

A Full and Fulfilled Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn to our Bibles now, and Josh Johnson, who was preaching on Luke's! Gospel a little while ago, is back in Luke's Gospel for the next few Sunday mornings, and we're going to be studying together the very last chapter of Luke's Gospel. So we're going to read this morning the first part of Luke chapter 24. If you need a Bible, if you don't have a Bible with you, there are visitor's Bibles at the sides and at the back. Do pick one up and you'll be able to follow on. In those Bibles, I think it's page 884, but the very last chapter of Luke's Gospel. And I'm going to read the first 12 verses, beginning really just with the last line of verse 56, which really begins this paragraph. And the story is picked up after the burial of Jesus and the women who had gone to the tomb. And we're told that on the Sabbath day they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

But when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.

And they remembered his words. And returning from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they didn't believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves. And he went home marveling at what had happened. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

We'll do turn once again to Luke chapter 24. How do we become a people wholly given to the cause of the gospel? How can we become bold witnesses for Christ? Is there something that can truly enable, empower, envision, and equip you and me to be fruitful servants of the gospel? I imagine there are some here, perhaps many, who knew that we bear a real responsibility as Christians to be witnesses to Jesus, and yet we feel inadequate for the task, fearful, discouraged, even dejected. Of course, there will also be some who still need to grasp that we are indeed called to bear witness to the wondrous gospel of Jesus. But perhaps more commonly, we know that truth, we know that truth, and yet feel daunted or deficient when it comes to actually doing it. Is that you? Well, over the next three weeks, Luke will press into our pores, and I pray our hearts, the very real and wonderful encouragement that enables all who know the Lord Jesus to be witnesses to him. That's the thread that runs through most of chapter 24. Before the ascension, Luke gives us three episodes, the empty tomb, the road to Emmaus, and Jesus appearing to the eleven. And each of these follows the same pattern. All three begin with downcast disciples. Verse four, they're perplexed by the empty tomb. Verse 17, the two on the Emmaus road stand still looking sad. Verse 37, the disciples are startled and frightened. That's how each episode begins. But notice how each one ends. Verse 9, the perplexed become proclaimers, announcing, telling the eleven unto the rest of the risen Lord.

Verse 33, the sad become sent. They hurry back to Jerusalem to declare that the Lord has risen. And verses 47 and 48, the startled and frightened become spirit-filled disciples who proclaim the gospel to the world. And in every case, the same thing turns perplexed disciples into proclaimers.

[5 : 27] A rebuke followed by the sure word of the risen Lord Jesus. It is nothing more and nothing less than having the word of God pressed into their hearts. Look at verse 6 and 7.

Remember what he told you, that the Son of Man must suffer and die, and on the third day be raised. Verse 27, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. Verse 44, these are my words that I spoke to you whilst I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Each time, what produces real resurrection faith and real witnesses to the gospel is the word of the risen Lord Christ. And notice something striking. In Luke's account, the eleven are the last to encounter this resurrection faith. It's easy for us to think that witnessing to Jesus is really the task of the professionals, the ministers, the staff, the gifted evangelist. That's Willie's job with all of his giftedness. That's for Katie to do. She can talk to anybody. It's their job to do what feels scary.

That's not for me as a regular Christian. I've got enough to think about just getting through another week with my own struggles. But not so, says Luke. He begins with the most unlikely witnesses at the empty tomb. And then he shows us the everyday disciples on the Emmaus Road. And only then come the leaders, the apostles. Luke wants us to see that resurrection faith is solid. It rests on sound foundations, grounded in real history, anchored in wondrous hope. And it truly turns even the perplexed into proclaimers. Because resurrection faith grasps why Jesus had to die and therefore why he had to be raised. And so the first thing we see as a result of Jesus' resurrection in verses, verse 56 to verse 1, is the rise of a new world. The rise of a new world. The death and resurrection of Jesus mark the true turning point of history, the moment from which the full reversal of the fall begins to unfold. Notice Luke's emphasis on the day that this happens. The last verse of chapter 23 ends with the Sabbath, a day of rest. Then verse 1, the first day of the week dawns, Sunday. And on this single day, Luke records three resurrection episodes, one extraordinary day. Of course, we know from elsewhere that Jesus remained on earth for 40 days after his resurrection before ascending to heaven.

But Luke's focus is deliberately narrowed to this one day. Why? Because something seismic has happened. Something seismic for creation, for humanity, and even for the calendar itself. Jesus was crucified on Friday, bearing upon himself the guilt and sin of the world, the innocent becoming guilty. Then the Sabbath came and went, that day of rest and worship written into the very fabric of creation.

