

Solid Assurance for a Global Mission

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Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0:00] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to our reading for this morning. If you don't have a Bible, if you'd like to have one, one of the stewards will be glad to bring them to you. There's visitors Bibles outside. We're going to be reading together in Luke's Gospel, chapter 24. That's the very last chapter of Luke's Gospel where Josh Johnson has been preaching to us in recent times.

And we're in our third week in this great resurrection chapter, and we're going to read together from verse 36 to the end of the chapter. And boys and girls, do pay attention. Make sure your moms and dads are paying attention to the Bible reading. It's the most important part of everything that we do today.

And then you can ask them questions later on over lunch, what they learned today. How about that? So you listen carefully, and you can make sure they're listening carefully too. Luke's Gospel then, chapter 24 at verse 36.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace to you. But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

And he said to them, Why are you troubled? And why did doubts arise in your heart? See, my hands and my feet, that it is, I myself, touch me and see.

[1:23] For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And when they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat?

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

That everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. And then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

And said to them, Thus it is written, That the Christ must 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.

[2:42] And then he led them out as far as Bethany. Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

And were continually in the temple, praising God. Amen. May God bless to us these his words to us.

We'll do open once again to Luke chapter 24. Luke chapter 24. Now, how big is your vision for life? What would you love your achievements to entail in five or ten years time? What do you want to see when you look back on the next decade?

And then, how big is your vision for our church? What would you love to see this church with our particular gifts and heritage and strengths? What would you love to see us achieve in the next five or ten years?

[3:52] And perhaps even more searchingly, what do you think is possible? Because Jesus' final words in Luke's gospel are here precisely to set the focus for his people's lives.

What is resurrection faith for? Jesus lifts our eyes from the ordinary, everyday horizons. So often constrained by this world and its pressing needs.

And he shows us what is possible. And what must, in fact, be a priority for his church. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Wouldn't it stir our hearts and enthuse our souls to see what Jesus describes here in verse 47 happening more and more in our midst?

That the gospel would go forth to all the world, spread far and wide. That we as a church would be growing not because we merely crave size, but because each new row of seats, each life course, each on-board course represents real flesh and blood.

Someone's friend. Someone's father. Someone's colleague or cousin. What an immense encouragement it would be seeing those known and loved by us being baptized and professing faith.

[5:16] People who have encountered Jesus and had their eternities changed. Who've repented and received forgiveness for their sins. And wouldn't it fill us with deep joy as it does the heavens to see more people rescued by the gospel joining our church family so that we might be able to train more and send more workers out into the mission field, into Scotland, more Andrews, more Stevens, to serve and lead other churches across this land, helping others to see more people rescued.

What I've described there is the extension today of what we read here as Jesus commissions his disciples and sends out his church.

And this is no humdrum calling. It's something to pour ourselves into with all that we have and all that we are. And it will be a source of lasting joy because it is the very purpose of our salvation. It is what resurrection faith is roused to pursue. Luke's closing section, the final act of the resurrection narrative in chapter 24, brings this home.

Across these three resurrection scenes, the empty tomb, the route to Emmaus, and the appearance to the eleven, Luke has pressed the same pattern. Perplexed disciples become proclaimers.

[6:42] Sad hearts become burning hearts. And startled witnesses here become sent witnesses. And all of it happens as the risen Christ opens his word and opens their eyes.

And now Luke draws it all together. And so before he sends his disciples out on their global mission, he steadies them. He gives them something immovable to stand on.

Solid assurance for a global mission. And so firstly we see in verses 36 to 43, great reassurance. Great reassurance. Before Jesus calls us to take up his mission, he first comes to minister to us. As he commissions us for his service, he also gives us confidence in his salvation. He meets our fears with peace, our doubts with proof, and our weakness with grace.

We might think that a grand and global mission is beyond us. Well, here, the disciples are fearful and unsure, startled, frightened, doubting.

[7:51] Maybe you know that feeling. Maybe when you hear talk of mission and vision, your instinct isn't excitement, but unease. You wonder whether you're really up to it.

Concerned about what it might take, what it might cost. Perhaps you're not even sure that such things are what your faith is geared toward. But notice how Jesus prepares his disciples for a mission that will stretch to the ends of the earth.

He begins not with demands, but with reassurance. Not with condemnation, but comfort. Verse 37 tells us that the disciples think they've seen a ghost as Jesus appears in their midst.

They cannot believe it's really him. And to be fair to them, it has been quite a day, hasn't it? An empty tomb, angelic messengers, all sorts of confusing reports from women and the two men on the road.

