

Luke 1:1-24:53 "The Good News Is a Person"

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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.
- Let's pray. Jesus, you are glorious, beautiful, and we pause to marvel at that.
- To bow before you and delight in who you are and how you love us. In your greatness and glory, you have come to us.
- And we, this weekend even, are remembering, thankfully and with grateful hearts, those who have given their lives.
- For our freedom in this country. How much more so do we give you thanks? For giving your life for not remaining glorious and beautiful and far away, but being glorious and beautiful and near.
- [1 : 18] Coming to us. So we ask again for your help this morning in seeing you as you truly are.
- Give us eyes to see. Holy Spirit, would you work in our hearts. It is hard for us when we encounter a sermon that has no new information for us.
- We especially need you to engage our hearts. That we would know you more. That you would change us. As we meet with you and as we look at your word.
- We ask for you to do that, especially this morning. For your glory that Jesus would be exalted and we would be helped by him. And we ask in his name. Amen. Amen.
- As Jeremy said, I am really, really excited about the summer of one another. It's going to be a great summer. Together we get to experience together how God answers the loneliness of this world.
- [2 : 29] With relationships. With a community. A community shaped by the gospel. By the good news of Jesus. That's what we're going to be doing together this summer.
- Is learning about that and experiencing and living in that. But before we jump into that next Sunday. I wanted to look back at Luke one more time.
- As we've gotten to see the story of that good news unfold. From the birth of Jesus all the way through his crucifixion and resurrection.
- Call me sentimental. It's probably a fair criticism. But when you spend the better part of three years and 77 sermons. But who's counting?
- In one book. You ought to expect God to be teaching and transforming you through that, right? I'm the world's worst at finishing something and then just moving on to the next thing.
- [3 : 30] I'll read a book and get to the end of it. And I'll put it down and I'll pick up the next book and say, let's read another one. And two weeks later, I couldn't tell you what I took away from the first book. And I don't want us to be that way with God's word.
- That we would come to it and just move on and say, well, I've checked Luke off. I don't know. There was something in there. So I'm trying to slow down with you this morning and say, what's God been doing in our hearts?

A lot has happened in the life of our church during those three years and 77 sermons. We had one pastor when we started. Now we have four, which is really, really exciting.

But it's not merely staff. About 20% of the members of our congregation today were not here when we started studying the book of Luke together.

Not to mention like a few dozen babies. And that's really, really exciting too, what God is doing in and among this community. So hey, if you're new, this is your first week, then congratulations.

[4 : 33] Great planning. You're going to get three years in one day. And that's much more strategic than the rest of us who've been showing up. Well, anyways, it's a good day to be here for the first time.

Think about how much has happened in your life in three years. God has met you in the midst of all sorts of joys and sorrows, celebrations and challenges.

I hope in the midst of all of those things that have been going on in your life, you've also met Jesus. And that you know him and love him more.

Because that's what Luke's all about, right? That's what he's telling us. He tells us he writes an orderly account so that his readers may know the certainty of the things they've been taught about the life and times of Jesus.

That's what the gospel of Luke is. I've called Luke the historical, paradoxical, upside down, life changing, true story of Jesus.

[5 : 39] And we'll see some of those realities as we talk this morning. But it is all about Jesus. The angels announced that to the shepherds. And in Luke 2, there's good news of great joy for all people, right?

And as the story unfolds, we watch as Luke shows us how that good news of great joy is a person. Jesus himself.

I want us to look back and see some highlights of what Luke shows us about Jesus and what that means in our lives. One last thing as we do that. I'd encourage you to consider and even ask God as we're here this morning to show you what he's doing in your heart.

What he's teaching you. How he's working in your life. I'm going to share some personal takeaways for me. But Holy Spirit may be doing different things in your heart with the same truths.

So sometimes God shapes us as we read his word. And we don't even realize what he's teaching us and how he's molding our hearts. But sometimes also he brings particular things to mind that speak into where we are in our lives right then.

[6 : 48] And how our lives must change in light of God's word. And I suspect he's been doing some of that with all of us right here in the midst of it. As we're learning them, how should our lives be impacted?

Perhaps the place to start this morning is Luke's clear demonstration of Jesus' uniquely focused mission. Jesus announces himself from the beginning of this story and of his ministry as the promised Messiah come to redeem God's people.

And as he begins to make his primary focus in coming to this earth clear, the must language starts. He starts saying this must happen. The Son of Man must suffer many things.

Be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes. Be killed and on the third day be raised. He says in chapter 12, if we could go back for just a second.

He says in chapter 12, I have a baptism to be baptized with. He's got to go to the cross and die. How great is my distress until it's accomplished? He tells his disciples in chapter 18, see we're going up to Jerusalem.

[8 : 02] Everything written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. He'll be delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon. After flogging him, they will kill him.

And on the third day, he will rise. Jesus has this laser focus on Jerusalem, right? On the cross. He's going there.

He knows what's going to happen. Many are going to be redeemed. And it's so important to him, isn't it? It's where he's driving through the whole gospel. It's actually where he picks up after the resurrection with his disciples.

