

# His Final Words and Glorious Ascension

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Take your Bibles and let's go to Luke 24:36. We'll begin there and go through the end of the chapter, the end of the book. Luke 24, beginning in verse 36. Jesus is resurrected. He has been appearing to his disciples. The Gospel writers record various accounts of that. He appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus Road and he disguised himself in some form, they could not see that it was him, and then finally he revealed who he was. Then he vanished from them and so those two disciples rushed to the apostles where they are praying. They're still downtrodden and discouraged and floundering in unbelief and they begin to report what happened to them on the Emmaus Road, that they saw Christ. Then we pick up in verse 36,

36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. 41 While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; 43 and He took it and ate it before them. 44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." 50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising God.

"His Final Words and Glorious Ascension," that's the title for this last exposition from the Gospel of Luke.

First of all, let's note the doctrines that he's teaching in this final communication, at least on earth with his disciples. 1. I. His bodily resurrection. His bodily resurrection. These disciples, these two from the Emmaus Road experience rushed to tell the apostles. While they are there talking to the apostles, their hearts are full of Christ and they can talk of nothing else but Jesus. The Bible says he all of a sudden appeared in their midst. We don't know how. Walked through the wall? Just made an appearance there? We don't know. We know he has a glorified physical body and you can do things in the new glorified physical body you can't do in these fallen physical frames we are in now. So suddenly and silently he stands before them.

Now, these 11 apostles who were not on the Emmaus Road haven't seen him resurrected yet. They have been floundering in their despair and in their unbelief but now Jesus appears to them all. You know, Jesus, due to nothing they have performed and nothing they have merited, just appears to them. One writer said, "Bolts of fear and gates of unbelief are no barriers to him."

When he appears, he says to them, "Peace be to you." Now, those are four simple words but they have four tons of meaning. By Jesus appearing, proving he's resurrected from the dead, that means death is conquered. That means forgiveness is granted. And that means their eternal security is secured. Think about it: if the holy and just God forgives your offenses and your transgressions and then he has removed the barrier of death, then that is true peace. "Peace," he said, "be to you."

So Jesus comes to them from the tomb and he brings not a chastisement or a condemnation for their floundering and unbelief, he brings something else: peace be to you. What a grace. At his birth, the angel saying, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth with men whom he is well pleased." And now in his resurrection, Jesus appears to his apostles and he says, "Peace be to all of you." Then as his church and his followers, he has commissioned us to go preach this Gospel of peace unto all the world.

Two disciples on the Emmaus Road have seen Jesus. They run to tell the apostles. While they're there talking to the apostles about all they've experienced seeing Christ on the road, he suddenly appears and the Bible says in verse 37, "But these apostles are startled and frightened." One historian tells us that the Jews believed that demons could bring people back up from the dead so maybe they thought that's what was happening, demons are playing a trick on us. The Bible says they think he's a spirit, some sort of phantom, some ghost just had a human appearance but he's not really physically there. You know, when Jesus enters our life and we begin to learn about him, he sometimes startles us, does he not? Have you not sat here as we've gone through the Gospels and uncovered glorious truths about what Jesus would do and wouldn't do, say or wouldn't say? It's startling at times because he's not your Jesus, he's the Jesus. So these guys are seeing him and getting

adjusted to him being resurrected and the Bible says they're startled and they're frightened.

He tells them in 38, "Why do these doubts arise in your hearts?" They have now this mingling of faith and unbelief in their hearts. By the way, that happens, a mingle of true faith but yet struggling unbelief still remaining in our hearts. As a matter of fact, you will go to your grave or go to the rapture with some degree of faith yet some struggling of unbelief in your heart. Now, once you come to faith, you never depart from faith but you have seasons where the faith struggles. That's where they are. They believe yet they don't believe.

Verse 39 and verse 40, let's look at that together. Jesus says to them, "'Well, see My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet." So they saw him nailed to the cross. They saw the nails pierce his hands and his feet and now they look at those same hands and those same feet and they touch them and they think, "This is truly him." That's why John would later write in his epistle in 1 John 1:1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life." Why do you think these apostles against the overwhelming avalanche of harsh severe persecutions and hatred would keep going forth, writing and preaching and teaching with such bold confidence? It's because they saw him, they heard him and they touched him resurrected from the dead.

