

# The Climax of Certainty

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning. And Josh is finishing his series through Luke's Gospel. So we're going to have two readings from Luke, one at the very beginning and one at the very end.

So please do turn in your Bibles. We have plenty of visitor Bibles scattered around, so do grab a visitor Bible if you need to. So firstly, Luke chapter 1, that's page 855. And then we'll flick to the very end of Luke in a moment. So Luke chapter 1. And the first four verses there of Luke chapter 1.

So Luke 1 verse 1. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who were from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

[ 1 : 21 ] So there's Luke's introduction. Let's flick to the very end. And we're going to read just the last three verses. This is following Jesus' resurrection and his ministry with his apostles.

So verse 50. Then Jesus 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. Well, amen.

May God bless his word to us. Well, we've dwelt over the past months on Jesus' crucifixion and then over the last three weeks on his resurrection.

But now I turn up to these last four verses of Luke, chapter 24, as we come to the climax of Luke's gospel. Now, there's no question in the world with an answer that has greater implications than this.

[ 2 : 41 ] Who is Jesus and what did he come to do? How we answer that question will determine not only the course of our lives, but also will shape our eternity.

And we cannot afford to be vague about Jesus. We cannot afford to be passive or casual or merely curious. And yet, there is great confusion in our world, and even in the professing church, about who Jesus truly is and what he came to accomplish.

We've seen that in recent weeks with the fracturing of the global Anglican communion. Sad evidence that clarity about Jesus has been lost and that some have redefined Jesus and his word to fit the spirit of the age.

But before we shake our heads at others, we must let that question turn inward. Who do you say Jesus is?

What do you understand of what he came to do? And are your answers the ones Jesus himself would affirm? And are they shaping your daily life?

[ 3 : 54 ] Because how we answer those questions is not a matter of opinion or personality. It's a matter of eternal significance. And that is exactly why Luke wrote his gospel.

He tells us that he wants to give his readers certainty about the things that have been fulfilled among us. Luke is not merely a historian recording information. He's a preacher declaring salvation. He writes not simply to inform the mind, but to convince the heart so that we would know with confidence who Jesus is and what he's come to do. Turn for a moment to Luke chapter 1.

Luke tells us he's writing an orderly account.

Verse 2, he relies on eyewitness testimony. He's dealing in real history. And in verse 4, he tells us why. That you may have certainty concerning the things you've been taught.

[ 5 : 05 ] Certainty about what you've heard about Jesus. And notice how he begins in verse 1. He writes about the things that have been fulfilled among us. Accomplished.

From the very first line, Luke's concern is not only with what happened, but with what has been fulfilled. He wants us to see Jesus as the fulfillment of everything that God has promised.

The one in whom all threads of Scripture meet. And so Luke's gospel begins with barrenness. A picture of this world without the Savior.

Barren Elizabeth and Zechariah there in chapter 1. Longing for salvation. And the long years of waiting have worn them down so deeply that when salvation finally dawns, Zechariah struggles to believe it.

And he's struck dumb. And so Luke's gospel opens with barrenness and a priest struck dumb, unable to pass blessing onto the people in the temple.

[ 6 : 09 ] But look at where it ends back in chapter 24. 24, 53, it ends. Again, in the temple. But with praise.

As God is blessed by his people. Because, verse 50, the true priest has spoken blessing over them. You see, by the end of Luke's gospel, the expectation has given way to accomplishment.

The world that once waited in silence now bursts into praise. What began with heaven descending to earth now ends with humanity in Christ ascending to heaven.

It begins with longing and ends with joy. It begins with promise and ends with fulfillment. And so Luke's aim for us, by the time we reach these closing verses, is that we would have absolute certainty that Jesus is the Christ, that he has accomplished salvation, that he does reign with authority, and that he will be worshipped with joy.

And in these closing verses, he brings his desire to give certainty to a climax by showing us, firstly, accomplishment, verse 50. Accomplishment, the priest, who blesses with certain hope.

[ 7 : 30 ] The church lives in unshakable hope because the risen Christ, our great high priest, has completed redemption, and he still extends his blessing to his people.

Look at verse 50. Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. Luke doesn't separate this from Resurrection Day.

