

From Disbelief to Courage: Recapturing the Heart of the Mission
Luke 24:33-49

Introduction: Fads come and go, as do seemingly unsinkable companies. For every swatch watch craze and jean jacket trend there have been companies like Blockbuster or Mervyns that seemed like fixtures but were unable to sustain success. Sustainable models that bridge not just decades but centuries are unique. The Coca-Cola company was started in the late 1800's with a combination of Kola nut and coca leaves and has grown to the world's 3rd most valuable brand in a 2015 study. When there was a proposal to change to original formula in 1985 (remember *New Coke*. It was about as popular as Crystal Pepsi...yikes) there was a backlash from loyal customers, prompting management to scrap the change. In-n-Out burger has been a fixture in Southern California and a continually growing company since 1948 in part because they are unwilling to change the core of what they serve: simple, quality, and consistent burgers and fries. No chicken, no growing menu to accommodate changing tastes, and though small adaptations have been made (chopped chili's anyone!), the core of the company continues to be passed down through the generations.

Passing of a baton successfully is also unique, and just as imperative for sustained vision, fruitfulness, and faithfulness in the church. After the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, He began to clarify the mission of the church that would sustain until He returned again. That means there would be handoffs of this mission from generation to generation, in the midst of changing fads, appetites, and cultural norms. There would have to be a core given to the church, the family recipe, the part of who we are that can never be compromised and can never change, even as things change around us. In the midst of a busy, full, and hectic life of good things: jobs, family, school, sports, worship, fellowship, friendship, working out, eating, and Bible study, we are called to the one thing that EACH OF THESE POINT TO. We are called to be witnesses of Jesus with the message of the gospel. That is why we are left here. Most of the other things that the church does will be done in heaven - service, worship, and study -- but the one thing we can never do is make disciples through evangelism. That task was given to us through a group of ordinary men who ran away when Jesus was arrested and whom we find huddled in fear the day He arose. They were faithful, and handed the baton to us with the question: *are we going to be faithful to carry on the mission.*

Overcoming Fear: *Jesus showed Himself (33-43)*

Luke 24:33-43 And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them **gathered together**,³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were **startled** and **frightened** and *thought they saw 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 And while they still **disbelieved** for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

Disbelief Caused Fear and Trembling

We pick the story up on Easter night. The disciples had found their way back together at a gathering spot in Jerusalem to figure out what to do next. They had seen the empty tomb, heard the testimony of the women, and Peter himself had seen the risen Savior. But they were still in bad shape. Remember,

they were bitten by Kingdom fever and their temperature had risen to extreme levels in the months leading up to this weekend. Their expectations were shattered. They had been thinking in **selfish and individualistic terms** for so long that they were not sure what to do next. Imagine the scene in your own head with 11 grown men huddled together, heads low, spirits down, and doubts aplenty.

In barges the two disciples who had experienced the gentle but corrective teaching of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They began to tell their story after doing a 180 and rushing back to find the disciples. As they were telling their story, **Jesus appears and utters the words "Peace to you!"**. We might expect them to run to Him, wrap their arms around Him, and bow down. But instead they thought He was a ghost (or spirit)! Notice how the text gives us a glimpse of **mindset and heart** the disciples were currently in: **startled, frightened, troubled, doubting, and unbelieving**. This disbelief was the kind that we say "we can't believe our eyes", when something unexpected happens "did I just see what I think I saw", and it takes time for our mind to register with our heart. Shattered dreams had lead to fearful unbelief, and this was the group that was supposed to carry on a mission!

Disbelief Caused Lack of Movements

Their unbelief caused by personal loss lead them to stay put. There was no grand plan or forward movement, simply shell shock and personal pity. So Jesus recaptures their heart and mind by giving them a **sensory experience of Himself** ----- See my hands and feet, **touch** me and see, **eat** with me. Jesus gave the disciples at this point something He chooses not to give us: sight over faith. Remember that this was **before** the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so these men needed reassuring and restoring. So Jesus reveals Himself to them to restore them and ready them for their mission.

When we believe the world is primarily *about us*, we inevitably contract the disease of *individualitis*. This can come from many sources, from being told from a young age that we are masters of our own universe, that we can become anything we want to be, or the reinforcement by awards and trophies or the comparison game in a small pond of participants. For the disciples, it was allowing themselves to believe the coming kingdom was somehow about them. The problem with this infection is that when suffering occurs, failure comes, or God simply has another plan than your own (or parents) golden dreams, we don't know what to do. We huddle instead of moving forward. We believe God is against us instead of for us. We forget the gospel calls us to follow through sacrifice and suffering, and worldly success is much more the anomaly and exception rather than the rule. This causes us to shrink in fear, to be troubled and fearful in our heart, and see the world through a lens of disbelief rather than relentless faith. Carl Trueman commented on this thinking this way:

*"The belief that we are special is, by and large, complete tosh. Most of us are mediocre, make unique contributions only in the particular ways we screw things up, and could easily be replaced as husband, father or employee, by somebody better suited for the task...[Yet] far too many Christians have senses of destiny which verge on the **messianic**....Put bluntly, when I read the Bible it seems to me that the church is the meaning of human history; but it is the church, a corporate body, not the distinct individuals who go to make up her membership....**My special destiny as a believer is to be part of the church; and it is the church that is the big player in God's wider plan, not me.**"¹*