[8 : 58] And then a new week begins. Luke draws our attention to this because he wants us to see that this day is the first day of a new world. The first day of a new epoch. The first day of the undoing of the curse. The first day of new creation dawning. Before we look at the details of the resurrection accounts and the reactions to those present, it's just worth pausing to appreciate that.

Throughout the first half of Luke's gospel, we have glimpses and four tastes, harbingers, of what Jesus' kingdom would be like when it comes in its fullness. But those were only tastes.

Here, on this first resurrection morning, the full reality begins to dawn. The turning back of the curse, the defeat of death itself. This, Paul says, is the first fruits of our own resurrection.

This event is cosmic in scope. Even creation itself is caught up in the change. What was once the Sabbath, Saturday, is now transformed. In light of Jesus' resurrection and his appearances, it becomes clear that a new day that a new day has dawned, a new day for worship. No longer a shadowy longing for the coming of a Savior, but a day for joyful delight in what has been accomplished. So that when we worship on the first day of the week, on Sunday, our longing is now for the new creation that has already begun to dawn. Because the resurrection of our bodies is bound up with Christ's. His resurrection and ours are two movements of the same event. His resurrection marks us as being engaged to also be resurrected at the glorious last day. And so Luke begins his great resurrection chapter with this tantalizing prospect of something new, a new day, a new week, because a new world has begun. Where before we saw

Jesus performing miracles, snatching life from death and plundering Satan's realm, all the way through the first half of his gospel, Jesus did so in anticipation of the victory he would win at the cross, which would be conferred by his resurrection. James Phillips puts this so beautifully when commenting on Jesus raising the widow's son back in chapter 7, the widow's son at Nain. He writes, Christ has come in the gospel to give life to men. To be true, it was not simply by being in the flesh that he was able to do so. It is his life, death, resurrection, and ascension that constitute his saving work. And it was in the decisive battle on the cross with the king of terrors that he finally vanquished death and won the victory. But even before the decisive battle, he was using that power and exercising his lordship in an anticipatory manner, anticipating his victory, working miracles on trust, so to speak. On the basis of the victory, he was yet to win in the cross. He goes on, as we sometimes go to a store to get certain goods on account and do not pay the bill till later.

[12 : 24] So also Christ went, so to speak, into the dark store of death and said, pointing to the young man in Nain, I'll take this on account, mark it down to me, and I'll pay later. All his miracles in the New Testament were performed on this basis. And the price has been fully paid and honored.

In the death, he died. And at the resurrection, that price is shown to the world to have been paid in full. Jesus' death is vindicated. His resurrection shines forth the victory of the cross.

It confirms to the world that his sacrifice has paid the debt, that he has swallowed up death's dark sting and crushed the serpent's head. He's settled the account. Now, on this first resurrection day, a new world has begun, one in which death need not have the final word.

Here is the dawn of a whole new age, which will culminate in the full and glorious salvation promised in the scriptures, the complete experience of the year of the Lord's favor.

Or as the apostle Peter writes, according to his great mercy, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfearing, kept in heaven for you. And it is precisely this living hope that Luke wants us to trust with certainty and to trumpet with clarity. And so we see, secondly, in verses 2 to 8, the reassurance of Jesus' true word. The reassurance of Jesus' true word.

[14 : 19] The word of the risen Lord Jesus is God's appointed means of transforming people. It is the resurrection in the resurrected Jesus that brings life to the dead, courage to the fearful, and turns perplexity into proclamation.

Now, the gospel, real doctrine, always unites the facts of history with the meaning of those facts.

Actual events, real history, paired with authoritative explanation, that's what makes the gospel a message. A message that lacks either element, facts, or meaning, if no gospel at all. And so Luke gives careful details to show the facts of the resurrection in these verses.

So you see, on the first day of the week, the women, from chapter 23, verse 55, come early at dawn to the tomb. And in verse 3, they find it empty. Notice the detail Luke gives. Jesus' body was not discarded in a common pit with other bodies, as might have been usual for the crucified. No, no, we saw Joseph of Arimathea insured otherwise.

2353, Jesus was laid in a new tomb where no one had ever been placed. In God's providence, this meant Jesus' body was distinct, identifiable.

[15 : 52] 2353, Jesus was laid in a new tomb. And the women, verse 55 tells us, had seen exactly where he was laid. They'd watched what was going on, and now they return to the same tomb, one they knew well.

And so Luke also makes clear that this isn't a case of mistaken identity, mistaken location. Nor are the women expecting resurrection. They come, verse 1, with spices to anoint a corpse.

But in verse 2, they find the stone rolled away. We've seen throughout Luke's gospel, haven't we, that stones are never an obstacle to Jesus accomplishing his purposes. And yet the key point is this.