A lot to process for those who are not expecting resurrection. And yet Jesus is patient with them. Patient with those still stumbling and fumbling their way toward grasping the enormity of the gospel.

[9:00] He does not break the bruised reed. And so we hear his question, the heart of these verses in verse 38. Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts?

Do you hear the tune? This isn't the sharp rebuke of verse 25 when he called out the foolishness of slow hearts. This is a gentle correction meant to reassure, an invitation to see that it need not be

this way.

Before he sends them to preach repentance and forgiveness to the nations, Jesus steadies their trembling hearts. And he does so with three gracious reassurances.

The first one, verse 36, peace. Peace. Peace. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, peace to you.

Peace to you. It's not just a polite greeting. It's the great declaration toward which Luke's gospel has been moving. Back at Jesus' birth, the angels announced, peace on earth, 2.14.

[10:09] Of his triumphal entry, as he approached the cross, the crowds cried, peace in heaven, 1938. And now, at his resurrection, the risen Jesus stands between heaven and earth and declares, peace to you.

The theologian Benjamin Glad says that this is the moment when heaven and earth meet. The peace that began in the manger and was secured at the cross is now applied to his people.

It is cosmic peace, the restoration of order and harmony between God, humanity, and creation.

Peace, in other words, encapsulates the fullness of salvation, God's shalom, his peace, breaking into a fractured world through the Messiah.

And so what began in the manger, peace on earth, and was anticipated in Jesus' triumphal entry, peace in heaven, now meet in the resurrected Christ who stands as the bridge between two realms. Now in the risen Christ, heaven and earth are united. And this is the culmination of Luke's theme of peace. Cosmic reconciliation, accomplished.

[11:22] The prince of peace, now bestows peace upon his people. Just as Zechariah had sung back in 179. Jesus has guided our feet into the way of peace.

What the angels sang and the crowds anticipated, Jesus now accomplishes and applies. Peace to you is the risen Christ declaration that the work is done. Glad puts it like this.

In the resurrection, the realm of heaven invades the realm of earth. When Jesus stands bodily among them, speaking peace, he embodies the union of heaven and earth, the first fruits of the new creation, standing in the midst of the old.

Now when we're watching something frightening on TV, a tense thriller, or a war film, some people don't want to look, they can't bear to look. They hide behind a cushion until someone says, it's over now.

The danger's past, the scene has changed, the storm has stilled. That's what Jesus is doing here. His friends are frightened, hiding behind fear.

[12:33] Their great hopes have been shattered in his death. They've been left wondering, what now? What next? What about God's promised Christ? And into that moment, Jesus speaks peace to you.

It's as though he says, you can look now. The worst is over. The storm has passed. The wrath is spent. The war is won. No need to be troubled. No need to doubt.

Salvation has been accomplished. It was meant to be this way. Enmity gives way to peace in the person of Jesus. And this, in verse 36, is the first time these disciples have actually heard that declaration personally.

Now, now, as they're about to be sent to proclaim that peace to the world, they receive it as a word not of aspiration, but of accomplishment.

Peace has been achieved. That's the first note of reassurance for every follower of Jesus. He comes not first to demand, but to declare, not to burden, but to bless.

[13:37] He says, before anything else, it is finished. Peace to you. And friends, as we wrestle with what we are saved for, as we feel the burden, the call of giving ourselves to Jesus' mission in this world, before we get to that, Jesus first wants us to hear this for ourselves.

Peace to you. He wants us to hear, to receive, to know his peace, to be sure and certain that he has truly achieved peace on earth and peace in heaven, all through his death and his resurrection.

So the first reassurance is peace. And the second, in verses 39 to 40, is proof.

Proof. To arrest any doubt, Jesus invites them, verse 39, see my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me. See. And this is a moment of stunning humility, of gracious condescension.

The Lord of glory stoops to satisfy the weakness of their senses. Listen to J.C. Ryle. Our Lord knew the infirmity of their faith. He condescended to their weakness, allowing sight and touch to confirm

the truth of his resurrection.

[14:59] Here is a gracious accommodation to their frailty. And it shows that faith then is not fantasy. It's anchored in reality. The same Jesus who was crucified now stands risen, flesh and bone, scars and all.

Verse 39, it is I myself. The crucified Jesus and the risen Jesus are one and the same. There was no swap.

There's no illusion. The same hands that were pierced now hold the proof of redemption. And this matters because it grounds salvation in history, not in imagination.

We are not saved by ideas or feelings, but by facts. The fact of a real savior who really died and really rose again. And notice what this reveals about Jesus' character.