Verse 41 is an interesting verse. "While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement." So they are still there in some form of belief but now here it's a different twist. He appears to them and as if it's too good to be true. Their hearts are rejoicing but their minds are astonished. Their hearts desire to believe but their minds couldn't comprehend how this could be. They've been wallowing in fear and would not believe and now for joy they cannot believe. Have you ever been there? Something magnanimous and wonderful happens to you, it's the best thing it could possibly ever happen and you just never dreamed it would happen but it does happen and you just can't believe for joy. That's the point here.

Verses 41 through 43, "While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them." So he takes their food and he eats it. He does not eat it because he's hungry, he eats it to show that he has a literal glorified physical body. Now, let me just say a word to you about the importance of that doctrine. If Jesus did not literally physically actually become a human, if he did not literally bodily die on the cross, if he did not literally and bodily rise from the dead, then we are still in our sins. Be done with the pastors and the theologians who are liberals and he would tell us that we are not to take the words of the Scriptures literally, that these are just illustrations and symbols and allegories, that the resurrection is just about how we can follow the concepts of Jesus and have a new start in the human race. Listen, the human

race doesn't need a new start, the human race needs a new heart and only a risen Savior can give a new heart.

So Jesus is going very thoroughly or is illustrating very thoroughly here, "I am physically literally here, risen from the dead." Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wants to document very thoroughly the fact that he was bodily raised from the dead. So Jesus takes in this physical food and chews it and swallows it and as he's taking in physical food, these 11 apostles are drinking in the spiritual meat of the truth of all they are observing. What a picture and what a point the writer is making here.

Now we come to II. His biblical validation. The doctrine of the bodily resurrection is important but now Jesus is going to say something quite interesting and I wouldn't have thought this. I would have assumed that if Jesus had showed himself physically that would be enough but Jesus says, "You've got to understand something, you don't go primarily on your physical eyesight and your physical hearing capacity, even on your physical sense of touch, you go by the word of God." So he's going to validate the truth of his resurrection by showing them it was already in the Scriptures.

Look at verses 44 through 46. "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me,'" this is the Old Testament, "'in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written,'" again, that's the Old Testament, their Bible, "'that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day.'" So Jesus says, "Okay, you've seen me, you've touched me, you've heard me, you watched me eat, bodily resurrection. But now I want to tell you something even more final than that." It's time to have a Bible study. "The basis of your faith must be beyond the human eye and beyond the human ear and beyond the human mind. Though you have seen me physically and you've believed, you should have believed because these things are in the Scriptures." Are you hearing me, church? You cannot follow the next thing that moves your emotions. You cannot follow the next sweet lady who wants to lead you in a Bible study. You cannot follow the next persuasive, dynamic, charismatic humorist or whatever else speaker who comes along the track. Or the next brilliant book writer. There may be good things in many of those but, by the way, the final authority is the word of God. Jesus said, "Get out your Bibles. They told you I would die. They told you I would be persecuted. They told you I would rise again. Why didn't you believe the Bible?" He goes further and said, "And I taught you while we were together that I was going to do these things." The point is the Bible validates the truth of everything. The Bible validates the truth of everything. If the Lord Jesus, God Incarnate himself said, "Look at the word of God to find out what you should believe about me," then everything else must be subject to the validation of the word of God.

All other avenues of truth are fraught with difficulties. Just a few verses here. Matthew 24:24 Jesus warned, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." He says, "If you're going to be persuaded by stuff you see with your eyes, you've got to understand something,

there are mighty and powerful spiritual forces out there that can counterfeit and cause you to see lots of stuff you don't need to follow."

John 4:48, "So Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.'" He's rebuking them. "Why can't you just believe the word? Why do you have to see some kind of sideshow to believe?" That's a rebuke.

Matthew 16:4, "'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.' And He left them and went away." He said, "When you want to base your faith on something beyond the Scriptures, you're like an evil and adulterous generation." That's why here at Grace Life Church and in our outreaching ministries we use the phrase "anchored in truth," truth of the revealed word of God.

