

# Christ's Leading & His Blessing Of His People & Their Worship Of Him

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 13 April 2025

Preacher: Rev James MacIver

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Let's begin our worship of God this evening, singing in Psalm 98. Psalm 98, we'll sing these verses marked 1 to 6. Singing on to the end of verse 6.
- O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he has done. O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders he has done.
- His right judgment is for the arm in addition he has won.
- The Lord God is a vision, a God bless you, the Lord.
- His right judgment is for the Lord.
- [ 1 : 50 ]     Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- [ 3 : 48 ]     Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. a Saviour who died on the cross for his people, a Saviour who is now alive forevermore and who rules from heaven on his throne.
- We give thanks, O Lord, tonight that we worship you through what you have revealed of yourself to us. We pray that we may come before you with humility, and we may come before you recognising your greatness and our own smallness and our sinfulness, and recognising we have no claim upon you that you should look upon us in any way to favour us.
- Yet you have done so out of your grace and out of that sheer mercy that you have shown to your people. And so, Lord, tonight we come claiming that we have that place through your grace, which enables us to rejoice in your presence.
- And we pray as we come before you, acknowledging our own smallness and sinfulness, that we may come before you penitently, confessing our sin, confessing our demerit, confessing, O Lord, the vileness of our own hearts, and yet rejoicing at the same time that it is for such as we are that you came into this world and died on the cross.
- [ 5 : 49 ]     And it was for us to redeem us from our sins that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself to the curse and the death of the cross.
- Help us then, we pray, to focus our mind on those things that are essential for us this evening in our worship. And help us as we come to focus upon you especially. Enable us to do so, O Lord, by your Holy Spirit.

Apply to our hearts your own truth, we pray. May your word come with power into our experience anew this evening. May we know that the Lord has been here, that we have met with him, that we have been here in his presence, that we have been, as the psalm we have been singing, said before us, before the Lord, the King.

And help us to wonder at the fact that we have such a privilege to have an audience with our King. Lord, we know how many difficulties there are in this world to have an audience with human kings.

How many different things need to be set out, how many qualifications, how many things need to have preparation for. And yet you invite us into your presence only requiring that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 10 ] And that we receive what you have done in him. And so, Lord, we pray tonight as we come into your presence, that you would make yourself known to us once again. We thank you for the Gospel.

We thank you for your Word. And we thank you for its relevance for our own age. Lord, help us to prize your Word as that which you have given us and given to every generation of your church, as a Word that is applicable to the conditions in which they live.

And help us never to be ashamed of the Gospel, but to be like the Apostle, who could say that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, knowing that it was the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

We ask, O Lord, that your blessing will continue to bestow upon us in the Gospel those blessings of eternal life. And that we will see that Word blessed from week to week so that many will add themselves to the number of your worshipping people.

That we may see, Lord, those who are presently not saved coming to embrace you, coming to confess you, coming to acknowledge you as their God and as their Saviour too.

[ 8 : 25 ] We pray for all tonight who hear the Gospel and we pray for all who are unsaved under that hearing. We ask that you would open their hearts, Lord. We ask that you would indeed grant us that new mind by which we will focus on you upon the Saviour himself.

And we ask, Lord, as we come once again into your presence, that he may fill our vision and that we may indeed be thankful that we have such a knowledge through your Word as we realise that there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved but the name of Christ.

Lord, again we pray for this congregation. We ask that you would bless them in this time of vacancy. We thank you for all the support you give them, for the way they are supportive of one another, for the way that that witness continues in this district to be shown forth by them.

And we pray that you would bless the Gospel amongst them. We ask that you would bless every home and every individual connected with the congregation. We pray that you would bless those who may be seeking you even tonight and may be looking for confirmation as to where they stand in relation to the Lord himself.

Lord, we pray that you would bless them with assurance, bless them we pray, with further seeking and insight into their own situation. Remember those, Lord, who have been following you and confessing you for many years.

