's something which is wonderful beyond our imagining. At the moment, we are in the shadowlands. There is a deeper country.

[ 13 : 30 ] The big story. When we begin ourselves, when we join ourselves into that big story which no one on earth has read, we at the moment, in the title page and the contents, we will discover just how wonderful a thing salvation is.

Meeting the living Lord. That's the first emphasis of Luke here. Now, secondly, in verses 44 to 49, learning from the living Lord.

Now, notice, he reinforces and expands what he said on the Emmaus road. Back in verse 27, just across the page, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

This is what he does here as well. Verse 44, 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.

That's a very interesting verse and these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. You notice he doesn't refer to the Sermon on the Mount. He doesn't give them a digest of what he'd said on the Sermon on the Mount.

[ 14 : 45 ] He doesn't give them a summary of the Upper Room Discourse, John 14 and following. He doesn't, he doesn't in effect say, you don't need the Bible now, you've got me.

What he says is something far different. He says, you will never understand me. You will never come to know me. You will never be able to proclaim me unless you know the scriptures.

So here we've got a continuing story. The three parts of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the first and the authoritative revelation on which everything else in the Old Testament flows. The prophets, that includes what we call the history books, showing God at work in history. And then the Psalms, that's the beginning of the vision of the Hebrew Bible called the writings, which includes the wisdom books, which includes, and also books about the exile and its aftermath and so on.

The whole Bible presenting a whole Christ to produce whole Christians. That's what Calvin, and I think it was originally who said that. If you want to know the Lord Jesus Christ, you will not know him apart from the scriptures.

[16:00] Now, of course, you can read the scriptures and not find Christ. You can read the scriptures simply for interest. Remember a guy who was with me when I was training at theological college said, I read my Bible for poetry and for inspiration.

I didn't read it to learn how to be right with God. Simply, you read it in the way that you might read a book of poetry or listen to music.

Now, of course, there's poetry in the Bible. I'm the first person to emphasize that. Music is wonderful. But this is a life-changing message. And why is it so?

Because that death was planned before the worlds were made. Peter talks about the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

The pattern of the Old Testament. Christ should suffer and rise. You see, the pattern of sin and death that you get all through the Old Testament.

[17:07] Death. There is a death here which destroys death and forgives sin. and rise. The pattern in the Old Testament. The death of being expelled from Eden at the very beginning and the dawning of hope.

The descendant of the woman will crush the serpent's head. The death of the nation as it goes down to Egypt. Book of Genesis ending with the phrase in a coffin in Egypt.

That's pretty desperate. But here's something it makes sense of all these things. In a coffin in Egypt the nation scattered in exile in Babylon when it comes back a pathetic run.

This makes sense of it because we believe in a God who knows his way out of the grave. That's what the rising of Jesus shows. And it's not just true history as I say.

It's life changing proclamation. Notice verse 45. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. We must read and study the scriptures.

[18:15] But we mustn't make that a private hobby. We mustn't make that something we simply enjoy for its own sake. That leads to repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

So we have the continuing story and we have the coming spirit. Verse 48. 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. This spirit promised in the Old Testament. Jeremiah and Ezekiel talk about the new covenant when the spirit will be poured out.

Joel talks about the spirit being poured out on all flesh. This is the promise of my father. At the very beginning of the gospel John the Baptist had said he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

That's not two elements the Holy Spirit and fire but the Holy Spirit who is fire in other words the Holy Spirit who is God himself because fire is one of the symbols of God.

[19:26] You'll be clothed just as in Romans 13 Paul says put on the Lord Jesus Christ. we cannot be witnesses unless we have a message.

We have to have our minds opened. We have to study the scriptures. We cannot have a mission either unless the Spirit is with us. Unless the Spirit takes these words and applies them.

The living Spirit who takes the written word and leads fully and faithfully to the living Lord. So we have meeting the living Lord. We have learning from the living Lord.

Then in the last few verses 50 to 53 we have worshipping the living Lord. He led them as far as Bethany.

Here's another detail that shows us the historical nature of this. If you had been a novelist writing this story, if you wanted to dramatize this story, you wouldn't have had him leading them out as far as the Bethany.

[ 20 : 30 ] You had leading them to Pilate's palace, to the high priest, to those who had rejected him and put him to death. No, he leads them as far as to Bethany.

With all its homely and dear association with Martha and Mary and Lazarus, John tells us that this is a home he loved to go to and loved to be in. On the east slope of the Mount of Olives.

The time will come of course when Herod and Pilate and Caiaphas and others will see his glory. When John tells us in the book of Revelation see he is coming with clouds and every eye will behold him those also who pierced him.

But that time is not yet. And once again there are two things in this part. First of all a high priestly blessing. He lifted up his hands and blessed them.

Now once again the old testament gives us background on that which is hugely important. At the end of the day of atonement the day in Israel's year when the sins of that year were covered.

[ 21 : 42 ] At the end of that the high priest lifted up his hands in blessing as a signal that the atonement had happened. You see what's happening here the great high priest lifts up his hands because he has accomplished the once for all sacrifice the sacrifice that cannot be repeated and to which nothing can be added.

His work on earth is finished. So it looks back. It also looks forward to his continuing work. As the great high priest lifts his hands we remember the words of Hebrews we have a great high priest who has gone into heaven Jesus the son of God let us then come with confidence to the throne of grace work on earth finished that work which can never be repeated but his work continues in heaven he raises his hand in blessing Jesus the great high priest so we have the high priestly blessing the gospel began with a failed priest it ends here with the great high priest lifting up his hands and the second element we have is heartfelt worship this word worship is hugely hugely important this is the word that makes all the difference between those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and those who don't question is do you worship Jesus not do you admire him not even do you love him not even is he hugely but do you worship him in other words do you believe that this man is truly God that in this man dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form remember Luke's gospel like all the gospels has continually asked the question who is he and over and over again answers have been given there's no doubt now who he is as they worship him the Lord from heaven the son of man the last Adam that's who he is gathering up all those pictures from the past and focusing them in this unforgettable moment now when of course he was taken away from them to the cross they wept bitterly this time they rejoice because he's entering the heavenly temple

Luke began his account really with Jesus in the temple hearing and answering questions now Bethany was immediately opposite the temple the great temple which Herod had built and many many travelers of the time talk about how magnificent it was many travelers say that when the sun shone it you couldn't bear to look at the splendor as he looks at that temple which is now a thing of the past the temple which is going to be destroyed by the Romans he is entering the heavenly temple the great story goes on and notice those are two phrases they worshipped him and they blessed God so I say this is bringing together the humanity the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ who is he crown him crown him

Lord of all what the disciples say and that's what his disciples today say as well that begins the great story in which every chapter is better than the one before so they were saying this morning we only have glimpses of it we're in the waiting room so to speak at the moment we're in the anteroom and God in his graciousness shines shafts of light but when we see him John says we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is that's what resurrection is about that's what resurrection has accomplished praise God Amen let's pray God our father we panic often when we think of being your witnesses in the world help us to see the great resources we have the spirit sent down from heaven and the written word which is able to make people wise to salvation so we pray that as the living

[ 26 : 29 ] Christ in heaven continues his work as great high priest that we may be able to continue ours and see many others coming into that kingdom and rejoicing worshipping him and blessing God we ask this in his name Amen man you are you know I