

Luke 24:36-49 "Witnesses"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Turn with me, if you will, to Luke 24. Luke 24 is page 885 of the Bible in the pew in front of you. Don't forget what we've been doing up in the service this long.

This is merely a continuation of this conversation. God sends us into the world with good news. We're nearing the end here of the account that Luke gives us of Jesus' life.

And we get this morning one more encounter of the risen Jesus. Probably still the night of Easter Sunday. And he shows up with his disciples.

He says some things that they've heard before. But listen as I read for some new things. Especially toward the end of this interaction. It's powerful stuff for who they are and who we are to be.

[1 : 07] Remember, this is God's holy word. The reliable way to know who God is. The definitive authority on who you and I are designed to be.

The only thing that will always direct you and your life to be shaped in the right direction. Luke 24 at verse 36.

As they, the disciples, were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace to you.

But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 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. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, Have you had anything here to eat?

[2 : 13] They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it before them. 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.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. 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.

Pray with me. Father, thank you for your word. And we ask now that that promised Holy Spirit, that Jesus told us he's sending upon us, would meet with us and so work in our hearts this morning that we would be different people, that we would be those that you call us to be, that we would share your heart.

Father, do that work in us by your spirit through your word. You love to do that. And that's why we've come this morning to your word expectantly and needy of you to speak and you to work and act in and through us.

[3 : 42] So we ask it and we look forward to what you'll do in Jesus' name. Amen. When you are introducing yourself to someone for the first time, you might say, Hey, I'm a pastor.

I'm an engineer. I'm a dental hygienist. I'm an auto mechanic. Whatever it is that you spend much of your time doing, you know, chauffeur for busy young people, whatever it is that you're doing all the time.

But sometimes when we say that, we forget that that's not the primary part of our identity. What we do is not supposed to be the same as who we are.

Child of God, image bearer of the King, follower of Christ. Those things are more fundamental to our identity, right?

Perhaps this passage would suggest that we could accurately introduce ourselves and say, I'm a witness. Anybody want to start doing that? Just practice over the next few weeks with me just to introduce yourself.

[4 : 59] Nobody wants to do that. But you could theoretically begin to say, Hey, I'm a witness. Jesus says here and elsewhere, that's the identity, the calling of his followers.

A witness. Someone, you know, with a story to tell. Something he has seen. Something she has experienced. Something he or she needs to share.

The word in the Bible, witness, speaks to someone with a truth to testify to. A reality to recount. And Jesus in this passage shows how vital it is for his followers to be witnesses.

I mean, think about it. We've got just a very small window of time between Jesus rising from the dead on Easter and then ascending into heaven.

There's only a little bit of time he has with his followers to say, here's what you're to be about. Here's what's most important. And what is it that's most important to Jesus? Well, we've read on Easter afternoon, he's found these followers on the road to Emmaus.

[6 : 14] They're discouraged. And he teaches them about himself, about the Bible, revealing to them as they break bread who he is. He's committed to our knowing him, right?

That's what we learned a couple weeks ago. Jesus is committed to our knowing him. And this passage shows us that in addition to that, he is committed. What's important to him is our making him known.

That's why the witnesses part comes in. Jesus' plan for his kingdom involves witnesses. And he makes sure here that he's prepared them with the right story, the right experience that needs to be shared.

Watch how this unfolds as Jesus appears to his followers. As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them.

Jesus does it again. He just shows up, right? He keeps doing this now since he's risen, just showing up with his followers. And now here it's with the fuller group of disciples for the first time since his resurrection.

[7 : 19] And what's he going to say to them? You know, what do you think? I mean, after all, they've all in one way or another just abandoned him. Haven't they?

Some of them physically left the premises. Some denied him multiple times. No one's been there for him. They didn't even understand what he was talking about, that he was going to do.

They have failed him at the key moment. Kids, have you ever had your mom say to you, just wait till your father comes home?

I heard that a lot when I was a kid. And it's not an exciting thing, like he might bring you a present or something. You hear those words and you think, uh-oh, right? Just wait till your father comes home. What it means is that he's coming home to give you at least a part of what you deserve, right? Now, not that your mom couldn't do it. She could, but what she's saying is that I've done everything.

[8 : 23] I'm through with you for now. And maybe she needed to cool off a bit too, possibly. But here comes Jesus, the very one they've abandoned coming home, right?

Standing right there with them. And he could give them the talking to they deserve, right? It should have started with, with how could you? Or why did you not?

Or do you have any idea? But Jesus' first word is different. What's Jesus' first word? Peace.

Peace to you. It's a word that to Luke is a microcosm of all of salvation. Jesus shows up bringing salvation in himself.

Peace between God and man here because of what he has done on the cross and in the empty tomb. And a witness for Jesus has to know that that's who he is.