So then in verse 45 we see the foundation stone of men being made capable to receive and grasp the truth of the word. It says, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." You see, the key to opening the mind and the heart to understand and believe the Bible is in the hand of God. You're not in charge of this. It's in his hand. That's why when we start receiving the word by the Spirit, it humbles us because we know that very fact, that very privilege of understanding God's word and it more than just illuminating our minds, it grabs our hearts and we begin to love it and treasure it and embrace it. That whole process is a grace gift of God and we don't deserve it and we're humbled because of that.

In Acts 16:4, as Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman of her day is hearing the Apostle Paul preach the Gospel, the Bible says in Acts 16:4, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." She didn't just respond, the Lord opened her heart to respond. Moms and dads, grandmothers and granddaddies, you pray for your children and you pray, "O God, I'm going to fully immerse my children in the means of salvation which is a sound church and strong Bible preaching, but we understand unless the Spirit moves, all is vain." Amen? We exhaust the means he's given us but we trust and believe the Spirit of God to do the work. Young couples, not that we have a problem with this but, young couples, do not be persuaded that you've got to go to some trendy, culturally relevant, entertaining, exciting new thing in church life to reach your children. That's a lie from hell. It's right the opposite. It's not the stuff men can do, it is what God does through his word by his Spirit that converts the soul. The same God who said, "Let there be light," speaks that same truth to men's hearts today and we agree with the songwriter, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one come down." I can get up here and study until my brain is fried, be as thorough and careful and that my exegesis is absolutely possible and dot every "i" and cross every "t" and preach with vigor and conviction and boldness, but unless the Spirit of God implants it to your heart, nothing good happens.

So Jesus says to these disciples, "I'm actually literally bodily resurrected. Touch me. Look at me. Watch me eat." Then he says, "I'm validated by the Scriptures, the Scriptures said the true Savior, the Messiah, would come and die and be buried and rise again." Now, thirdly, he gives them his divine prioritization. "Here are your priorities now," he says, "as my followers. Here's your marching orders," if you will. Verse 47, "and that

repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." So here he gives his church the message, the scope and the means of her ministry. The message: repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name. That's basically the Gospel. We're to go preach the word, i.e. preach the Gospel. In his name means we're to preach his person and his work. It wasn't just Jesus, "name" here means the person's character and his body of work.

So we're to preach Christ to the world and then he said, "and repentance." Now that's primary repentance, I call it. What I mean by that is we preach to all men everywhere this message: whatever you're looking to, whatever you're trusting in, whatever religious system, organization, philosophy, works, code of ethics, whatever it may be that you're looking to, you must repent and turn from that and embrace only Christ as your hope of salvation. If you're a good Baptist and you're trusting a Baptist tradition of walking the aisle or repeating a prayer, you must repent of that and turn to Christ. If you're a Catholic and you're trusting the sacraments administered to you by the priest, you must turn from that and trust only Christ. If you're just a basic legalist and believe, "If I do these do's and do not do these don'ts, then that will get me into heaven," you must turn from trusting that code of legalism and turn only to Christ. He's saying, "That's your message to the world. Preach my person and my work, telling all men everywhere to turn from everything else and embrace me alone as their hope of salvation," and he said, "that will grant forgiveness of sins to all who truly believe."

So that's the message. The scope: he says, "to all the nations." That means every people, tongue, tribe and nation. Then the means: he said, "this is to be proclaimed." The word "proclaimed" can be translated both "herald" or "preaching." It's the concept of God-called preaching like the apostle said in Romans 10:14 later as he's living out these marching orders that Jesus had given the early church. Paul writes, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?"

So in our work and in our missions work, we do not plant churches. That is a little bit wrong-headed. We send out preachers. We do not primarily plant churches, we send out preachers because God has ordained the means of having a church is through the preaching of the word of God. When there is sound, Spirit-anointed, Gospel preaching, there's going to be a church eventually. God will call one out under that ministry. Now we remind ourselves looking at this divine prioritization that we have, that we are not responsible to convert the unbelievers, only to proclaim the Gospel to them. They must hear and believe and we must faithfully proclaim it to them.

Then he said in verse 48, "You are witnesses of these things." I think what he's saying is, "You've experienced it. You've heard me preach the truth. You've heard the Gospel. The Spirit has changed your hearts. Now you know it's real, now go and preach it to everyone."