[ 9 : 57 ] We thank you that they are in all our congregations and districts. And we thank you for the encouragement they give us. When we see those who have been following the Lord for many years and have done so consistently, Lord, we are encouraged that you look after your people, that you are the one who guards and surrounds them even as you promised.

We pray that we may take encouragement and always seek to learn from them and from the experiences they've had of your grace in their own lives too. And so we ask that you protect them further in their journey of faith.

Remember the young ones of the congregation, the young families and the children. We commend them to you again, Lord, this time and pray that your blessing will rest upon their lives, that you would establish them in your own ways, that you would give them to grow up in the knowledge of Christ as their Saviour, that you would give them, Lord, to increase week by week and day by day in their knowledge of the things of God, that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Saviour.

We pray your blessing too to be with all who teach in the Sunday school, with all, Lord, who have given the opportunity and the privilege of guiding young people in their lives.

We ask that you bless our schools, our day schools. We pray that you bless those who teach in our schools. Grant to them, O Lord, your own blessing and support as they face many challenges in our age to depart from those things which are of the truth, which are wholesome and which have moral acceptance in accordance with your own revelation in your word.

[ 11 : 41 ] Deliver us, we pray, O Lord, from mere human wisdom and deliver us from that which would lead us further astray from you as a nation. Lord, we recognise that you call us to pray for those in government over us and so we do.

We commend them to you and pray for your wisdom for them and pray that you would turn them into your ways and pray that you would give them good counsel, that you would deliver them from evil counsel, from that which would be of sin and of reproach to your name.

We ask, gracious one, that you would grant us as a people, as a nation, as a generation that we may be uplifted in righteousness. We have so much to confess, O Lord, of our departure from your ways, so much to confess of unrighteousness, of sinful behaviour, of looking to the things of this world and of the ideologies of other religions and human beings.

Deliver us, we pray, from these and grant us in the way of the gospel that you would uplift us and that you would enable us to pursue righteousness and holiness of life.

We pray that you would continue with us now this evening, grant us your guidance as we turn to your truth. Help us as we sing your praises to do it heartily and enable us to be thankful, O Lord, that you have given us such a desire to be here this evening.

[ 13 : 10 ] So we commend ourselves to you now and we pray that you would in all that we ask that you would forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness and all for Jesus' sake.

Amen. I'm going to sing further now in Psalm 25. Psalm 25 and the first version of the psalm singing verses 1 to 5.

To thee I lift my soul, O Lord, I trust in thee. My God, let me not be ashamed or foes triumph over me. Let none that wait on thee be put to shame at all.

But those that without cause transgress, let shame upon them fall. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy paths, O teach thou me. And do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be.

For thou art God that dost to me salvation send, and I upon thee all the day expecting to attend. These verses, To thee I lift my soul, O Lord, I trust in thee.

[ 14 : 24 ] Amen. Amen. To thee I lift my soul, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, I trust in thee.

My God, let me not be ashamed, our hope triumph for thee.

Let none that wait on thee be put to shame at all.

And I have only over me Every day I give you a hand Let's turn now to read God's Word We're reading today, tonight from the Gospel of Luke Gospel according to Luke, chapter 24 We're going to begin reading at verse 28 and read through to the end of the chapters That's Luke 24, verse 28 So we're breaking into this account, this famous account of Jesus' meeting with those two unnamed disciples on the way to Emmaus and when he revealed himself to them and rebuked them somewhat for their lack of faith and their lack of perception that they had not believed the Scriptures that he would rise from the dead And so at verse 28, if we can pick up the reading there

And saith unto them Peace be unto you But they were terrified And affrighted And supposed that they had seen a spirit And he said to them Why are you troubled?