He knows our need for tangible reassurance and he meets it. Listen to Ryle again as he speaks about dealing gently with weak disciples, teaching them as they are able to bear.

[16:03] He says, like our Lord, we must condescend to the feebleness of some men's faith and treat them as tenderly as little children in order to bring them into the right way.

We must not cast off men because they do not see everything at once. We must not despise the humblest, most childish means if only we can persuade men to believe.

That is how Jesus deals with doubting disciples. He's not above accommodating himself to our frailty that we might be assured. The Lord knows that we can be weak and need to have tangible things that we can touch that grant us reassurance.

Real and physical things that confirm to us the reality and glory of our faith. And while we do not touch his wounds, he is gracious to give us signs that we can touch and see and taste.

That's why the Lord has given us the sacraments, bread and wine and water, visible words to help us see and touch the gospel. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, Christ has promised that his body was offered and his blood shed as surely as I see with my eyes that the bread of the Lord is broken for me and the cup is shared with me.

[17:22] Also, he has promised that he himself as certainly feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood as I receive and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given to me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ.

The risen Jesus still offers reassurances that we can touch and see means by which our faith is nourished and strengthened. Well, the third reassurance then in verses 41 to 43 the physical the physical still they disbelieve for joy it seems too good to be true and so Jesus grants one more reassurance he says have you anything here to eat?

They give him a piece of broiled fish and he takes it and eats before them now this is not a throwaway detail it is Luke's deliberate insistence on the physical reality of resurrection and therefore of salvation ghosts don't eat fish but the risen Christ does Ralph Davis writes Christianity is always like this it deals in flesh and bones and fish and nails it will not let you drift into the spiritual ether biblical faith resurrection faith is terribly crass and earthy and rightly so because the gospel is not escape from this world from these bodies but the redemption of them salvation is physical resurrection is real and the disciples must be convinced of this beyond doubt or they will never risk life and limb to proclaim it do you see Jesus gives evidence upon evidence reassurance to grant these doubting disciples the solid foundations that they need foundations that can really hold them sustain them that can really allow them to withstand the bombardments of this world because remember what Jesus has already said to these disciples back in Luke 9 he says 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 this was a present reality a burning concern for these disciples if they are to place their lives in peril for Jesus is salvation going to deal with that if they're killed what will happen and Jesus makes plain resurrection is absolutely real and physical and here lies immense comfort for us if the risen

Jesus ate food and he really did then this meal is a trailer for the great banquet to come the proof that in the new creation we will not float as ghosts but sit as guests the table of the kingdom will be filled with real laughter real food real fellowship and at its head will be the very same Jesus who gave himself for his people still flesh and bone still eating with his friends what will resurrection life be like we can say this much it will smell like supper Jesus gives these reassurances to steady his church before the church can be sent she must be sure perhaps right now your heart isn't enthused

for mission perhaps the thought of being sent feels more like a burden than a joy well Jesus hasn't changed the same risen Lord who reached out to reassure those startled disciples still reaches out to you through his word maybe you lack the surety that fits a person for sacrificial service the quiet confidence in this gospel's truth and power but perhaps that assurance is missing because you've not sought it remember what

Jesus said back in chapter 11 ask and it will be given to you seek and you'll find knock and it will be opened to you our father in heaven delights to give good gifts indeed he gives his own holy spirit so don't stay behind the cushion of fear or doubt ask him he won't give you a scorpion he delights to turn startled hearts into steady ones and steady hearts into serving ones and so we see then verses 44 to 49 the global mission the global mission the risen Jesus envisions empowers and employs his church to an expansive mission to see the world reach for the gospel the same Jesus who brings peace now gives purpose the same Lord who steadies his people now sends his people this whole chapter is building towards this commission in verses 47 and 48

[22:38] Jesus death and resurrection and what it achieves and what it demands should be proclaimed to all nations and then notice verse 48 you are witnesses of these things this is all about unleashing an unstoppable mission out into the world that is what we are saved for that is what resurrection faith rises in people and so Luke has some realities about this great mission that need to be made clear and instilled into anyone any would-be disciple and into the church the first reality the gospel is rooted in verses 44 to 46 is guaranteed promises guaranteed promises 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 here

Jesus grinds their future and their mission in the unshakable certainty of scripture once again Jesus conducts a bible study he opens the scriptures and shows how they all speak of him but of course these are not new words to the disciples they're words he'd spoken before but now in light of the cross and resurrection they ring with fresh power everything written about me must be fulfilled that phrase is loaded with certainty some of those promises have already been accomplished his suffering and resurrection stand as the hinge of history the fulfillment of redemption foretold across all the scriptures but that phrase everything must be fulfilled doesn't stop there it also looks forward beyond what Christ has already completed to what is yet to be consummated!

