

The Main Thing

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[0 : 00] Well, you'll find it helpful if you open a Bible in the seat in front of you. You may need to share with someone nearby at page 86, the last 17 verses in the Gospel of Luke.

And I want to say that trying to preach this section in 23 minutes is like trying to stuff a parachute into your pocket. So I might just pop out every now and again and I might call for some caffeine and go a little longer.

The parachute that we're looking at has three main lines and each of those lines is carrying one thing which is the heart of the passage, which is in verse 47, repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

So let's look at the three lines together. The first line, very obviously, is the risen Jesus in verses 36 to 43. It had been a very big day for the disciples.

Jesus had died a couple of days before. They're in the upper room. They're hearing stories about Jesus, the body gone, Jesus being risen from the dead.

[1 : 24] And just when the barbecue fish is about ready and done, Cleopas and his friend burst into the room and say, we've met Jesus. He's alive.

He was with us seven miles away in Emmaus. And then suddenly it says, behind closed doors, Jesus stood in the middle of them.

Now I just need to pause here and say what's very important about this is that Jesus' resurrection is not a resuscitation. It's not that Jesus has survived death to live a little longer in this life and in this world so as to die again.

This is a resurrection with a resurrection body. And his body has a different relation to space and to time. In just the way he suddenly disappeared in Emmaus a few moments ago, he now suddenly appears in the upper room and he beat Cleopas in the run back to Jerusalem.

The resurrection body doesn't obey the old rules, but his new body has flesh and bones. And Jesus is at pains to point out his identity, that he's the same person.

[2 : 42] Look at verse 39. He says, See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. So the resurrected Jesus, he's not a ghost, he's not a zombie, he's not a hallucination, he's not a vision.

It's the same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, the same Jesus who went onto the mountain and fed the 5,000. The same Jesus who was nailed to the cross by his hands and by his feet is the man standing before them, flesh and bones.

But these are flesh and bones of the new creation. And as they are sputtering and gasping and touching his hands and touching his feet, he says, Look, he says, I've just got to have something to eat.

And they give him a piece of barbecued fish and he ate it. And one of the commentators said, Scholars have had indigestion ever since.

Which I think is a wonderful line. Because you know that there are bishops and Christian theologians who say that the resurrection is not a bodily thing, it's just a spiritual thing. In fact, we've heard someone say it from this pulpit.

[4 : 02] There are a lot of theologians who say it's just a mystical, spiritual thing and that the disciples are having a kind of a group hallucination.

But if you say it's just spiritual, you have to kiss the new creation goodbye. Because the resurrection is the beginning of the new world.

Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. God has taken the flesh and bones of Jesus in his earthly life and he's raised them into a new existence, a resurrection life.

And now these flesh and bones have the capacity to stand in front of God, to bear the glory of God and to live for eternity. And it means that something has happened in this world that has never

happened before.

The old creation has met the new creation. The old creation has met its Lord. Now, of course, the old creation, when Jesus was born, knew that he was the Son of God.

[5 : 02] But now the old creation meets its future for the first time in the resurrected flesh and bones of Jesus. A new body, a deathless and glorious body.

Not the fruit of some natural process in this creation. But for the first time, the old creation has not just seen the end of the beginning, but the beginning of the end.

The worst thing the old world can throw at us is death and Jesus has overturned it. Let me put it a different way. In his resurrection, God gives Jesus a different name.

Remember in the letter of Paul to the Philippians that God exalted him, gave him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is, what's his new name?

Lord. Before the resurrection, Jesus Christ was the Son of God in weakness. But now that he is raised, he is Lord of all. And if you go through the sermons in the book of Acts and if you go through the life of the Christians in the book of Acts, again and again and again they refer to the name, the name, the name, which means Jesus Christ is Lord.

[6 : 14] This has huge implications for us. It means that the Christian faith is not a private, individual experience between me and Jesus. It's not just me flipping off and going to heaven.

It's about Jesus taking this creation and transforming it through his death and resurrection into the new creation. That's why Jesus says, now God once proclaimed repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name.

The reason I have this name is so that repentance and forgiveness of sins will go forward. It's not that the new creation is over here and repentance and forgiveness of sins is over here.

They're part of the same thing. Repentance is calling Jesus by his new name, Lord. It's tasting the new life of God. It's tasting the forgiveness of the resurrection.

This is the first line of the parachute, the risen Jesus. But there's a second line and it is the written scriptures. And even after they see Jesus eat, they don't believe.

[7 : 25] And I can't help thinking that the picture of Jesus eating just triggers us back into the heavenly feast. And the purpose of forgiveness and the purpose of redemption.