Luke is careful with these details so that the only reasonable conclusion is that Jesus has been raised. If Luke were fabricating a myth, he would never have made women the first witnesses.

In the first century, such testimony carried little weight. This would have sunk his claim, not strengthened it. But Luke records it plainly because it's the truth.

[17 : 07] Even the linen cloths, verse 12, tell their own story. If someone had stolen the body, why leave the grave clothes behind? If Jesus' enemies had taken the body to quash talk of resurrection, they would have displayed it.

But no such thing occurred. Luke's details throughout these verses, small, medical, precise, bear the marks of authenticity. Even the disciples' disbelief in verse 11 reinforces this.

They think the women's words are idle tales, literally delirium. Dr. Luke's vocabulary is showing his hand there. But why would he include that the disciples were skeptics if he were fabricating a myth?

Well, before we reach Luke's main point, we must first grasp this. The gospel is not detached from reality. It's not wishful thinking. It's rooted in real events, real history.

But these real events require real explanation. And so in verse 4, we see that the women are perplexed. Their minds don't jump to resurrection. And in their perplexity then, behold, two men in dazzling apparel stand before them, angels, as verse 23 later confirms.

[18 : 27] And Luke draws our attention to their dazzling clothing for a reason. Jesus has said back in chapter 17 that the day of the Son of Man would come like lightning.

That is the same word used here for dazzling. The angels' presence here signals that a cosmic event has taken place. An event that is ushering in that day of glory.

Also back in chapter 9 at Jesus' transfiguration, his clothes become dazzling white. That was a 40th in Luke chapter 9 of Jesus' glorious kingdom.

But now, at the resurrection, that glory breaks into history. The angels' appearance matches their message. That here before them was a great accomplishment, great progress in the advance of Jesus' kingdom.

And so the angels' message comes to these women as a message of rebuke and remembrance. So look at the rebuke. Verse 5. Why do you seek the living among the dead?

[19 : 37] If they had truly heard and understood Jesus, they would not be searching for him in a tomb. A word of rebuke.

And so often it's the same with us, isn't it? That it is a rebuke from God's word that so very often sees us make progress in our faith. A rebuke that sees God's word pressed more deeply into our hearts.

God's word so often confronts us before it comforts us. That's something worth pondering each time we are hit between the eyes by the word of God. We face a wrestle as to whether we submit or not.

His rebuke, his word, is always for our good. And that is the case here. For following the rebuke in verse 5 is verse 6. He's risen.

He's not here. And so the rebuke becomes the reminder. Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day rise.

[20 : 43] Jesus has said this plainly back in chapter 9, just before the transfiguration, and he'd said it again in chapter 18. Jesus has said at the very beginning of his journey to Jerusalem that he was heading there to accomplish his exodus, his departure.

His journey to and through Jerusalem always had a grand horizon. It always had a redemptive horizon. It was to be the means of the true exodus, the true rescue of God's enslaved people.

That's what was to be accomplished at Jerusalem. And the journey always had in view a great departure to be accomplished beyond Jerusalem. A departure in glory to Jesus' glorious kingdom.

Opening up the path, the gate, the door for others to follow him to that kingdom. And so this moment should not have been a surprise. As Jesus was raised up onto the cross, that shouldn't have been a cliffhanger.

Jesus has already said what must happen. And here at the dawn of a new world, the angels make it unmistakably clear.

[21 : 56] The climax of Jesus' earthly ministry, the heart of the gospel, is his death and resurrection. There's no gospel without them. Jesus' mission was not merely to teach, to inspire, to exemplify love.

His purpose was to attune, to bear sin, to conquer death and to redeem. His purpose was to plunder Satan's kingdom, to destroy the works of the devil, to unseat Satan, and ultimately to crush him.

Jesus' death, a real event in history, was not a tragic fall, but a triumphant fulfillment. The gospel is fact and explanation together, an event explained by God himself.

And so never let anyone tell you that this message was invented by the apostles, added to by the church. No, these are Jesus' own words. The great must of Jesus' ministry was that he must be crucified, and on the third day rise.

That is the full and fulfilled gospel, which delivers full salvation. And that was always the plan. All through Luke's gospel, we've seen Jesus orchestrate events precisely as he foretold.

[23 : 23] Remember the cult, exactly as he described. The upper room, exactly as he described. The betrayal, a Judas, all according to his sovereign hand.

The world's greatest act of evil, the murder of the sinless Son of God, was in God's design the very means of defeating evil itself, vindicating Christ and providing justification for all who believe.