Overcoming Misunderstanding: *Jesus opened their minds (45)*

Luke 24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

¹ Carl Trueman, "An Unmessianic Sense of Non-Destiny," Reformation21, April 2010, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/an-unmessianic-sense-of-destiny>

Necessity of Divine Enablement

But seeing, touching, and dining with Jesus was NOT enough. They had already done that before the crucifixion and now after, but they were still not ready or equipped for the mission. They needed what everyone needs to see Jesus and understand our mission: **divine enablement**. This moves our reading of the Bible to a moral or intellectual exercise to a life-changing directional change. We need God to open our eyes because our minds are clouded by sin, our hearts are hardened, and our ears inattentive. That is why the Psalmist says "**Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law**" (Psalm 119:18), followed by words like **make me understand** (27), teach me (33), give me understanding (34), incline my heart to your testimonies (36). The Psalmist recognized that without God making Scripture clear, we would be unable truly drink from its yield.

In the NT, Paul prayed the same thing for the church, "remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, **having the eyes of your heart enlightened**, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you" (Eph. 1:16-18). God opens our eyes to see what we are called to, what our inheritance is, and what power is working in us.

This is what Jesus prayed for and promised in the Holy Spirit. The Helper would come and He would not only convict the world concerning sin and righteousness (John 16:8), but would be our **guide** in life (John 16:13), but that guide would specifically be **in the truth!** The Spirit does not operate on His own authority but would glorify the Son and speak the word that He receives. The disciples lacked the Spirit at the time, so Jesus opened their eyes. Every believer today is indwelt by the Spirit, and that means we CAN UNDERSTAND all of truth as it comes to us in Scripture, to give us hope, purpose, clarity, faith, and joy.

Necessity of Proper Sourcing

Why is this so important? This is the answer that we long for. The Scriptures *explained* to the disciples on the road to Emmaus moved them from lowliness to vibrancy. The Scriptures *opened to our eyes* moved the disciples from fear and doubt to mission bearers. The Scriptures are what we need to help our fear, doubt, unbelief, wandering, purposeless existence, and lack of focus. We are dependent on God opening our eyes the Spirit guiding, which means NOTHING we accomplish is of our own doing, but are enlightened to be obedient and fruitful to the glory of God.

We are tempted at times to look elsewhere for answers, inspiration, and direction. People have been tempted to separate hearing God's voice from God's Word, believing that we can receive *personal revelation* outside of the Scripture. Writers like Bill Johnson have popularized phrases like "**We don't put God in a box**" or "**God likes to draw outside of the lines.**"² This kind of teaching wrongly, falsely, and dangerously teaches that there is a secret kind of knowledge that the Spirit can give us (which is a new form of an old heresy called *Gnosticism*), which calls adherents to subjective, emotional, and irrational answers, moving them away from the ONE TRUE solution God gives in His Word.

The Spirit of God enlightens our eyes to God's Word. **God's Word is enough**. It moves us from fear to faith, from unbelief to life, from discouragement to joy, from doubt to courage. Our problem is not that we have plumbed the depths of God's Word by Spirit filled wisdom and been found wanting. Our problem is that we have neglected the source of knowledge that opens our eyes to the Person of God in Jesus Christ, or have simply decided to disobey what it actually says. Notice in this next section that Jesus did NOT give the disciples some new, unknown knowledge, but simply opened their eyes to what was **already there!** He gives the same thing to us.

² Bill Johnson wrote the book "When Heaven Invades Earth", Destiny Image, 2003. He is part of Bethel church in Redding, Ca, and the Jesus Culture.

Overcoming Confusion: *Jesus gave a renewed mission (44-49)*

Luke 24:44, 46-49 Then 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 said to them, "Thus it is written, that the **Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,**⁴⁷ and that **repentance** and **forgiveness** of sins should be proclaimed **in his name to all nations,** beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ **You are witnesses of these things.**⁴⁹ 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."

Foundation of the mission: *Old Testament (44)*

Luke records the Great Commission in a unique fashion, adding nuances that we did not get in Matthew 28. First, Luke connects the mission of the gospel ministry as the **fulfillment** of what was written in the Old Testament, not a negation of them. In other words, this message was not something added or new, but a continuation of what was already given.

Notice that Jesus did not say the OT in general, but said that every part in the three fold division pointed to the message that found its fulfillment in Christ. In the **Law of Moses** (Genesis through Deuteronomy) we see that a seed and Messiah would come to bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; cf. Rev. 5:5). Paul picked up this teaching as he explained that "your seed" would mean one Person, who is Christ (Gal. 3:16), and incorporated in His body (Gal. 3:29).

The **Psalms** (which included the wisdom literature) is where we find that soldiers would gamble for Jesus' clothes (22:18), He would be crucified (all of Ps. 22), and that He would rise from the dead (Ps. 16:8-11). This is the message Peter preached at the Day of Pentecost, quoting from Ps. 16.