Now if your disciples didn't believe that you'd risen from the dead and you were standing there in a new resurrection body, what would you do? I think I would like to show them some tricks. Really. I mean, I think I would like to show them some of the things that I can do. I can appear. I can disappear. This is how it works. It's very interesting. Jesus doesn't do that. He doesn't say, look, I'm going to set up an enormous spiritual internet connection so you can download my goodness and all my thoughts.

Verse 44. Verse 44. 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 he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He says, while I was still with you, this is what I said. Now that I am raised, we're in a new relationship.

[8 : 35] I'm no longer going to be with you physically. But the way that God is going to direct you and speak to you and guide you is through everything that is written. And he casts his mind back over the whole Old Testament, Moses, the Psalms and the prophets.

And he says, it's one story with one focus and one purpose and one goal. He says, it's all about me. This is not a matter of an occasional proof text.

You know, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Jesus is saying that the deepest intention of every one of the Old Testament books is him. Why did God create the world?

He had Jesus Christ in mind. Jesus is the goal and purpose of creation. Why did God promise blessing through Abraham? It was so that Christ would come into the world. Jesus Christ fulfills the law.

He fulfills the prophets. He fulfills the sacrifices. He fulfills the kingship. He fulfills the ark and the temple. All the Old Testament is God getting the world ready for his son.

[9 : 37] But they do not understand this until he opens their minds. And then the puzzle starts coming together. And then Jesus says, if you want to summarize it all, the scriptures from beginning to end, there are three points.

If you look down there in verse 46. And in the original, there are three verbs that happen the same way. He says, thus it is written, verb number one, that the Christ should suffer.

Second, on the third day, rise from the dead. Third, repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations.

He says, you want to boil it all down from God's perspective? Here are the three things. Three things about this world. The cross, the resurrection, and now the announcement of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

And what that means is that the first word of the gospel is forgiveness. The first word is Christ has died, Christ has risen.

[10:48] This is news and that God is willing to offer us the gospel. He's willing to offer us freedom. The first word of the gospel is comfort.

Comfort my people. Let me put it to you this way. If God desires repentance and forgiveness of sins to be announced, it means that the gospel has two sides to it.

On the one side, it says, you are more sinful and more evil than you know. And on the other side, it says, you are more forgiven and more accepted than you can possibly imagine.

Some of us are thoroughly convinced of our sinfulness. You don't need anyone else to remind you that you failed. But you find it very difficult to grasp the freedom of God's forgiveness completely.

Others of us just think, oh, it's God's job to forgive. And I've never really taken responsibility for my sin. And you don't know the joy of repentance and the freedom of forgiveness. Listen, in Luke's gospel, forgiveness is always liberty, freedom, and release.

[12:01] And God does not give it to us because we deserve it, because we are sorry for our sins or because we've been through penitence. He gives us forgiveness for one reason alone, for Christ's sake.

He delights to give us forgiveness, to free us from the bondage to sin. And that is why repentance is not this terribly difficult, joyless, negative, groveling over the things I've done wrong.

It's joyful. It's just running through the door and it's saying, yes, that's what I want. I think that's the tragedy of the liberal gospel. It replaces the freedom of forgiveness with an acceptance and a tolerance and an approval of my sin.

It says, God accepts us just as I am. But in Luke's gospel, we have learned that sin is a spiritual sickness that leads to death. Sin is me wandering off and going my own way until I'm utterly lost. Sin is becoming a slave to the opinion of others and a slave of Satan. Sin is having other things in the place of God and worshipping God, God's good gifts.

[13:12] It's living upside down. And here is the announcement of the gospel. God does not accept me just as I am. God accepts me just as Jesus is.

Jesus comes as the divine doctor to bring us healing. He comes as the son of man to seek and to save the lost. He comes bringing freedom and reversal and forgiveness because it's his good pleasure.

It's a great picture. Here are the disciples. They're confused. They're unsure. They're uncertain. They face insecurity. What does Jesus do? He shows them his resurrection body, then he takes them to the word of God.

Throughout the history of God's people, when the church faces uncertainty and confusion and insecurity, where do we go? We go to the word of God written. And it says to us, Christ has died. Christ has risen. And then it announces to us repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. So here are the first two lines of the parachute.

[14:20] The first is the risen body of Jesus. The second is the written scriptures. And the third line is the living church. Listen again to verse 47.

Jesus says, Amongst Bible-believing Christians, there are basically two views as to what the purpose of the church is.

One view says the purpose of the church is worship. Glorify God. Magnify God. Exalt God. And it's very difficult to say a negative word about that.

Because our every breath, the purpose of our lives is to glorify God. But there's another view that says the purpose of the church is mission. That we are the only organization that exists for the sake of our non-members.

The primary reason Jesus has left us on earth is mission. And the church is a mission agency. Not that we send a couple of missionaries overseas. But that we are missionaries by virtue of following

Jesus Christ.