This is where Jesus was always headed, to and through Jerusalem and the cross, to be raised in vindication and then to ascend in victory to glory.

And the angels helped the women see that before their eyes, God's promises and Jesus' purpose are being fulfilled. So this death is not something to grieve, because he was always going there.

But he was always going through it, to be raised in glory. And so notice, what transforms perplexity into proclamation? It is not actually a dramatic encounter with Jesus himself.

[24 : 39] He doesn't appear to them. Notice it's not the site of the empty tomb or some sort of overwhelming miracle. What is it that transforms perplexity into proclamation?

It is the word of Jesus. His gospel words that explains his death and resurrection. The explanation joins the event.

Throughout this chapter, it is always his word that transforms. It is as disciples grasp that the whole pool of the scriptures has been towards this very event.

That it is here on this first Easter Sunday that fulfillment reaches a whole new point. It is the unpacking of the scriptures that brings resurrection faith. The empty tomb alone does not produce faith.

It's the living word, fact, and explanation together that brings transformation. Friends, we do not need to wait to see the risen Lord Jesus in order for him to have his full effect on us.

[25 : 50] Nor do our loved ones need a miraculous encounter for salvation. We don't have to pray for and hope for a day when Jesus himself will walk into a room and tap your friend, your brother, your child or spouse, maybe your failing parent.

We don't have to wait for a day when he'll walk into the room and tap them on the shoulder in some splendid and miraculous way. No, Luke wants us to see that we can have full confidence in the word of the risen Lord Jesus.

Confidence that it's his gospel that testifies to the reality of his death and resurrection, but also testifies to the reason for and the result of his death and resurrection. That's what transforms.

That's what can transform lives from perplexity to proclamation. Maybe you're here this morning and you come from a place where Jesus' name is forbidden.

Perhaps you've never read much of the Bible before. Maybe you're wondering if you can get to know something of Jesus. Well, Luke shows us that if you receive the word of the risen Lord, if you take his word, if you take the Bible so seriously, you receive the very thing that has power to transform you, to turn sadness to joy, misery to mission, sorrow to joy, fear into faith.

[27 : 19] The word of Jesus truly has the power to turn our whole lives around. As Paul writes, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.

So let me ask, how often does our perplexity as Christians arise from forgetting God's word? How often do we create our own anxiety and worry because we lose sight of Scripture's perspective on eternity, on life, and on reality as God declares it?

In the wide sweep of life, the angels' announcement gives us the perspective we always need. He is risen, just as he said.

He is risen. A new day has dawned. He is risen. The first fruit of resurrection has bloomed. and when that reality fills our hearts, everything changes. Everything changes. The resource for true witness.

[28 : 35] Verses 9 to 12. The resource for true witness. The word of the risen Lord Jesus equips even the most unlikely people to take part in proclaiming the gospel and serving the kingdom.

One of the distinct features of Luke's account of the empty tomb is that he names the woman only at the end, not the beginning of his account.

He saves their names to make his point all the more forcefully. The first witnesses! The first witnesses of the risen Christ, the first to declare his resurrection, are humanly speaking the least likely.

In the first century, women were treated as insignificant. Their testimony carried little weight. But not with Jesus. And as these women remember his words, as the event of the resurrection is joined with the explanation of it, as the word of the risen Christ grips them, dealing with their perplexity and sorrow, look at what happens in verse 9.

They go and tell. They report all these things, the fact of the resurrection and the fulfillment of Jesus' word to the eleven and to all the rest.

[29 : 52] And that word told means announce, proclaim, declare. Do you see? The word of the risen Lord Jesus when received turns perplexity into proclamation, even for the most unlikely.

And now, Luke finally gives their names, verse 10. Mary Magdalene, who was once possessed by seven demons.

The number of perfection, seven. Hers was a life totally overcome by evil, possessed by Satan and his minions to the uttermost. But now, a herald of the hope of heaven.

now, announcing victory over death, over sin, over Satan and his minions.

Then there's Mary, the mother of James, very likely Mary, the mother of Jesus. Earlier in Luke 8, whilst she was waiting impatiently for Jesus, she was rebuked by Jesus as he declared that his true family, his true mothers and brothers, are those who hear the word of God and do it.

[31 : 10] You see, these are not merely women in general, and that would have been seen as limitation enough in the first century. They're unlikely women, the ones enslaved, the ones rebuked, the most unlikely of the unlikely.

And yet, Luke shows that Mary, Jesus' mother, had been long treasuring in her heart all that she'd seen and heard back in chapter 2. And he shows us that she and the others had followed Jesus' path to Jerusalem, hesitantly, yes, but faithfully and enduringly.