The **Prophets** (which include the major and minor) also declare that the Messiah would die for the sins of His people (Isa. 53), that He would be pierced (Zech 12:10), and that He would rise from the dead (Isa. 53:10). Peter cited **Joel 2:28-32** in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16-21) to show that the outpouring of the Spirit was being fulfilled in part.

The disciples who carried the mission out used the OT Scriptures alone to proclaim Christ. We have the advantage of the completion of the NT. To leave this is to try to change the recipe of an IN-N-OUT burger. We don't change the story because we lose the power. The gospel as it is in Scripture is the story, and the WORD OF GOD IS POWER!

Reality of the mission: *Resurrection (46)*

We preach the message of the gospel as an event that is ground in *history and reality*, something that really happened. Theological liberalism (those that believe in the Bible but do not take it literally) will always try to cut out the foundation of what we preach. They will say things like "we believe in Jesus and His resurrection, but not as a historical event but as a spiritual happening". Our message is a declaration of what happened at a point in time in history. And since it happened in reality, His return is just as real, as is His future Kingdom. The Bible is to be read not only literally, but historically.

Goal of the mission: *Transformation (47)*

The Great Commission in Matthew tells us that we are to make disciples, to baptize and teach them all that Jesus commanded. Luke fills in some of the blanks as far as the message. The message we proclaim is "**repentance and forgiveness of sins**". It is imperative that we understand the way these two things are unique and yet are gloriously interlocked.

Forgiveness is a major theme of Luke's gospel. It was prophesied by Zacharias (1:77), John the Baptist (3:3), taught by Jesus (5:20; 7:48) and pronounced on the cross (23:34). Forgiveness is the message of the Apostles in Acts (2:38; 5:30; 10:43). It means that God poured out His wrath on His Son, canceling the record of debt that stood against us (Col. 2:14) and brings us to peace with God. But forgiveness is

never alone. If it were forgiveness alone, there would be no power to change or even desire to change. We would be forgiven and continue on in our sin, which was NEVER what God called us to.

Repentance is a gift that God produces in us (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts. 11:18), prompted by the Spirit (John 16:8) that is the foundation of forgiveness. It is the spiritual act that moves the heart in the direction of salvation. Repentance turns our mind, desires, and actions from one direction to another, from selfishness to selflessly following Christ. It is not merely **being** more moral, it is being an new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), having a new heart and having a new Lord that moves not only our actions but also our desires to obedience to the Lord. This means that repentance and forgiveness allow us to be radically NEW PEOPLE who are totally reconfigured to serve and worship the Lord. When we teach forgiveness of sins without repentance, we are NOT GIVING THE WHOLE OF THE GOSPEL, and cheapen the work that only God can do on our heart and mind.

Object of the mission: *in Jesus name* (47)

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The name of Jesus is power since it points to all of who Jesus is. We preach Jesus as the perfect Savior who died a worthy death, resurrected on the third day. It is HIS BLOOD ALONE THAT SAVES. We cannot proclaim the gospel without understanding, knowing, and pointing to Jesus alone.

Extent of the mission: *All nations* (47)

Notice the global view of the extent of the mission. This was given to a bunch of fishermen and others who had likely never travelled outside of the country. Yet at the very beginning Jesus had the NATIONS in view, which were already in view in the OT (see Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Kings. 8:41-43; Isa. 2:2-3; 45:22; 49:6) and which we see in the future heaven (Rev. 5:9). They were to start in Jerusalem, the place where they felt like fugitives, the place where Jesus was killed 3 days earlier. It was here that the mission would start, the church would be established, and would launce out to all nations. NOTE: All nations has not only **geography** in mind, but **people groups**. We are not only called to go to places with the unreached, but is for the nations that are represented all around us.

Instruments of the mission: *All disciples* (48)

This is extraordinary. "You are witnesses of these things" Far from being disqualified or calling in substitutes, Jesus commissioned a bunch of ordinary people who had hours before run away in fear. He uses flawed, weak, normal people to be witnesses of the greatest message ever given. That means that the baton is passed from generation to generation, from church to church, to equip and train **people** for the work of ministry. That is our mission today. We want to train each of us to join this mission, to reach all nations in Simi Valley, Ventura County, the United States, and nations around the world. This means we are all "**goers**", but we will also be **senders** from this church. It means that this is YOUR PURPOSE, the great vision for your life, which gives meaning to everything.

Power for the mission: *Holy Spirit* (49)

The mission was daunting but also exciting. Sensing both Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem to be clothed with power from on high, the promise of the Father. This was the giving and outpouring of the **Holy Spirit** which would come on the Apostles at Pentecost. The Spirit would empower them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, but then Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. This is what the Spirit does. He keeps us on mission, sanctifies us so we are pure vessels, and guides us in the truth. We trust

that He will convict those we proclaim the gospel to. In this we are responsible yet dependant, we act yet are needing God to act, and we obey yet He gets the glory.

This is the mission, both to the disciples and to us. We have the Word, the Spirit, and Message, and the Charge. The question is: are we willing to follow the recipe, not trying to change what is powerful and handed down, or are we trying to do it our own way, according to our own wisdom?