He leaves it as the climax of his gospel. And here, the risen Lord Jesus, having prepared his followers to be heralds to the world, giving them a great mission to the ends of the earth, here he leads them to Bethany, a place they've been to before.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem in his triumphal entry from Bethany. A journey that had begun in glory as he was celebrated as the king, but he was journeying to the cross at a brutal death.

As a substitute for sin. But now, as his death has been vindicated, and as he was raised, here he is now again at Bethany, preparing for another journey.

[ 8 : 40 ] But this time, not a journey downward into the depths of man's sin. Not down the mountain. Not down into the abyss of God's judgment. But now, a journey that will see him ascend, be lifted up.

a journey that will see him depart in glory to the Father. And so, as Jesus prepares to go on this final journey in Luke's gospel, notice, what is it that he does beforehand?

He's already proclaimed peace to his disciples, verse 36, but now his final words to his followers, his final act of preparing them for their mission, to live out their resurrection faith, is to bless them.

And what's the significance of this blessing? Notice, verse 50, he lifted his hands. It's the only time we see him do this and bless people in Luke's gospel. And that language is priestly language.

It's an echo of what Aaron, the high priest, does in Leviticus 9. There, having made atonement, the high priest lifts his hands over the people and blesses them before he enters the tent of meeting.

[ 9 : 51 ] And so, what we're seeing here as Jesus does this is Jesus fulfilling the office of the great and the true high priest. He, too, blesses the people before entering into God's presence.

And so, the implication from Jesus doing this is that atonement has been made. It's fulfilled. It's accomplished.

Sin has been dealt with. Atonement was the backdrop to this blessing by the high priest. But here, atonement is accomplished in Jesus once and for all.

The other thing about the blessing proclaimed by Aaron in Leviticus 9 is that what followed it was an appearance of the glory of the Lord. And so, I take it, that is what Luke is wanting us to be prepared for.

I take it that as Jesus is carried up to heaven, that is an appearance of the glory of God. As they witness the risen Christ ascending to be the enthroned Christ.

[ 10 : 52 ] So that here, what is seen is the reality of Jesus' finished work. But the appearance of glory is not simply a passing one, a fleeting one here.

Because tied up with this passage, just the verse before, verse 49, we read of the promise of my Father, said Jesus, that I am sending upon you. That promise is the pouring out of God's Spirit that Luke goes on to talk about in Acts chapter 1 and 2.

And indeed, the appearance of the glory of God in Leviticus that comes with the high priest passing on this blessing is fire being sent down.

And sure enough, what is it that we read of in Acts chapter 2? The Spirit is poured out and it's marked by the appearance of fire. And so here, Jesus is ministering to his people, he's granting to them great assurance, final assurance, that truly, atonement, full atonement, atonement, has been made.

And there's going to be a wondrous pouring out of God's presence of Spirit upon them. Think about that for a second. To first century Jews, to those who've had the sacrificial system as a regular pattern of their lives, they were used to the regular and sensory experience of blood being shed and poured out in order to cover their sins.

[ 12 : 15 ] A regular reminder of the horror of sin. That in order for it to be covered, in order to have communion with a good and gracious God who's created everything, blood had to be shed.

You'd smell it. You'd be involved in the process of animals being brought for sacrifice. All of this speaking at the same time of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

But, here, is the risen Jesus who's been crucified as a true Passover lamb. The sacrifice who took the guilt of the whole world upon himself.

Here he is, raised, and about to ascend to the Father's side. And as he does, he speaks this great blessing, this great priestly blessing that just confirms all the more, that gives certainty that now, truly, and forever, atonement has been made.

no more blood. Because Christ has been shed. And no more barriers to enjoying the presence of God, to enjoying communion with him.

[ 13 : 25 ] Because he's going to appear in glory in the person of his spirit. And not just appear, but indwell his people. And so here, in Jesus' blessing, we can find great certainty about what has been accomplished.

We are told that, we are told the words that Aaron the high priest used to bless the people. They're in Numbers chapter 6. He would say to the people, the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. But those words conclude with God's own words where God says, I will bless them.

And that's what he's done. He has, really and truly, in the person of Jesus. He's now accomplished all that he set out to do. And his blessing is full and it's real.