[9 : 30] In addition, a witness will need to know that he is the physically resurrected Lord. That this is Jesus himself.

Jesus lets them do several things here, doesn't he? He lets them touch his hands and touch his feet. He eats a fish right there in front of them.

What's all that about? Apparently it's really important that they experience his physical reality. A new, glorious body. For sure there's things different.

They struggle to recognize him. Yet nonetheless he shows them it is I myself. It is Jesus himself who's with them. The Bible does not teach the idea of a figurative resurrection but rather the reality of a bodily resurrection.

This is not some Gnostic Christianity where the goal of our lives is now escaping this world and these bodies to something immaterial and floating on clouds forever.

[10:32] No. The direction this is headed is a renewed, glorified, fully human existence made perfect in God's image.

Jesus is committed to their knowing him. who he really is. What he has really done. So he's now taught for hours.

He's patiently lingered with slow disciples who didn't recognize him. He's shown up among them. He's let them touch him. He's eaten with them. All so that they can know him and then make known who he is.

If you've been at Southwood you should hear echoes of experience and express grace. know him and make him known. That's what this is about.

And I'll admit here that there are differences between what it means for these first disciples to be witnesses and for us today to be witnesses.

[11:34] We all have a story to share. They have a first-hand experience, don't they, of the risen Jesus appearing over and over in those weeks to over 500 of them at one time.

Eyewitness accounts that they have and that they then witness to us about in the Bible for the rest of the New Testament so that we too can know the reality, the truth of Jesus and therefore have a story to share.

I love how they invite us into that. That's the design of God's word here and they're inviting us into that story with all of our emotions that we might have about this risen Jesus.

Just see if your feelings about Jesus aren't represented here in this room where the disciples are startled, frightened, anybody, troubled, doubting, and Jesus comes in the midst of all those emotions and says, experience me, know me.

And then even as they touch him and his hands and his feet and they can't deny who he is, they know it's Jesus but actually says they disbelieve with joy.

[12:54] We would say it's too good to be true. I know it's true but I just can't wrap my mind around it. Some of you have felt that way about Jesus, haven't you?

You know those emotions and the disciples here feel all of those things that we feel in different ways in our own hearts about the story, this incredible story.

It's crazy of a man rising from the dead and they say, come with us. We're going to tell you about it and they're going to invite you to come with them as Jesus shows up in real time and soothes their fears with his presence.

He calms their anxieties with his words. He shatters their doubts with his reality and truth. Jesus wants us to know him like that too.

And so, again, for the third time now on Easter Sunday, someone wanting to know Jesus is pointed where? To the Old Testament scriptures.

[14:07] To the Bible. Verse 44. Then Jesus 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, that's the whole thing by the way, Old Testament, must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. What's Jesus opening their minds to in God's word? There's a lot of stuff in here, right?

It's the same things he's been telling us are so vitally important over and over. He's been saying it through this last half of Luke. Keep reading. He said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.

We've heard this, right? God's story, the one Jesus' witnesses must tell features the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus. Again, he's showing them how this is exactly why he came.

Why God has been telling his people from the beginning that it must be this way. Remember we talked a couple of weeks ago how this whole Old Testament story points to Jesus.

[15:25] Over and over it points to a promised king who would die to rescue God's people and restore their relationship with him. Jesus opens their Bibles with them again.

We suspect they were already open when he showed up because they were talking to each other about Jesus that night. And now he opens their minds even more to understand.

They understand those really vital things but this time there's actually something new. Y'all listen to me for a second.

Jesus never adds anything to his core focus. You've heard it enough times by now to recognize it, right? I am going to Jerusalem. I must go.

I must suffer. I must die and on the third day be raised from the dead and that is how it goes every time. End of story. That's the good news, right? The Savior coming.

[16:25] But there's more? This time Jesus actually goes on and adds something we haven't heard in this context before that he's teaching them from the Bible verse 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

What's going on here? What's going on is that now it's time to move the mission forward. The good news is meant for everyone, right? All these important things have happened now people need to know about it.

Remember back from the angels to the shepherds before Jesus even enters into the world Jesus has been promised he's been promised to be good news of great joy for all people.

There's news to proclaim in the name of Jesus repent and believe come back to your father be forgiven and cleansed forever. Jesus says hey I got a secret for you I'm not making this stuff up this is not new this has always been God's mission it's just you could only handle a piece at a time for me and even those things you didn't understand.

It's like what we heard Rob Futo say in the video earlier the church is a mission not a club it's not about us but about those who aren't here yet right?