Now he has come to having finished these final words of exhortation and now we have IV. His glorious translation, translating from his earthly dwelling to his glorious

dwelling. Look at verse 50, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them." Now, he's at the area about a mile outside of Jerusalem, an area called Bethany. Now Bethany was the final stop on the road into Jerusalem. You've heard of people traveling and they'll say, "Now before you get there, the final place to buy gas is So-and-so." Well, that's what Bethany was, the final place you could stop and get refreshments or whatever you needed before you journeyed on to Jerusalem.

Bethany's on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives so we know this is the area where our Lord frequently retreated to with his disciples for rest and for prayer. It's from here that Jesus wept over Jerusalem's hardness and unbelief. It is from here that Jesus bowed on his knees and sweat drops of blood and surrendered to the Father's means of redeeming his people through the cross and through his death. It is from here that he began his royal entry into Jerusalem when he went into Jerusalem to be crucified.

The Bible says here he goes to this area again, he lifts up his hands, verse 51, and "was blessing them." He came to us as a blessing and he departed from us to be a blessing and this blessing is not a one time thing. He didn't just bless them, it continues on. You see, he lives in heaven today to bless us. A few days earlier, he had departed from these disciples through a cross. Man, how much different this parting is, but he's parting that there might one day be a glorious reunion.

Verse 51 says, "He was carried up into heaven." The angels sang at his birth and how much more the angels must be rejoicing and must have rejoiced when he went into heaven. The Psalmist records it as Jesus approaches the celestial city. Psalm 24:7-10, "Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in! Who is the King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory." Moral minds even with spiritual illumination and biblical information cannot conceive the glory, majesty and worship that was his when he entered into heaven. You see, heaven had watched with unerring focus as Jesus was born. The angels watched as he lived among the people as a common boy and began his ministry at the age of 30. The angels watched as he preached with unparalleled wisdom and power. They watched as he called his disciples and at the set time, sets his face like flint toward Jerusalem. The angels watched as Judas betrayed him and the disciples forsook him and the Jews and Romans ordered him to crucifixion. The angels gazed in wonder as he was violently persecuted and nailed to a tree. Then they observed the darkness as God the Father laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. The angels' hearts must have been broken as his lifeless body was laid in a tomb and then on the third day, they marvel in speechless joy as he rose from the dead. You see, 1 Peter 1:12 says concerning the wisdom, the beauty and the power of Christ's redeeming work that, "things into which angels longed to look." It means that the angels did not grasp it all until it unfolded actually before them.

Then the angels watch as he is resurrected and he appears to his followers over 40 days, and then at the set time, they watch as he ascends back up into heaven. He is translated back into the limitless splendors of his heavenly kingdom, the all-holy, all-glorious

Savior King has made victorious conquest of his enemies. He has freed his children from condemnation and bondage and now heaven receives him back home. Mighty angels many times more powerful and more intelligent than mortal men speed through heaven with voices like the greatest of thunders and are by sheer virtue of his performance on earth and his glorious presence, shout out his praises saying, "Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals for you were slain and purchased for God with your blood men from every tongue, tribe, people and nation! Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and glory and honor and blessing! To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever!" Then Jesus sits down at the right hand of the majesty on high where he ever lives to make intercession for us. He is such a faithful and powerful Savior that for us to lose our salvation, the heavenly Father would have to excommunicate him from heaven which he would not do. Heaven received him and, by the way, the only ones who go to heaven are those who are in him. If you're in him, heaven receives you too. Heaven received him.

He was taken away from these disciples but he did not leave them because he told them, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This ascension into heaven was the conclusion of his resurrection but it was a continuation of his purpose and work as King of the universe and as head of the church. Because he has ascended, sin is forgiven. Because he has ascended, prayer can now be answered. Because he has ascended, dominion has been established and we have dominion as co-regents with him over the earth. It's not fully realized but it's coming. You see, when he came the first time, earth gave him a manger. When he comes again, he will be granted a throne. Dominion established, sin forgiven, prayer answered. Because he has ascended, eternal union with him is guaranteed and because he has ascended, the Spirit has been imparted.