And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish And of a honeycomb And he took it And did eat before them And he said unto them These are the words which I speak unto you While I was yet with you That all things must be fulfilled Which were written in the law of Moses And in the prophets And in the Psalms concerning me Then opened he their understanding That they might understand the scriptures And he said to them Thus it is written And thus it beheld Christ to suffer And to rise from the dead The third day And that repentance And remission of sins Should be preached in his name Among all nations Beginning at Jerusalem And ye are witnesses Of these things And behold I send the promise Of my Father upon you But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem Until ye be endued With power from on high And he led them out As far as to Bethany And he lifted up his hands And blessed them And it came to pass

While he blessed them He was parted from them And carried up into heaven And they worshipped him And returned to Jerusalem With great joy And were continually in the temple Praising and blessing God Amen And once again We pray That God will bless to us This reading of his word Now let's sing further To his praise In Psalm 21 Psalm number 21 At the beginning of the psalm Through to verse 6 The king of thy great strength O Lord Shall very joyful be In thy salvation Rejoice How vehemently shall he Thou hast bestowed upon him All that his heart would have And thou from him Didst not withhold What e'er his lips did crave For thou with blessing Him preventst Of goodness manifold

[ 21 : 06 ] And thou hast set upon his head A crown of purest gold When he desired life of thee Thou life to him didst give Even such a length of days That he forevermore should live In that salvation brought by thee His glory is made great Honor and comely majesty Thou hast upon him set Because that thou forevermore most blessed Hast him made And thou hast with thy countenance Made him exceeding glad Whenever we come in the Old Testament To speak about To have passages about the king We think about God We think about King David And Solomon of course But they were types They were representations Of God himself When you come to a passage like this It's very obvious That we can apply it to The Lord in his exaltation The Lord in the way That the Father exalted him And gave him such a place

Over the creation And has made him blessed Forevermore And given him such a length of days That he forevermore Should live So we sing These verses In consciousness Of their application To Christ himself The king In thy great strength O Lord Shall very joyful be In thy soul In thy soul In thy soul Let voy, voy, voy, voy voy voy voy voy

O town, and the grove thing is not with us, forget it, it's given.

For now we're blessing the end of goodness, mighty good, and the earth set upon His head, a town of purest moon.

When He decided to lie for thee, a life to live this year, in such a little cage that He forevermore should live.

[ 24 : 45 ] In Thy salvation brought by Thee, it's glorious with grace.

On earth, the mercy of the King, Thou hast upon His head.

Because Thou hast forevermore most blessed Thou hast made, and Thou hast with Thy covenant made Him bestie in God.

Please start with me to Luke chapter 24, the final verses of the chapter that we've read a short time ago. Luke 24 at verse 50.

And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

[ 26 : 17 ] And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. Luke begins this gospel, this book that he wrote, with an emphasis on worship.

And he finishes the gospel, he concludes this gospel of an abatious name, with the same emphasis on worship. Beginning with worship, ending with worship, and in between those two worship points, in the beginning and ending of this gospel, we find that Christ really fills all that He has to say to us.

That main dominant figure of Jesus, is really what times the worship at the beginning, and the worship at the end. The ministry of Christ, death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the exaltation of Christ as He's taken back to heaven.

And as you find these encounters that I mentioned, in verses 13 to 49, in the chapter, you find that it shows really that it's Luke's way of showing that it's the same Jesus who died, who now met with the disciples after His resurrection from the dead.

It's not a different person. He's in a new state, he's in a different state. But it's the same Jesus, the very same person who died on the cross, that now meets with them as they come to see Him after His resurrection.

[ 27 : 59 ] And that, of course, is important. Verse 42, You can see there is an emphasis in trying to prove to them, and indeed proving to them, that this is not a ghost, this is not a figure other than the reality of His own person.

You can find there verse 42, that they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and of honeycomb, and He took it and ate before them. He was a real human being, as He'd always been prior to His death.

And He's now demonstrating for them that having risen from the dead, He is nothing other than a human being, as He was before. Of course, He continues to be God as well.

And so this second encounter that you find in the early part of the chapter now continues through into this departure of Jesus from the disciples, from the church on earth, taken up into heaven.

And there are three points that come across to us from this final passage in Luke's Gospel. Points that are very important for our own life here, for our own perspective, for our everyday life, and for our thoughts towards eternity itself as well.