[17:59] That's true for the church in Hungary it's true for the church in Huntsville why? Because it's always been true of God's people the church must be on mission to everyone all nations or it's not the church church Jesus tells them how making his name known to the nations has always been crucial to the story man this must have been another great sermon like the one on the road to Emmaus that I wanted to be there for and as I said then I'm not sure all Jesus says as he opens the Bible for them but from the rest of the New Testament he told at least some of this story a story that God who from the first time that mankind fell out of that intimate relationship that he created them for was set on rescuing him and he started with a special relationship with one nation one group of people right but even when he blessed

Abraham and Israel it was for the sake of all the nations for the ends of the earth and so God says to Abraham in your offspring singular particular offspring by the way shall all the nations of the earth be blessed and Isaiah prophesies of this promised Messiah it's too light a thing it's too small it's not enough that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and bring back the preserved of Israel millions of them though they be that's not enough I've got a bigger vision God says I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach where to the end of the earth that's that's the Messiah who's coming Micah talks about him that way another prophet who says this Messiah is going to be born in Bethlehem right after that what does he say he'll stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord and the majesty of the name of the Lord his

God and they'll all dwell secure for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth not just in Bethlehem to the ends of the earth and he shall be their peace the prophet Zechariah tells us about a king who's going to come and enter on a donkey and Jesus has just done that just a week ago right and then he says this this king that comes in on a donkey shall speak peace where to the nations his rule shall be from sea to sea from the river to the ends of the earth do you hear what God's been saying all along peace to the nations to the end of the earth if you had a King James Bible you could read it the right way which is to the uttermost parts of the earth is the best way to say it you see that's God's mission through the whole Bible that's his heart yes the Messiah would come to rescue and restore God's people yes he would die and rise so that when you repent and trust in him your sins are forgiven yes but that's only one piece that good news was always for all people in all nations they were all supposed to hear about it they were all to know him and now Jesus comes and he adds that on to what's happening for the disciples can you imagine their excitement I mean just think about it the risen Jesus is there this is going to be great this is the guy who always heals anybody who's sick this is the guy who whenever any of us is hungry he's got us covered right more food for everybody this is the one who always knows what to say in every from the dead and now the Christ will proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations and they're like let's go except that's not exactly what Jesus said the Christ should suffer the Christ should rise from the dead but then repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his

name Jesus says

I've scheduled the world tour now see ya I'm out it's a little bit disconcerting actually verse 48 he says you are witnesses witnesses of these things I just imagine the disciples who've gotten so excited hearing that and saying oh I think he meant road crew like you know plan some potlucks hang around with Jesus organize some conferences for him to speak at and that's that's what he meant Jesus says no no witnesses you're witnesses you're the ones with the story to share you're the ones to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name where to all nations everybody needs to know so so Jesus you mean you mean we 11 you know confused followers am I hearing you right

[23 : 28] I mean maybe if you helped us we could gather a few hundred back around probably but but all the nations Jesus come on now but what happens well if Jesus being made known to the nations was the goal I I'd say God knew what he was doing 2,000 years from this conversation in a little room in Jerusalem billions of people have repented and received forgiveness of sins from nearly every people tribe language and nation nearly the mission is still underway but listen if you're like me and you you hear that and you think most days that God would be crazy to make you a witness pick somebody else all I can say is it looks like he knows what he's doing see

Jesus never calls us to something without empowering us for it does he verse 49 behold I'm sending the promise of my father upon you but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high Jesus says I've got a gift for you because sometimes witnesses can be intimidated can't they I mean they've got someone to talk about they've got a story to share but sometimes they just can't get up the nerve to do it because there's people who won't like hearing their testimony yeah there are a lot of other things that I could fill my schedule with besides that so Jesus empowers witnesses with the gift of his spirit there's no other way for this mission to be accomplished is there I mean when Jesus said he was leaving they knew immediately they couldn't do it alone they weren't wrong

Jesus says yeah you're right don't go anywhere alone it's not safe you're not strong enough you're not faithful enough witnesses don't leave the city you can't be trusted on your own wait for the spirit listen this is really important witnesses we must rely on his power there's there's no other way to do this the disciples experience it at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes in power and if you know Jesus you have a new identity as a witness yes but also a new empowerment for your mission as a witness see it's actually even a little bit more exciting for you than for the disciples Jesus is not telling you this morning to go somewhere and wait that was for them they had to wait until Jesus left and sent the spirit guess what already happened that part's over so you have if you know Jesus his spirit living and active in you already and in others and in this world he's at work so yes wait independence upon him absolutely but you don't have to wait for Pentecost you're 2000 years beyond that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you your church is a part of the people from every tribe tongue language and nation who are together a temple where the spirit lives you have the power that raised Jesus from the dead in you and among us to be witnesses that's where boldness comes from y'all boldness that most of us are pretty unfamiliar with right boldness especially for weak people like me you will be clothed with power from on high now that's that's witness where we can be proud of I couldn't resist that joke