They were there at the cross, 23, 49, watching, but watching from a distance. And they followed that up by coming to the tomb to honor his body.

But now, at the tomb, what they see is joined to what they understand. What they see is explained by what Jesus has said. And so they move from distance to closeness, from spectators to proclaimers, from sorrow to speech, from perplexity to proclamation.

They are now at the heart of the new resurrection community, those whose faith is alive and whose lips declare, he is risen with all that that means. but notice verse 11.

[32 : 34] Verse 11 reminds us that the word of the risen Lord, powerful as it is, does not always produce immediate faith. The disciples think these women are talking nonsense, idle tales, except for one, Peter.

And it's worth us pausing on Peter. Why does Luke single him out? Peter has been among those given privileged glimpses of Jesus' power and kingdom. He saw Jairus' daughter raised at a resurrection of sorts.

He saw the transfiguration, a glimpse of the glorious coming of Jesus' kingdom. Peter saw both of those alongside James and John. Peter helped prepare the Passover room with John.

But at times, Peter himself has been honed in on. And it was Peter who was the one who grievously denied Jesus three times, just as Jesus had warned.

Peter had followed at a distance after Jesus' arrest. It was, as Jesus was being led to his trials, there was Peter at a distance following, but denying, denying, denying that he knew anything of the Lord Jesus until the rooster crewed.

[33 : 44] And Jesus turned and looked at him, no doubt, to remind Peter of the words that Jesus had spoken. Do you remember Jesus' words to Peter turn back to chapter 22, verse 32?

Jesus' words to Peter, 22, 32. I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail or fail completely. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Now, 24, 12, Peter hears the woman's report, and he rose and ran to the tomb. You can almost hear the pounding of his heart.

Is it true? Could it be true? And notice he stoops down to look inside. Remember in Luke's gospel that posture of stooping says so much.

The great thread through Luke that we see again and again that Jesus has brought down the mighty from their thrones. And he exalts those of humble estate. Jesus has been appointed for the fall and rising of many.

[34 : 57] And here Peter, the one self-assured disciple, is now humbled, stooping, looking into the tomb to see the linen cloths, evidence that death's grip has been broken, to see that he is risen.

And we see that Peter goes home marveling. Luke doesn't tell us exactly what that means. Marveling in Luke's gospel can be positive or negative. It can describe wonder that stops short of faith, or it can be wonder arising from faith.

Commentators disagree on how positive this should be taken about Peter. But either way, I take it that Peter is in the process of turning again, just as Jesus said.

Remember Jesus' words, when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. You see, the word of the risen Christ, the full and fulfilled gospel, has power not only to turn the perplexed into proclaimers, but also to turn those Satan has sifted into servants.

Here was a key point in Peter turning that would end in Peter meeting Jesus, being restored, and being commissioned to take the gospel to the world. Brothers and sisters, ministry and mission are hard work.

[36 : 20] Many of us feel unqualified, unworthy, inadequate even. I knew that feeling well. I'm sure I'm not alone. But notice what Luke is doing here. Before he gets to the Great Commission, before the disciples are sent out on their mission to the world, Luke offers encouragement not only to leaders, not only to everyday followers, believers, but to the most unlikely witnesses, to those who have been riddled by the stain of evil, to those marked by shame or failure, to those who have been rebuked by Jesus, to those who are broken, to those who publicly rejected Jesus, denying any connection with him, to those who might feel like they are traitors to him, could they, could they become faithful and fruitful witnesses?

Could they have a role? and spreading the wonder of the gospel? Could you? Could I? With all our weakness and fears and flaws, with all our limitations, well Luke's answer is clear.

Yes. Yes, we can. Yes, you can. Because the resource for true witness is the word of the risen Christ dwelling in our hearts.

The same word that turned the perplexed into proclaimers, that restored the fallen into servants. That same word still imparts people today. What is it that fuels mission in Jesus' kingdom?

It is hearts gripped by the gospel of a crucified but risen Savior. It is hearts that hear and see and grasp in the word of the gospel that Jesus has fulfilled all that the scriptures speak of so that every promise is yes and amen in him.

[38 : 15] So is there something that can truly enable and empower and envision and equip you and me to be fruitful servants of the gospel? Well let the angels tell us.

he is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, must be crucified and on the third day must rise.

Friends, he is not here but has risen. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord God, would you grant us that our hearts may indeed burn within us, that we would grasp and cherish again and afresh the wonders of Christ's purpose on earth.

Lord, be gracious to us to fill our minds and hearts with the riches of Christ's work, that we would know it and love it and be so affected by it that we wouldn't be able to do anything other than herald it.

Help us to this end, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.