[ 29 : 15 ] In a way, it's a continuation of what we saw this morning with regard to Christ's resurrection, as was verified to the disciples, that you find in John's Gospel, chapter 20, where they looked into the sepulcher, saw the clothes lying there, and by what they saw, they came to believe that He had actually risen from the dead.

So this is really the follow-on from that, where now, having risen from the dead, and coming to this point, He is taken up into heaven in His exaltation. And the three things that we want to just focus briefly on from this chapter, first from this passage, Christ's leading of His people, and secondly, Christ's blessing of His people, and thirdly, Christ's worshipped by His people.

His leading of His people, His blessing of His people, and His people's worship of Him. Here He is. He led them out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up His hands, and blessed them.

The risen Christ, and the sending Christ. The two sub-points we can say, we can have, in regard to Christ's leading of His people. It is as the risen Christ, that He leads them out.

It is as the risen Christ, that He goes before them. It is as the one who is raised from the dead, the one now, having followed through His resurrection, from the dead, who comes to lead them triumphantly.

[ 30 : 43 ] And that's such an important aspect, of our own Christian walk as well, in this life, of the church's experience, down through the ages, from this point onwards. They're not just led by an account, of what happened in the experience, of Christ Himself, in the life history of Christ Himself.

They're not just led by reading that, by trying to have that explained to them. They're led by the Christ Himself. He is the actual leader of His people. It's not just what they read about Him, that proves to be their guidance.

He is their guide. He goes before them. He's the one who leads them out, as far as the point here, where He was lifted up, above them, back to heaven. And how important that is, His death has not removed His leadership.

His leadership did not come to an end, the moment He died on the cross, and had His body buried in the sepulcher. He's still the leader of His people.

He's the leader of all those here tonight, who have placed their trust, and their confidence in Him. He's the leader of every single person, throughout the world, tonight, who believes in His name, who has come to give themselves, to be led by Him, and guided by Him.

[ 32 : 02 ] And it's important, because it means that the leader of the church is not just Christ, but Christ, risen triumphantly from the dead. It's that triumphant Christ that goes before His people.

It's that Christ that has defeated death that goes before His people. It's that Christ that stands over death and says, you are no longer, in any way, in charge of my people.

You are, in fact, defeated. How important that is for yourself tonight. For all of those who look to the Lord for His leadership, for His guidance, for a safe passage through life into eternity.

He goes before them as the great warrior. I'm going to turn just briefly to Psalm 68. Many of the Psalms have referenced, we'll sing part of this one just in concluding tonight.

But this is a psalm, really, a psalm of David, which speaks about the Lord as the great divine warrior, as theologians sometimes put it. Because it's just filled with an emphasis on God being the warrior, leader of His people, engaging with His enemies, overcoming His enemies, triumphing over His enemies, leading His people onward successfully into battle and beyond.

[ 33 : 22 ] Look at verse 7 there in Psalm 68. O God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God.

Thinking of God as He went ahead of His people, causing the whole world, especially His enemies, to shake. And as you go through the psalm, there's twelve kings of armies that flee apace, and she that tarried at home divided the spoil.

There's a wonderful picture for you there of those who stayed at home, the women folk at the time, the men folk had gone into battle under whoever was the leader at the time.

And this is a spiritual picture for us as well, that the church shares the spoils that Jesus has purchased by going out to battle with His and their enemies. And so they triumph, as He triumphs for them.

Verse 18, Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity, captive, thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell amongst them.

[ 34 : 32 ] Blessed be the Lord, the God of our salvation, He that is our God, the God of salvation. For unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.

You ever notice that when you're reading it? I'm singing it. To Him belong the issues from death. Deliverance from death lies with Him. The conquest of death lies with Him.

And all the way through the psalm, you find that emphasis. Sing unto God, it says in verse 32, You kingdoms of the earth, O sing praises unto the Lord, to Him who rides upon the heavens of heavens which were of old.