Think back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke's gospel. It begins in chapter 4 with a battle in the wilderness between Satan and Jesus.

[ 14 : 25 ] A battle that Jesus comprehensively wins. But that victory is now made conclusive in Jesus' death by what he has accomplished, by the atonement that he has just made.

Or think about how Jesus began his public ministry again in chapter 4. He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and read from it about the year of the Lord's favor. And he said, today, this is fulfilled in your hearing.

The great year of the Lord's favor that would set at liberty all those who were captive, all those who were oppressed, that would give sight to the blind. It's here.

It's arrived. And as Jesus passes this blessing, he's saying, this is it. I've done it. It's yours. As he prepares to ascend, he blesses his people with a full confirmation that yes, indeed, the year of the Lord's favor has dawned.

It has been made certain for all through what Jesus has accomplished. Now, the true and greater high priest lifts his hands, scarred hands, to pronounce not a wish, but the final effectual benediction of redemption accomplished.

[ 15 : 45 ] All of this is Luke's final blast of the trumpet proclaiming certainty about what Jesus has done. The final act is the tangible sign that everything promised has been accomplished.

All the shadows of temple, priests, and sacrifice converge in the risen Jesus. The blessing signals that the curse has ended. The priestly hands, once nailed to wood, are now spread with grace. The lifted hands now bear the marks of the cross. Hands, once stretched in agony, are now stretched to pass on blessing. It's not uncommon that in our ministry staff group chat that a message appears for myself asking where one of my books is.

Many are borrowed and some of them make it back to me. I've even found one of them for sale in our book room. Maybe you've got some at home. But once I remember discovering that one of my colleagues had borrowed a book and then had given it to someone else.

She meant well. She told them, oh, you can have it, keep it. But it wasn't actually hers to give.

There's no malice in it, but it was an empty promise. She couldn't offer what wasn't hers.

[17:07] Well, how different it is with Jesus. When he lifts his hands to bless, he is not offering something that is beyond his reach or outside of his authority.

Luke wants us to have certainty that Jesus is actually able to bless. Because his words of blessing carry the full weight of what he's accomplished.

The peace he gives is the peace he's purchased. The life he gives is the life that he's secured by his death and resurrection. You see, Jesus never promises what isn't his to give.

Every blessing that he pours out is already paid for. Already his. And already ours in him. And so Luke wants us to have certainty that Jesus is able to bless, but also he wants us to have certainty that Jesus actually aches to bless.

It is the goal of all that he's done. And isn't it fitting to notice that Jesus' last act in the gospel is to bless those who would follow him.

[18:16] That's the fruit of what he's done. He wants to bless those who would follow him. He led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

Well secondly, verse 51, we see the ascension. The ascension. The king who reigns with certain authority. The church goes forward in every generation with confidence because the risen Christ has ascended to heaven not to abandon his people but to reign over them, to intercede for them and to empower their witness by his sovereign authority.

Luke's gospel began with heaven coming down, the silence of centuries was broken, angels filled the night sky, God stepped into history, heaven descended to earth as the infinite took on flesh.

But notice how the gospel ends. verse 51, with humanity in Christ ascending to heaven. The son of man who stooped to share our weakness to take on our flesh is now lifted up in that flesh to share his father's glory.

This is not an afterthought, not a footnote at the end of the story. This is the very goal to which Luke has been moving ever since chapter 9 when Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.

[19:45] Every step, every word, every miracle has been part of this great upward movement.

Down first through suffering and death but only so that he might be raised and exalted. The ascension is the climax of Jesus' journey.

Back in Luke chapter 9, Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Do you see the very pattern of God's kingdom is that the way down is the way up. the path to glory runs through the cross.

Jesus has been showing his followers that this is what it means to walk the road of discipleship, to follow him on his road to glory. That is a path of losing your life in order to gain it.

Exemplified in Jesus himself. Here at Bethany, the pattern reaches its crescendo. The one who stooped so low is now exalted so high.

[20:49] The eternal son who took on flesh that great act of divine condescension and who went still lower to the shame of the cross bearing our sin and our curse is now lifted up enthroned in glory.