Let's look at that under V. His spiritual impartation. Now, it's interesting the weight Jesus gives in these final moments to the essential foundational importance of the Holy Spirit's work. Verse 45 again, the Bible says "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." That's what the Holy Spirit does. He's doing that in the world. The Spirit was sent to us because it was sent from him. Jesus had all authority over the Spirit, just like the Father had all authority over the Son Jesus and if he did not go away, he could not have sent the Spirit to us. John 16:7, "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper," that's the Spirit, "will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." Then John 16:13-14, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Now in verse 49, Jesus said, "behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Now, that was the falling of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as recorded in the book of Acts, by the way, which is written by the same Luke that wrote the Gospel of Luke. Now, this falling of power from on high was an initial anointing of the church age – now listen – and a unique anointing of the early apostles. We see the early apostles functioning in a



way that no other group has ever functioned in all of history: tongues of fire falling on them; speaking another language; signs, wonders and miracles; and they are commissioned and enabled by the Spirit of God to write the New Testament that we have today. That's why we hold that the biblical evidence is those kinds of unique spiritual anointings ceased primarily with the end of the apostolic era because they had a unique calling and ministry no other generation has ever had. As a matter of fact, Ephesians 2:20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." What is the writer saying there? He's saying: God in the first generation uniquely anointed his apostles to be able to write sacred Scripture and all the rest of us build upon that foundation. Listen, we're not waiting for another apostle to give us a word of information from anywhere. We have the foundation they left us. We build upon that foundation, he says. And that's what Jesus meant, "Stay in Jerusalem until the power falls. Not only is that initiating a church age and there is going to be spiritual power throughout the rest of the church age, but this is a unique anointing for you men who are the foundation stones, humanly speaking, of the beginnings of my church, my called out ones on the earth." So the Spirit is sent to us because Jesus departed from us.

Now VI. The final thing: their confident expectation. Notice the change in these guys, no more doom and gloom and despair and unbelief. "And they, after worshiping Him," they couldn't do anything for awhile but just praise Jesus, "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God." That shows you they were confident in the doctrines he had taught them and the commission he had given them. They knew that if he promised he would die for our sins, if he promised he would rise again, if he promised we would see him, if he promised we're forgiven, if he has ascended to heaven and he's promised to return and get us, then we know for certain he's going to send us the Holy Spirit to enable us to be faithful until we all get home together. They had a confident expectation. So these things, this joy and this praising God, these were the outward signs of their new inward faith. They believed it all and now they are waiting to be clothed with a power from on high.

Now listen: today in the church, we are not waiting on the Holy Spirit, we minister claiming the power of the Holy Spirit. He's come. Just as there was a point in time when Jesus came, there was a point in time when the Spirit came to uniquely anoint the church age. He's here. Do you know what? God is looking for a church that will preach his Gospel, teach his Gospel, share his Gospel believing that God's Spirit will accompany that message and regenerate men's hearts and build his church. That's what God is looking for.

My question to you is: do you have a confident expectation that this old Gospel will save your family's souls? Do you have a confident expectation that this Gospel will save your wife? This Gospel will save your lost husband? Do you have a confident expectation this Gospel will save my children? And this Gospel is adequate to save my children's children? And as Spurgeon said, "If God is not going to bless the truth, then he's certainly not going to bless a lie." We're going to stay with the old truth and believe and that's where some of you are today, you don't believe it. Do you believe the Spirit of God will use the word of God to change men's hearts and build his church?

It's an old old illustration and I've said it before. Spurgeon was leaving his service one Sunday morning. A pastor from across town had been visiting that morning and he talked to Mr. Spurgeon and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I'm not seeing much fruit in my ministry. It's been a long time since we've seen anyone in the baptistry. I don't know what's happening." And Spurgeon said, "Well, you don't expect God to save someone every time you preach the Gospel, do you?" The old preacher said, "Of course I don't." He said, "That's why God is not doing it."

I charge you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to come into these services every week expecting God to change people for his glory. I mean, expecting it. Expecting it. "God, we believe you'll use your word to transform hearts." And it won't be but a little while until we hear the testimony of it in those baptismal waters. A confident expectation. Folks, I've been leaning on it and standing on it for 35 years with you and I plan to do it for the next 35. Preach the Gospel, trust the Spirit, watch God build his church and be grateful we get to get in on it.

His final words and his glorious ascension and now five years, eight months and 145 sermons later, we close the preaching of the Gospel of Luke. What a privilege and what a blessing to do it all together.

Let's stand together.