Lo, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice. And you see, all of that applied to Christ in the fulfilment of the likes of that psalm and other passages like it, where Jesus, the great divine warrior who went out to conquer, who went into engagement with Satan, with the powers of the world, with the powers of darkness, and now has placed them under His feet.

Sin doesn't reign in the world tonight. Human beings don't reign in the world tonight. leaders of the world may think that they're actually in charge, in total charge, of their own lives and the life and the destiny of those that they actually rule over.

[ 35 : 50 ] It's not the case. There's only one person in charge of the world and of the destiny of the world tonight, and that's Jesus Christ. He has overcome death.

He has overcome sin. He has conquered. He has won through the victorious divine warrior. Well, here He is in Luke's Gospel.

He led them out as far as to Bethany. And in all the present circumstances we face as a church, and the church has ever faced since then, we look to our divine warrior to continue to lead us through the challenges, the difficulties we face.

Of course, it does raise the question for myself, for yourself tonight, who is leading my life? Who is my life given to in order to lead it successfully and to have ultimately a triumph over sin, over the world, over the devil, over death?

Who's in charge of your own life? Have you given your life willingly as the Gospel calls upon you to do so? To this Jesus, is your life ruled by Him in such a way that you can say, not in your own strength, as you engage with everything that you meet with in life, but in the strength that Jesus gives you?

[ 37 : 18 ] So you share in the triumph and the victory of the divine warrior Himself. Because He has overcome, you also will overcome in Him.

That's the beginning of the book of Revelation. These letters to the seven churches, they all conclude, to Him who overcomes, I will grant. And they overcome in Him.

They overcome by virtue of His leadership. He is the risen Christ, leading His people. He is also the sending Christ, leading His people.

Christ's leadership of His people, He sends the Holy Spirit, as He sent, while He blessed them, He was part of, but He told them previously to wait in the city until He would send the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, to them.

And so Jesus, here's a great mystery in many ways, anything to do with the Trinity that God is, is a great mystery for us anyway. We can just very, very tentatively, even through what the Bible has revealed to us, touch the edges of that great topic, God, the one God, but three persons, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

[ 38 : 33 ] And each of them have their own role in our salvation. They each have their own work. The Bible talks about what the Father does, what the Father has done. It talks about Jesus, what the Son has done.

It talks about the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And so here, you find all of that keyed into the resurrection of Jesus as well from the dead, wait, he said, in the city, till you be endued with power from on high.

He meant the coming of the Holy Spirit. And that's what you find in Luke's second book, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. And he again had an introduction referring to his resurrection and his uplifting to glory.

Then comes Pentecost. Then comes the Spirit of God in power upon the church. And it's the leadership of Jesus. As Peter preached on that occasion, this is what he said.

That it was, this Jesus has poured out this, this Spirit, this power whom you now are actually witnesses of.

[ 39 : 37 ] And again, it asks the question, whose power is leading my life tonight? Is it the power of the Holy Spirit? Is it Jesus' leadership through the Holy Spirit that's leading my life?

that's actually guiding me day by day towards that final destination of God's people? You see, that's why he's saying here, he led them out as far as to Bethany.

Their visible, their visible appreciation of his leadership ended here. They could no longer see him after this. His leadership didn't end, but it was going to be again through the Holy Spirit after he was gone physically from the world.

And so it is with the church since then. It fits the passage here. He led them out as far as to Bethany. Jesus is still leading, but there's a new mode of leadership to the Holy Spirit that he would send and that he sent on the day of Pentecost.

What a wonderful thing that every Christian, every person who's saved has the Trinity operating in their lives, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.



[ 40 : 53 ] What a privilege to have a Bible that teaches you that. What a privilege to know that that's the case, that it's nothing of your own invention, that it's not something that the church has brought about, but rather God's work of redemption with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together.

And Christ's leading of his people really has all of that packed into it. He led them out as far as to Bethany. That was as far as his visible leadership was going to take them in this world.

And as we say, then afterwards, it will be the leadership of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christ's leading of his people. And how important it is for all of us tonight whether we're older, middle-aged, younger, we need leadership.