You see, crucifixion gives way to coronation. As Paul later writes, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has exalted him highly.

And so this movement in Luke chapter 24 is nothing less than the enthronement of Jesus the Christ. At his trial before the council a few chapters ago, Jesus said, from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

And here, that promise is fulfilled before their eyes. He's carried up into heaven. But notice the verb. He's carried up. It's passive.

The Father himself is the one who lifts and receives the Son. This is heaven's welcome. The Father gladly receives the one whose work is finished, the one who has conquered sin and death.

[ 22 : 00 ] Here is heaven's well done. The Son who perfectly obeyed returns to his Father's joy. And it's striking, isn't it, how this moment mirrors the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

Back at his baptism, just before he goes out into the wilderness to fight Satan, the heavens opened and the Father's voice declared, you are my beloved Son, with you I'm well pleased.

Well, and how the heavens opened once again, but not to speak, but rather to receive him. Just after Jesus' baptism, Satan tried to tempt Jesus by offering him the kingdoms of this world.

He could have them in an easier way, not through the cross, but instead by worshipping the devil.

But now, at the climax of the gospel, we see that the kingdoms of this world are Jesus' by right.

Not because he has deferred to Satan, but because he's defeated him. And so the one who pleased God perfectly is enthroned beside him eternally.

[ 23 : 04 ] The same Jesus who died in weakness now reigns in power. The crucified one is the reigning one. And so the ascension is not about Jesus' absence.

It's about his enthronement. And that is where Jesus is to this very day. And friends, that is wondrous news for us. And it's wondrous news in at least three ways.

First, humanity has a place in heaven. That's what it means. Humanity has a place in heaven because where Jesus has gone, he has gone as one of us.

So that right now, in heaven, there is one who's human. Christ has opened up the way for humanity to enter into God's kingdom.

And the confirmation of that is that right now, in heaven, seated at God's right hand, is the man, Christ Jesus. Since he entered into heaven with our human flesh, Paul is able to say that there is a sense in which we have been raised with him and are now seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[ 24 : 15 ] As John Calvin says, so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our head already possess it. The full glory of redemption is that what is true of Jesus will one day be true of us.

What is true of him right now will one day be true of us. We already belong there, in him. Well, secondly, it also means that Jesus' priestly work continues.

Jesus' priesthood did not end at the cross, nor did it stop at Bethany. He acted as priest when he offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. He acted as priest when he lifted his hands on the mountain and blessed his people.

But he continues that priestly work even now entering the heavenly sanctuary to intercede for us. In Leviticus 9, the high priest blesses the people after making atonement and then he enters the sanctuary.

Luke deliberately echoes that. Here the true high priest, Jesus himself, blesses his people and enters into the heavenly sanctuary. And what does he do there? Well, the writer to Hebrews tells us that Jesus holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

[ 25 : 33 ] Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them. Friends, right now in heaven, there is one who pleads for you, a perpetual advocate, an intercessor.

Listen to Calvin again on this. He says, Jesus ever lives to intercede for us. Thus he turns the Father's eyes to his own righteousness to avert his gaze from our sins.

He so reconciles the Father's heart to us that by Jesus' intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father's throne. He fills with grace and kindness the throne that for miserable sinners would otherwise have been filled with dread.

That is the ongoing ministry of our ascended Lord. His priestly blessing continues perpetually from heaven. He reigns, he intercedes, he blesses, he pleads for you and for me.

Thirdly, the eternal rule of Jesus stands behind the church's mission. Jesus really is Lord. He rules over everything right now.

[ 26 : 54 ] Nothing happens in this world that isn't subject to his rule. Now, look back to verse 49. Jesus had said, Behold, I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you.

Stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high. This promise is echoed in Acts chapter 1 and so what we can be sure of is that the ascended Christ sends the Spirit so that the mission he's just commissioned his disciples to do will go forward.

And as the Spirit is sent, Jesus sits and reigns at the right hand of the Father. Listen to Calvin again. He says, Jesus sits on high transfusing us with his power that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with the gifts of grace, keep it safe from harm by his protection, restrain the raging enemies of his cross and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth.