[15 : 39] And this is true as well in a sense. In fact, at this point in the Bible, what Jesus is doing is he's changing the direction of mission.

In the Old Testament, mission was centripetal. The nations came into Jerusalem. But now the mission changes direction and is centrifugal as Jesus sends them out to proclaim forgiveness and repentance.

And in the book of Acts, this is what happens as repentance and forgiveness goes outward and outward and outward. But I want to say that these two views of the purpose of the church, worship or mission, are not mutually exclusive.

And Jesus has a way here of bringing them together. And if you listen carefully again, he says that the purpose of God and the purpose for his church is repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name.

And there's a missional side and there is also a ministry side to this. There's an outward side and an inward side. And I just want to speak about these two together. So firstly, let me speak about the missional implication of repentance and forgiveness.

[16 : 51] Of course, Jesus himself has been the greatest missionary, hasn't he? I mean, Jesus crossed the biggest cultural gap the world has ever seen from the glory of heaven to first century Israel.

And throughout the gospel, Jesus has been deeply purposeful. From chapter 9, verse 51, he turned his face, set his face to go to Jerusalem because he knew he was going to be received up.

And through this chapter, three times we have heard that the Christ must suffer and die. He must suffer and die. He must suffer and die. That is why he came.

This was the purpose of God the Father. This is what God wanted. So that forgiveness and redemption is not some accidental byproduct of his death. It is his mission.

And now he says, that same must which drove me must drive you. And if you are a Christian, it means you see the death and resurrection of Jesus as the most necessary thing that's ever happened.

[17 : 55] And you cannot, you cannot keep it to yourself. When the women discovered that Jesus had risen from the dead, they spontaneously ran and told people, as did Cleopas.

They didn't do an evangelism training course. And the mission of church, brothers and sisters, is not complicated. It's to bring the entire world to repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. It's not to bring people into our church building. It's to go out into Vancouver with this wonderful message of repentance and forgiveness.

Because we know there's no other name. There's no other way of forgiveness. There's no other way to reverse the curse. And we know that all our friends who are desperately investing their lives in having the best life here are just building Babel again.

So repentance and forgiveness of sins means the living church lives for mission. But it also means, secondly, that the living church lives for ministry.

[19 : 00] It's very important for us to see that repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name is not just about mission to others. It's not just the ABC of Christianity.

It's not just how we become Christians. It's the source of ongoing growth and spiritual change in our lives until we come to the kingdom. The most godly and saintly Christian is someone who's doing nothing other than growing deeper in repentance and stronger in their grasp of the reality of forgiveness of sins.

And the more godly you become, the deeper you have a sense of your own sinfulness. At the same time, the greater you grasp the absolute acceptance and approval of God through Jesus Christ.

And this, you can apply this to any area of life. Let me just make a couple of applications. Take marriage, for example. What makes a Christian marriage work?

It's not scoring 98% on your compatibility markers. It's not finding your soulmate. In the end, it is repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

[20 : 13] See, in marriage, two sinful people commit themselves to a one-flesh friendship for the whole of life to the glory of God. And my purpose in marriage is redemption, redemption for my partner.

And that cannot happen unless I'm willing to repent and unless I'm willing to forgive. And I'm not going to really repent and I'm not going to really forgive unless I've grasped that Jesus has forgiven

me and I can repent to him.

A lot of marriages settle into a pattern of defense and pretense, a sort of a mutual deal. I won't hurt you too much if you don't hurt me too much. A sort of a mutual hostility where it's much easier to focus on the kids, frankly.

And then when the kids leave home, lots of marriages dissolve. The only place of real change is this spiritual dynamic of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

And it has to be in Jesus' name because the only place I know where I am completely accepted and completely forgiven, not because of my performance or lack of performance, is in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 23] And when I start to understand that, I'm free to repent and I'm free to forgive. Or take conflict. Most of us here hate conflict.

And those of you who don't, we wish you did. But of course, not all conflict is wrong.

Jesus' life is full of conflict. How do we deal with conflict in a godly way? The answer is not to know I'm right on everything and everyone else is wrong, nor is it to master all the techniques of conflict. The heart of being godly in conflict is repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. If I'm accepted by God, not because of what I've done, not because of what you think of me, but because of his delight, I can risk being wrong.

And I can stand up to your disapproval. Because my approval and my acceptance doesn't ultimately depend on what you think. Therefore, I can speak kindly and I can act in a godly fashion in conflict.

[22 : 30] I can have a repenting heart. I can know that God delights in me. We could apply this to bitterness. We could apply it to anger. We could apply it to jealousy.

My point is simply this. When we become Christians, the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name is not just something we give away to other people.

It's the deepest power of change. And it's something that we grow into more and more every day. The Christian life is a lifelong process of growing in repentance and understanding God's forgiveness.