We need that which guides us safely. And the only safe guide we have is the Lord himself. That's why we have to say to ourselves, is he my Lord?

Is he my leader? Is he leading me every step of the way through life? Am I looking to him for safe guidance? So secondly, Christ's blessing of his people.

[ 42 : 11 ] You know, that's where it says next. He led them out as far as to Bethany and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

Now, what does that remind you of? Lifted hands followed by the lifted up Christ. Well, the lifted hands remind you of what you read in the likes of Numbers chapter 6 where Aaron, the high priest, was instructed by God to bless the people of Israel in the name of the Lord.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

The blessing of the high priest in the Old Testament that was the representation of the high priest Jesus himself in the blessing with which he blesses his people.

Christ blesses as the high priest of his people and he blesses out of his own achievement. That's, again, a remarkable thing. It's on the basis of what he himself has achieved that he blesses his people.

[ 43 : 27 ] Every blessing you receive in your life is a blessing that's come about by virtue of Christ's achievement, by virtue of what he has himself brought about, by what he has actually died and risen from the dead to bring about for you.

You haven't earned any of it. Neither have I. We haven't created that blessing. It is Christ's blessing for his people and here he is lifted up his hand so that they would see him as the high priest of his people blessing them.

He blessed them as he lifted up his hands over them. Now remember how Paul, when he was writing to the Ephesians and saying, blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. What a great summary that is in a few words.

Blessed us in the heavenly places with every blessing in Christ. All the blessings that we will ever have are in him already.

[ 44 : 36 ] All the blessings that you'll have in eternity are already in him. All the blessings you receive in your life from the moment you came to know him right to this moment and all the blessings that will ensue till the end of your life and on into eternity.

All the blessings that will be enjoyed in heaven have come about because of him and they are in him already. The blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.

That's the blessed life. The life that knows of Christ's uplifted hands as it were and blessing over the administration of this blessing that's in the hand of Jesus for his people.

And so you see he's saying here Luke is saying that he lifted up his hands and blessed them. But he doesn't leave it at that. It came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up them to heaven.

Every word of that is really so significant. Here it is fulfilling numbers six where the high priest blessed the people of God in the name of God.

[ 45 : 49 ] And here is Jesus fulfilling this as he lifted up his hands and blessed the people and by virtue of that blessed the church and while he blessed him he was parted from them. In other words the last they saw of him was him being taken up to heaven but his hands had not fallen down.

His arms had not come to be by his side as he was lifted up into heaven. They saw him still in the act of blessing them. That final view of him leaving this world was their view of the blessing redeemer.

The redeemer who was in the act of blessing his people. In other words he was instructing them by this that though his physical presence was no longer to be seen by them his blessing was going to go on.

His high priestly blessing would not end. His departure from this world was not the end of his blessings. Was not the cutting off of his blessings. He would still have his blessings administered to them poured out upon them from heaven itself.

And that's the last sign they had of him physically. But what a wonderful emphasis that is for you and for me tonight.

[ 47 : 02 ] That Jesus' activity of blessing his people was not terminated when he left this world to go back to heaven. It continues.

As we said through the Holy Spirit he continues to bless his people. You might say in the words that you find here his hands are still lifted above them to administer the blessing that you and I require.

And what is involved in the blessing with which he is blessing them and would bless them continually from now on? Well of course you can't answer that in a few words because as we said in Ephesians chapter 1 you find every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

All the blessings with which he blesses his people are involved in his blessing. But it's especially important in Luke's writings to think of the blessing as the advance of the church, the advance of his cause, the advance of his people because that's essentially where Luke takes up the account again in the book of Acts.

And the book of Acts is really about the church overcoming the huge opposition they face. Put in the form of a question, how was it that a room full of disciples ended up going out with the gospel and within a short time coming to be multiplied into thousands of believers?

[ 48 : 30 ] Did they do that by their own ingenuity? Was it their own expertise? Was it their own tactics? Was it by virtue of their strategy they did it?