In other words, Jesus' ascension is not his absence but his agency. The church's mission now unfolds under a reigning Lord. He is the one who sends his Spirit to clothe the church with power. He is the one who guards his people as they bear witness. He is the one who rules over the nations and ensures that the gospel will reach the ends of the earth. Because he reigns, his mission cannot fail.

[ 28 : 24 ] All through Luke's gospel we've been given glimpses of that authority, his authority over demons, over disease, death, nature, chaos, sin itself. But now in the ascension that same authority is vindicated and extended.

The ascension gives us certainty that his rule is established, unbreakable, and all-encompassing. He governs history and eternity. And one day that rule will be visible on the earth when his kingdom that he has prepared for his people comes in all of its fullness.

And that is certain. It will happen because Jesus reigns. But until it happens, that rule, his reign, is looted fully behind his church to protect it, to guarantee that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And it's fully looted behind his church to undertake in its mission so that the gospel will and has spread throughout the whole world. Jesus hasn't disappeared to leave his disciples to the mission he's just sent them on.

No, not at all. Rather, the church's mission now unfolds under a reigning Lord. We sometimes think, don't we, that we have greater confidence if only Jesus were still here, if he walked among us, if he were serving here in our church, involved in our church, leading our ministries.

[ 30 : 03 ] That would be the answer. But friends, that would be to forget what the ascension means. It is better that he went because now his power is not limited to one place or people.

The risen, reigning Lord rules everywhere. And so what confidence this gives to the church. What confidence it gives to us. We go out into a world that scoffs at the gospel, a world that sneers at the simplicity of faith, a world that mocks the authority of Christ.

And yet, behind every act of our witness stands the throne of heaven. Here on the cusp of the great gospel mission, on the cusp of the gospel going forth from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth, Luke shows us Jesus' ascension because he wants the church to have certainty that Jesus reigns, certainty that his intercession holds, and certainty that the church's mission will not fail.

or as Matthew puts it, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus and he says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Go therefore because of my rule and reign. And he says, behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Jesus' ascension.

[ 31 : 34 ] Well, thirdly, we see adoration. In verses 52 and 53, the people who prays with certain joy. The church's unending song arises from the certainty that the crucified and risen Christ is worthy of worship and that our highest joy is found in blessing the God who's blessed us.

Verse 52 and 53, and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke's gospel began in the temple first with the silence of Zechariah, struck dumb as a chastening lesson in trusting God's unfeeling word. And then we have the various songs, the Christmas songs, Mary's song, the Magnificat, the Benedictus and so on.

All songs that celebrated the wondrous arrival of salvation. But here at the end of Luke's gospel, we don't have particular songs.

Instead, we have the church singing in celebration and worship at the accomplishment of salvation.

At the beginning, the angels announced good news of great joy and now, verse 52, the disciples return with great joy.

[ 32 : 54 ] Luke's gospel began with worship in the temple and ends with worship in the temple because salvation has come full circle. Arrival has given way to accomplishment. The world that knew silence now sings.

The people who once longed for redemption now live in it. The end of Luke's gospel is its beginning fulfilled. Joy, praise and blessing now on the lips of a redeemed people.

And it's important to notice this. Because the church is first calling his doxology before it is duty.

You see, Jesus has given them a mission, verse 48, you are witnesses of these things.

You're to go and proclaim them to all nations. Verse 49, but wait until you're closed with power from on high. And in the interim, before the day of Pentecost when God's Spirit is poured out, what did the church get up to?

Perpetual worship, blessing God. The life of faith, the response of faith, the obedience of faith manifests in two main ways.

[ 34 : 03 ] Praise and participation, delight and duty, song and service. But here's the reality. Our service will not be maintained unless there is a song of joy that bursts from our hearts.

Because here at the climax of Luke's gospel, the great certainty is that if we've understood who Jesus is, he's worthy of all praise. Here at the climax of Luke's gospel where we've seen all the ways that Jesus has fulfilled and accomplished all that was promised, there's nothing more fitting in the world than to be given in praise to him.

Praise is the natural response of a heart gripped by the grace of the Lord Jesus. Now, not happy, clappy, concocted, sort of supercilious or disingenuous praise, but the praise of a heart that has really understood that Jesus has reached down into the grime and muck, the mess and evil of my heart, of my life.