And I think that's why Jesus mentions partly the Holy Spirit in verse 49. He says you'll be clothed with power. That's not just for mission. It means being clothed with repentance and forgiveness of sins.

So there's the third line of the parachute. The first is the resurrection of Jesus. The second is the written scriptures. And the third is the living church.

[23 : 30] Now, how do you finish a series on the gospel of Luke? We've been going in this since September last. And I want to say thank you for the privilege of being able to work in this book.

The only thing I can say is I just want to point you to how beautiful Jesus is. How different he is. I want you to see and go away with a picture of his goodness and his grace and his kindness and his compassion.

And the more you read this, it just feeds your faith. There are treasures on every page. Don't tell me you've studied it. There are treasures on every page.

On this page alone, do you know what Jesus first said to his disciples when he comes into the room? He says, peace to you. These are the guys who had betrayed him, had let him down, had abandoned him, had denied him.

But what does he do? He comes with forgiveness. He wants to overcome their sin. He delights in mercy. And it means that you see God is far more ready to forgive than we are to be forgiven.

[24 : 40] He's so different from us. He wants to raise every single one of us. Did you notice in verse 47, where does repentance and forgiveness of sins get first preached in Jesus' mind?

It's in Jerusalem. The very place he was rejected and tortured and executed. It means there's not a single person who's gone too far for the grace and forgiveness of Jesus.

There's no person too evil. There's no person who has gone too far. The compassion of Jesus is astounding. And listen to how the gospel finishes with blessing.

Verse 50. He led them out as far as Bethany. Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, blessing God.

Jesus goes the same way he came, bringing blessing, leaving blessing. That's what he's come to do. He's come to reverse the curse. He comes as a friend of sinners.

[25 : 48] Listen, one of the commentators says this. You will never find a heart more tender, more loving, more patient, more compassionate, more kind.

He was gracious in his coming. He was gracious in his life and in his teaching and what he did. He was gracious in his death. He's gracious in his resurrection. He's gracious in his ascension. And he remains the same yesterday, today and forever. And it just fills us with great joy. So let us kneel and pray and bow to him and take his promises by faith.

For he is gracious. Father, we come to you this morning, our hearts full of gratitude.

We thank you for Luke, the doctor who took so much trouble to get his facts right and to get them coherent. We thank you for the portrait he gives us of Jesus.

[26 : 55] And probably everyone here today wishes they were there when Jesus, the risen Jesus, opened the scriptures up and explained our need for repentance and forgiveness.

We thank you for the diligence of our preachers who, like Luke, struggled hard to get it right. Who preach your word so fearlessly and faithfully. Father, we ask that we may be equally diligent with our listening. As we reflect on what we have heard, give us a spirit of repentance and the knowledge of exactly how much our sin grieves you.

We thank you for the resurrection of Jesus. Help us to find the joy in it that those early disciples found. Help us to understand that Jesus conquered death and what hope this gives us.

We thank you for the scriptures and that your spirit works within us. Helping us to see that Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection is its overarching theme.

[28 : 11] Help us when we think about forgiveness and sin. Help us to give us the courage and honesty to truly repent.

And to understand the freedom of forgiveness brings. Help us to comprehend that you want us to be happy, exuberant disciples of Jesus.

And Lord, in your mercy. Father, we ask that we will live our lives in a way that shout out that we are redeemed people.

We ask for courage again as we live and go into the world to proclaim the gospel, inspired and driven by the love we have for our risen Lord.

Give us words when necessary and actions which fit. And enveloping all, may your love be your ruthless. Help us to understand the implications of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name that we have heard this morning.

[29 : 21] Help us to not only understand the vitality it adds to our life and to not shy away from what it gives us. Help us to be happy, exuberant disciples of Jesus. Help us to be happy, exuberant disciples of Jesus.

Help us not to settle for all that we can be, but to yearn for all that you can make us be. Lord, in your mercy.

We pray this morning for those in the Diocese of the Upper Shia Malawi. Be with every follower of Jesus in their lives that are so different from ours.

We pray for those who have them in their care. And we pray as well for the Crisis Pregnancy Center here in Vancouver. We ask that you will give wisdom, courage and a sense of your love to all involved in it.

We pray also for those who are sick. Help them as they fight pain. Keep them close to you. And in particular this morning we pray for Ron, Ben, George, Harold, Rowena, Harold and Don.

[30 : 39] And we thank you as well for wonderfully answering our prayers for Paul. And in a short moment's silence, we pray for those who are known to us who need your healing power.

In conclusion, Father, once again we thank you for sending your perfect son to be our prophet, priest and king.

May we accept his saving grace and repent of our sins. We thank you for your love and forgiveness. We love you and are desperately sorry for grieving you with our sin.

We're so grateful for the risen Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.