Nothing wrong with having any of these things. No, they did it because Christ was leading them. The risen Christ, the powerful Christ, the conquering Christ was going before them.

And all of these aspects of the church's ministry in the days of the Acts of the Apostles, they went out successfully with the gospel. Success was not created by them, but by Jesus from on high.

The whole advance of the church was God blessing his people by virtue of what the high priest had actually achieved already by his death and resurrection.

And so you see tonight the blessing that you and I need is nothing short of the blessing which only Christ can actually give you. When we use the word blessed, we need to be careful that we use it in a proper way.

[ 49 : 37 ] Sometimes people will just treat it quite casually. It's a practice, as you know, a long standing. Somebody sneezes and somebody beside them says, oh blessing.

The blessing, when we use the word blessing, is a significant word. It's a word full of meaning. A word is attached to the person of Jesus.

A word into which we see the activity of Jesus in blessing his people. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

That's the blessing. And every time you come to know of that peace and of that comfort of that blessing, it's come about through him. It's situated in him.

It's from him. Christ's leading of his people then. Secondly, Christ's blessing of his people personally and even in a wider sense.

[ 50 : 45 ] The world's events are in the hands of the Lord. The whole advance of his church, the personal salvation of his people, the world's events are dictated by the blessing of God, the blessing of God, the blessing of Jesus, of his people.

Think, for example, again of Ephesians 1 and verse 10, which in many ways is a remarkable verse in itself, where you find that Paul is speaking there about what's attached again to the exaltation of Christ following his death and resurrection.

Ephesians 1 10, all the way through. You have one sentence there really from the beginning, almost from the beginning of chapter 1, the way in which we have redemption through the blood of Christ, forgiveness of sins, wherein he has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of his will, so on and so on, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.

In which also in whom you have obtained an inheritance. What is that saying to us? It says that everything is moving inexorably and infallibly towards the end that God has purposed for his people, his blessing of them, his final blessing of them, his eternal blessing of them.

Everything that happens in this world, all through the course of history, is part of that great package, part of that great arrangement. Why do empires come and go?

[ 52 : 26 ] Why do you find such movements in the world of our day, politically, economically? Where do all these things come from? How do they all fit together? Well, we might not be able to say that with any great certainty as to how exactly they fit together, but be sure of this, they are all God's program towards the accomplishment of the end of all things in Christ, to the glory of Christ, to the glory of God himself.

It's not human governments that dictate how the world is going to end. They're not in charge even of their own destiny. They're small cogs in God's book of history, in God's book of redemption for his church especially.

Whatever grand views they may have of themselves, they are actually instruments in God's hands to bring about the moving of his purpose towards the end of all things in Christ.

That's where you and I fit in as well. Tiny little specks on the surface of this great universe, this creation, and especially tiny specks and sinful ones of that in relation to God.

But what great things God has done for tiny sinful specks in Jesus Christ. It is for the likes of you and I that he came, that he suffered, that he died, that he rose from the dead, that he was exalted to glory, that he lifted up his hands in blessing and continues to bless his people.