And he, he, has pulled me out of it. Not because of anything lovely in me, but because of all that's lovely and gracious in him.

I wonder if that's something that's currently affecting your service, your part in God's unfolding mission in the world, has praise, has worship, has thanks, joy, been shunted out of the way so that your Christian life is marked much more by perspiring for Jesus, working, toiling for him, without enjoying him.

[ 35 : 39 ] When we pull out the worshiping heart of a church, when we rip out the heart that delights in having experienced grace from a Christian, then mission, then service is going to be hindered.

It'll become a slog. But when a church, when a Christian grasps the certain salvation that has been accomplished by Jesus, and not just accomplished out there in some sort of ethereal, vague, and idealistic sense, but accomplished for me, in me, then isn't that the source of missionary desire? Isn't that the source of sacrificial service? For when we grasp Jesus, grasp how he can change me and rescue me, then what relief we feel, what thankfulness is born, what joy is experienced, and it will, it does, flow out of us in mission, doesn't it?

It's very often why new Christians are the most effective evangelists in a church, because they are full of that joy and relief.

They just cannot feel to tell others about it, how it's changed them. But when that joy disappears, when it dissipates, then our service of Jesus, our participation in his mission, being engaged in ministry, it becomes drudgery.

[ 37 : 00 ] Luke's last words to his readers are a picture of what the gospel must produce. And it begs the question, if we've really understood Jesus, if we've seen all that he has fulfilled and accomplished, how could we possibly do anything other than worship him?

Praise is the proof of faith in a reigning Savior. You see, here, these disciples don't mourn his departure, they rejoice in his dominion. But maybe as you hear that, you don't feel very full of joy. You know that you should praise him, but your heart feels heavy, dry, distracted. Perhaps life right now feels a lot more like enduring than it feels like rejoicing.

Well, if that is you, take heart. Because the end of Luke's gospel is exactly for people like you. You see, the disciples, haven't they just been sad and confused and fearful and doubting and slow to believe?

Isn't that what we've been seeing over these past few weeks? And yet here they are, filled with joy. What changed them was not a sudden burst of enthusiasm.

[ 38 : 20 ] It wasn't something they generated from within. What changed them was the certainty of what they'd seen. They had watched Jesus die for their sins.

They'd touched his risen body. They'd heard his promise of the Spirit and seen his hands lifted and blessing. All of this to confirm to them the message of the Scriptures that Jesus had opened up to them. You see, their joy was not self-generated.

It was Spirit-given and Gospel-born. It was from the message of the Scriptures brought to reality, brought to bear on them. And that's where our praise begins too.

It doesn't begin in our emotions. It begins in our assurance. It's when we see Jesus as He truly is, crucified for us, risen for us, reigning for us.

That's when praise begins to rise again, even from weary hearts. When the Gospel grips us afresh, gratitude becomes the pulse that sustains our service, our mission.

[ 39 : 27 ] Praise keeps us from becoming self-reliant. It keeps our obedience from turning into obligation. Without wonder, our witness will wither.

But when joy in Christ takes root again, even quietly, even through tears, our worship will birth missionary zeal. And so the call today from Luke is not try harder to praise, but look again at Jesus. Look again at the one who has set his face toward the cross, who walked that lonely road for you, who lifted his hand in blessing and now reigns for your good.

And let his mercy warm what has grown cold. Let his finished work rest your weary soul. And from that rest, let praise rise again or perhaps rise afresh.

That's how Luke wants his gospel to end. Not with exhaustion, but exultation. Not with striving, but with singing. Because certainty in Jesus, certainty about Jesus, leads to joy.

[ 40 : 48 ] And joy in him leads to witness for him. While Jesus blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven and they worshipped him.

Let's pray. Gracious heavenly father, help us to marvel.

Indeed, never cease to marvel at the glories of Jesus. How easily we become dull, numbed to the wonders of his salvation.

May it never be so that we cease to find delight in him. But instead we ask, oh Lord, that you would grant us your grace in enabling, that we would, with ever increasing certainty, rejoice in the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, reign in Christ, and help us that we would be given in service to his unstoppable mission.

Hi, we need your help. And so we ask for it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.