the same divine necessity that carried Jesus from the cradle to the cross will now carry his gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and it guarantees the glorious last day of resurrection and new creation the one strengthens the other the promises fulfilled become proof that the promises ahead are sure it's a bit like when a company gives you a free sample of something that they're utterly confident in they know that if you taste it you'll want the whole thing I was out at the shop yesterday getting groceries and they were out doing it here have a taste of this have some of this I've had to learn not to be too quick to sample these things or I'm hooked in but that's what Jesus gives his disciples here he opens their minds to see that everything about him in the scriptures must be fulfilled and they've now seen and been convinced of what has already been fulfilled a taster through Jesus death and resurrection so that they can be sure that everything else will be fulfilled too and so before commissioning his disciples Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures and to understand him he does for the gathered group what he did for the two on the road to MS he grants illumination he moves toward his people to give what they lack clarity about and confidence in the Jesus of the scriptures and all that's promised of him that's how mission begins the open bible is both the impetus for and the instrument of mission and so this first foundation for global mission is the certainty of God's word it gives confidence that we declare to this world is true what has already been accomplished and what is still promised that's why word ministry must remain the beating heart of church's life it is both our motivation and our message the bible open and our service is open with our students with our children that's what makes us missionaries it's what turns everyday believers into people concerned for the spread of the gospel whether across oceans or across office desks and it works even this week I've heard of someone among us coming to faith because they've been brought to sit under the open bible that's how

God brings illumination and life and as we train people to multiply ministry here and beyond it's this same sure word that we're passing on equipping people to teach it to live it to love it and to open it

with others to bring it to others to bring others to the place where it's open in church life there'll always be other needs that clamor for attention programs structures events but they must never choke the supply of a rich ministry of the word because where the word wins mission withers now one final implication of Jesus opening up the scriptures here is what we see in verse 46 he says thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and embedded within that is the gospel pattern the shape of Jesus life was suffering and then glory and that is also the shape of the Christian life and ministry this was always God's design though Jesus predicted it and thought and though it was written throughout the

[28:12] Old Testament few had grasped that suffering was necessary for the Christ but the cross was never a detour from glory it was the road to it and that same pattern now extends to Jesus people the message and the manner go together Luke has already shown us in chapter 9 if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me and so if we expect the Christian life to be one of unbroken ease we'll never endure the cost of gospel service if we think ministry should always be smooth we'll stumble at the first sharp stone on the path but knowing Christ means knowing a whole Christ both the suffering and the victory both the weakness and the power that is the gospel pattern we must always hold them together the missionary church will be a suffering church bearing wounds and weariness opposition and rejection but those are not marks of failure they're the footprints of faithfulness part of the tapestry by which

God prepares us for his glory part of walking the path of Jesus after him into his glorious kingdom and it's part of the picture of us being formed into a real missionary church truly walking Jesus path after him well the second great reality about this great mission and this commission is that it is all about global proclamation verses 47 and 48 global proclamation do you see that repentance for the goodness of sin should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem you are witnesses of these things and now we see that the scoop of Jesus plan bursts forth but first it is worth just noticing the content the gospel to be proclaimed is nothing less than a clear call to repentance for the forgiveness of sins Jesus necessary death really does open up the way to knowing peace with God to forgiveness but that isn't automatic such wondrous benefit it comes through repentance this great mission to the world means confronting the world with the need for repentance and that message will not always be popular will it

Jesus has already told his followers to take up their cross and calling people to repent is costly remember John the Baptist his message of repentance to Herod cost him his head but a gospel without repentance is no gospel at all as Bob File often says the surefire sign of the false prophet is that they will never tell you to change repentance is a call to change letting go of what dishonors God and what dehumanizes us but that hard call comes with the sweetest promise forgiveness restoration peace that's the content of the message it brings danger it demands change but it promises peace and so the shape of the gospel message is not clear but now let's look at the scoop of the gospel mission it is breathtaking it's to all nations and notice verse 47 where is the launch launch pad for this mission