- [ 54 : 16 ] what a great God we have, how worthy of our worship, how worthy of our praise and service, so thankful that he has given us this record of his word to teach us such things.
- Christ's leading of his people, his blessing of his people, and it concludes by Christ worshipped by his people, just briefly. in many ways this is the beginning of the worship of the unseen Christ.
- They worshipped him before now, but now they worshipped him, as he was parted from them and disappeared from you, they continued to worship him, and that's important.
- They didn't conclude, well now that he's gone we don't further need to worship him. They continued to worship this Jesus, this now exalted Jesus.
- And you see it says, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. How significant that is. They didn't look in on themselves and say, well we're just a tiny number, what are we going to do in facing this world?
- [ 55 : 28 ] He's told us to take his word into the world, to be witnesses to him to the ends of the earth. How are we going to do that? Look at the size of us. That's not how they looked at themselves.
- They returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were rejoicing in what had happened, rejoicing in this Jesus. So it should be for us as well.
- There are many things that cause us difficulty, bitterness in this life, challenges, mournings, regrets, failures, pains, sadness.
- But it should never interfere with our sense of the appropriateness of joy in the worship of God. I know it's easy to say that from the pulpit.
- It's easy to say that preaching the gospel I have to apply to my own life as well and realize that I come short in this as in everything else. But here it is. He had gone from their sight.
- [ 56 : 36 ] They no longer saw him physically but they returned. They worshipped him and returned with great joy. Let's focus on that.
- Whatever our experience is as congregations, as churches, joy in the praise of the Lord is always appropriate. Joy in realizing what he has done, what he continues to do, where he now is, who he is, why he is significant.
- Joyful worship, and you see, they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. You know, one of the things that encourages us in preaching the gospel is to see the likes of yourselves again and again coming to worship God together.
- Believe me, that is a hugely encouraging thing for us to note as preachers of the gospel. Why is it encouraging? Because it tells us that here are people whose desire it is continually to worship God, not just now and again, not just spasmodically, not just when they feel good about it.
- They were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. I'm afraid there has become a tendency throughout the church, our own church not excluded either, that the morning service is enough for many people, just that morning service to worship God together, the evening is for something else.
- [ 58 : 16 ] We have the privilege of being able to gather together twice on the Lord's Day to worship God, to come to rejoice in his presence, to give him thanks, to call upon prayer, to hear his word expanded.
- There is no greater privilege. There is no alternative to that, no meaningful alternative, no beneficial alternative. So when I see yourselves here in front of me and others like you who come to gather together regularly twice on the Lord's Day, it uplifts our hearts and it should be an encouragement to yourself that you gather with others and others gather with you to praise the Lord in this place of worship.

And don't let the devil or the world get your heart down. Don't look around you and say, well, look at all these empty seats. Yes, we see them, but Jesus still reigns.

He's still the risen Christ. He still leads his people. He's still in the act of blessing his people. And he's still worthy of receiving the worship of his people.

And we have the assurance from his own mouth as we find at the end of Matthew's Gospel. Behold, I am with you to the end of the world.

[ 59 : 44 ] And when he is with us, it doesn't matter who else is not. That's the important thing, that he is with his people as the exalted Christ, as the ruling Christ, as the blessing Christ, as the Christ who died and rose again and was taken back to heaven.

Let's pray. Lord, gracious God, we give thanks that we worship one who is exalted, who is exalted as one who has triumphed over death and over the grave, and not only so, but triumphed over all who sought to put an end to his ministry.

We thank you, Lord, for the impossibility of your church ever being destroyed by the enemy. And we bless you that as we come to worship you regularly, from week to week and at other times, we give thanks that we do worship you meaningfully in our hearts as one who is worthy of our worship as you rule over us from on high.

And so continue to bless us, continue to assure us, we pray, of your own regard for your people, and continue to take us as your people, grant that we may know your peace continuing with us.

And may we find, O Lord, from day to day, that we truly exult in the achievements of Christ himself. Receive our thanks, we pray now, in his name, and for his sake.

[ 61 : 16 ] Amen. We're going to conclude tonight by singing in Psalm 68, Psalm we read parts of just earlier, Psalm 68 verses 18 to 20, wonderful verses that set out for us, the ascendancy of Christ, his exaltation, and the fact that he has in doing so received gifts, it says here, for men, for human beings, even the likes of ourselves, and what is the great gift especially?

Well, it is that God the Lord might dwell in the midst of them. So, Psalm 68 from verse 18, now hast O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph, victorious led, captive, captivity.

Verses 18 to 20. Say with my school, voy He has rejected his torment, for such a justice repel.

Aim for them, Thou brought the Lord, in which of them I dwell.

Bless thee, Thou Lord, who lives to us, all our salvation, God.

[ 63 : 43 ] To fill thee with his emphasis, our salvation, He the Lord.

He of salvation is the Lord, who is the God of God.

And under God, the Lord from death, he is good to be on.

Amen.