I knew it wasn't very good but but but but really I want you actually I say it because I want you to remember it clothed clothed with power covered in what you need to be a witness clothed with power not of yourself but but words to speak when you don't have answers think through church history confidence to speak the name of Jesus while the flames are starting to rise up at your feet when the sword is close to your neck strength to endure rejection and being left out by those who hate your testimony the power to be a witness y'all the power is his and he uses weak vessels for his glory God reminded me of this reality several times on my recent trip to India one of those in particular was as we were preparing to come back and the first leg of my journey home was about to start so I prayed the night before for gospel opportunities on the way home and I'm picturing these long plane rides where somebody has to listen to me talking but the first leg was actually a three hour car ride and at the last minute we stopped to pick up a young man in his late 20s we met seemed like a nice guy we get back in the car the driver turns to me and says oh hey he's not a Christian why don't you share the gospel with him oh okay so having just met him and being an expert in evangelism

[29 : 28] I turned and said hey I'm in India to share with people about Jesus do you know who Jesus is y'all that's not in any of the evangelism books to start that way and he says back through my translator this he says he knows Jesus is a God and that Jesus died on a cross but he doesn't know why Jesus died on a cross could you explain that to him let me think I mean I suppose if I had to start somewhere I could possibly start by talking about why Jesus died on the cross y'all my six year old could have finished the story from there right like she could have handled answering that question and here God God is doing something unmistakable in that moment I felt so clearly the presence of the Holy Spirit answering my prayers he was working in this man's heart and then he was at the same time making it painfully but gloriously obvious that his confidence was not in my evangelistic abilities let me take care of this one okay but that he was at work

I was weak in witnessing I know that but he's strong and that was all that mattered he had everything teed up he was the powerful one I just said Bunty you have a son do you love him would you do anything to get him back if you lost him that's what God did on the cross he loves many of us many sons he has that he loves and they needed to be rescued and brought back to him so Jesus had to die on the cross for us and I got to share my story my experience with Jesus I got to share from the Bible's story because he had three hours so even I could get through it in three hours he even invited me to share with his family when we got to his home at the end of the ride I tell you that so that you know that the Holy Spirit is working in India and the Holy Spirit is working in Hungary in these places to see repentance and forgiveness of sins proclaimed to all the nations he's working there to make the name of

Jesus known and if he's working there you can know confidently he's working in Huntsville Jesus is equally alive here equally committed here to many people hearing the good news and finding life in him who needs to hear from you where has God called you to go as a witness to the nations who's coming to know Jesus would delight your heart the question is not if you're strong enough but rather if you believe he is you are here to be a witness to tell the story of Jesus to tell your story with Jesus and the only power you need is his he is with you now why do we fear failure when he ensures our success in his mission he hears your prayers he knows your weakness he has sent his holy spirit to give you power for making him known that's a big part of what's going on at this table right Jesus comes here to give us a special reminder of his presence with us he meets with us and feeds us by his spirit to strengthen our faith for making him known for being witnesses he didn't want you to do it alone so he sends you back here all the time to remember you're not this bread and this juice are to encourage your faith by reminding you Jesus gave himself for you and you're never alone in your mission to make him known to the nations he sat with those disciples he took bread and broke it and gave it to him as I ministering in his name give this bread to you he said take eat this is my body broken for you do this in remembrance of me so you remember I'm always with you and then he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you there's forgiveness for you and to be shared with others and so drink and remember that that it comes only through me and don't let anyone else miss that if you don't know Jesus this may seem a little bit odd and we would encourage you this morning don't come and take bread and juice that mean nothing to you the bible warns against us doing that in a careless manner but we're so glad that you're here and we would invite you if you'd like you can still come forward to these tables and ask us to pray with you or we'd love to talk with you after the service because our mission is to make the name of Jesus known it's why we're here nothing would delight us more than to get to tell you about him grab any of us that's why we're here but if you do know him if you're part of his people whether whether here at Southwood or or at any other church please come and celebrate remember that he's here with you he he comes by his spirit to meet with you and to feed you so that you receive forgiveness that you repent and know the love of a father who always welcomes you home and that you're strengthened as you eat to be a witness to your risen savior let's pray and then we'll celebrate

Jesus thank you for deciding we could be a part of this as weak as we are for for being committed to making us a part of what you're doing in this world it dignifies us beyond what we deserve it makes every moment of our lives matter for something we're grateful thank you so much for not leaving us alone thank you for giving yourself for us and for sending your spirit to be with us strengthen us even now we ask in your name amen our host team members will usher you to tables forward and backward and we will rejoice and eat with Jesus for more information visit us online at southwood.org