Jerusalem Jerusalem permeates this whole chapter verse 13 verse 18 verse 33 verse 47 verse 52 Jerusalem is the place of salvation the salvation secured in Jerusalem must be sounded forth from Jerusalem and look as clear by that in both of his volumes here he says that this gospel of salvation should be proclaimed to all nations and then in Acts his second volume we see that the disciples are witnesses to the risen Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth Luke's whole gospel has moved toward this climax Jesus arrives in Jerusalem he dies there he rises there he appears there and now he sends his followers out from there and now the reality of the risen Jesus demands that the whole world is in view for this gospel mission resurrection faith is missionary faith now we can be quick to link that word missionary to overseas ministry and there was a time when

Britain sent out all manner of missionaries overseas it was in some sense the fruit of Christendom in our land so we took the gospel far and wide but the reality is that now Scotland is a country in dire need of the gospel itself of being re-evangelized re-churched Scotland's great claim to fame the world stage at present is being at the very cutting edge of progressivism which is just another way

of describing the total abandonment of God and so our church taking hold of this vision for the gospel going global will need to have a serious eye on our own city and our own nation you see the disciples didn't start with the ends of the earth they started from Jerusalem where they were and then to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth Scotland is in dire need of people encountering the gospel it's in dire need of more healthy churches that have the bible in the driving seat and so think again about what you'd love to see happen in your own life in the next five to ten years and in our church and now tie in

[34:09] Jesus' grand plan for the world this plan for you because if you are a Christian believer here Jesus has rescued you he has whispered peace to you in order to draw you into his plan for the world and so what do you want your life to be for it will be possible for us to look back for many of us to look back in ten years and have the decade marked by great career successes great progression there great family triumphs and lots of other things that the world will celebrate but the risen Jesus has far bigger plans for us than that he commissions us to make our lives about the things that will last into eternity not the things that will turn to dust and to ash the risen Jesus beckons us to be given to his mission but of course being given to his mission is being given to his church's mission and so what might we as a church be able to achieve in the next five or ten years or however long it is wouldn't it be wonderful if in that time we each had someone that we know or love who because of us and through our church's ministry has come to taste the peace of Christ and they're here with us gathering with us week by week as part of our church wouldn't that be something to look back on and rejoice in of course it would mean that our buildings being really rather full wouldn't it but what a joy that would be wouldn't it be wonderful if our prayer notes had to be expanded to a booklet because we would be able to send out more ministers to places all around

Scotland men who have trained here with us and who head out with a commitment to open up the scriptures and let the word get to work and see all manner of lives and eternities changed that is no small purpose indeed this is a purpose to fill and capture our lives to cut through the mundaneness of the job you find tedious to keep your aching body going a purpose to shape your family life and commitments around a purpose to fill your prayers it's the most thrilling demanding and lasting cause in all the world here was Jesus calling his followers his church to give their lives to this to see people come to repentance and faith to see forgiveness flood hearts and families and nations and that is to join the very purpose for which Christ died and rose well maybe you'd love to be part of such a thing but you just don't feel you'd be able to do much well notice what Jesus says finally in verse 47 at 49 he speaks of God's provision

Jesus says behold I am sending the promise of my father upon you but stay in the city until you're clued with power from on high we see that language again picked up in Acts chapter one where we read you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth here is the final reality of this global mission the mission that Jesus commands he also enables God undertakes to equip his church for his purposes the promise of the father is the gift of the Holy Spirit himself poured out in power from on high you see friends our mission is not precarious it's powered by God himself it does not depend on our wit and wisdom God himself enables it God's own spirit has been poured out to empower the church to actually realize this expansive vision and it's far more help for us to think of our place in this mission in the context of the church not how can you take the gospel to the world but how can you play your unique part in the church taking the gospel to the world and so you see holy spirit is not a substitute for

Jesus absence but it's the continuation of his presence the personal power of the risen lord in his church so that the same christ who stood in that room saying peace to you now stands with us by his spirit saying go in my power and that means this great vision is not fantasy it's not based on wishful thinking or dependent on our best strategies although they can help it's driven by and enabled by the spirit of God Jesus doesn't commission us without giving us the capacity to fulfill it do you want an illustration of the certainty with which we can take that look around the gospel truly

did go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth if you doubt that that is possible look around it's reached here it's reached us and so it can reach further nay it will reach further and so

Jesus says you are witnesses of these things let's pray heavenly father we we're so conscious of how easily we are waylaid how easily lesser things take up our energies and our thoughts and so we ask that you would grant us as a church such clarity about Jesus such confidence in his word that we would indeed be given wholeheartedly and above all else to your plans for this world grant us your grace and help that we wouldn't settle for less than this and we ask that with the help of your spirit we would be very fruitful in our ministry we ask all these things to the praise of your glory asking for your help in Jesus name amen amen