The angels first are telling them, he's not here. He's risen. Remember he told you this? That the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men. Be crucified and on the third day rise.

And Jesus follows up with him. He meets with him on the road to Emmaus with a couple of them and says, How did you miss all the things the prophet said that the Christ would have to suffer and enter his glory?

[8 : 59] Then he gets with a bigger group of them. And what does he say to them? Y'all, it had to happen this way. The end of chapter 24. It's the next verse. The Christ should suffer.

And on the third day rise from the dead. That's what Jesus wants them to know. That's what Jesus wants them to take away. Why he came. Why am I here?

Luke spends so much time in his gospel on the events surrounding the death of Jesus. Just those last couple days of his life. About a quarter of Luke's gospel. We must never miss its importance.

When Jesus talks in Luke about why he's come, he talks about the cross. And he talks about people. See, it's not merely this just generic salvation that Jesus was going to accomplish some vague, significant action on the cross.

But we've seen Jesus is a treasure hunter. That was the point of all the lost and found parables in chapter 15, right?

[10 : 06] A lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. They all find themselves in Jesus' sights. He's coming after them to find them and rescue them.

It's what he tells the tax collector Zacchaeus in chapter 19. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

He said the same thing to another group of sinners and tax collectors earlier. Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Jesus didn't come generically for people. He came specifically to find lost treasures. The prophecy used to launch his ministry makes that clear.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of our Lord's favor.

[11 : 11] And we read that earlier, right? We read together that prophecy from Isaiah 61. And Jesus says what? Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

This is what I've come to do. He says. Who's he come for? The poor? Captives? The blind? The oppressed?

These are the people that Jesus comes for. His mission was to a cross for a people who desperately needed him. And it's challenged us to realize how much we need him.

That reality has continued to hit me as much as anything else. How desperately I need Jesus to rescue, to redeem me.

Have you contemplated that recently? Jesus comes to earth and insists on going to a cross for you.

[12 : 12] Because that's what you needed him to do for you. We so desperately need him. And yes, once and for all on the cross. But continually as well we need him.

That's why I love Luke's emphasis on prayer. Constantly, Jesus prays all the time. Daily depending on his father. And particularly before the big events in his life.

But the grace in this is that he meets my desperate need. Jesus sees my need. He prays for me.

He succeeds where I fail to pray. He's praying. And he prays for me. He says that to Peter and his disciples. And I've got to tell you that reality has comforted me countless days over the last couple of years.

As I've seen myself desperately in need. And seen Jesus eagerly hunting for me. To find me. To pray for me.

[13 : 19] I hope that's a comfort to you too. It's also a challenge to us, isn't it? It's challenged me to consider if my life reflects that same mission focus.

That Jesus has on the lost. The least. Those most needy of a savior named Jesus. Do I pray for them?

Do I show them Jesus? That challenge really connects into the second point that Luke highlights from beginning to end of his book.

I'll start with my struggle and what God is teaching me here. My struggle is Jesus makes me uncomfortable. Maybe you can relate to that.

But when I genuinely encounter Jesus, it's unsettling. And it's challenging for me. Because I've got this comfortable lifestyle and personality that loves my patterns.

[14 : 19] My people. My places. I'm very comfortable with that. And Jesus constantly turns things upside down. I just want them right side up so I can keep them under control.

Control is important to me. And Jesus likes to unsettle that. And that's really fine because I know lots of people like that. That I can just ignore and keep going on with my life.

I'm the king of my own life, right? I'll live the way that I want. Doesn't matter if you want to unsettle things. But with Jesus, what's worse is that he tells me that he is in charge.

Not me. So I have to start shaping my life around his priorities. And 36 years in, I've got a long way to go on that.

See, what Luke reveals is that Jesus is king. And that he leads and rules over a uniquely upside down kingdom.

[15 : 25] It's not the way we would make it. And again, I'm okay with that. As long as it stays off in heaven waiting for me up there. That's cool, right? Jesus can make his kingdom like what he wants up there.

Except that Jesus actually invades. The king invades. He enters into this world. And he says eternity and today are tightly connected, doesn't he? That's kind of the heart of his message over and over in Luke.

Jesus says he wants the realities of heaven reflected on earth. He says to pray for a kingdom that is not of this world to come in this world. That's chapter 11.

We call it the Lord's Prayer. Jesus says he wants outsiders to be welcomed. Not merely at this table off in heaven somewhere. But at our tables.

Right here on earth. That's chapter 14. And he warns of dire, eternal consequences. If today doesn't start looking like eternity.

- [16 : 27] Frankly, that feels a bit scary. And not entirely Protestant to me. But Jesus' kingdom persistently holds together word and deed.
- Eternal and temporal. He keeps them together. As for example, when he forgives sins and heals many diseases. He speaks of the priority of eternal life.
- And also enters into real life pain of blind men. Lepers. A grieving widow. A grieving widow. A sinful woman. A demon possessed man.
- Many, many others. And those are just the kind of people he came for, aren't they? He values people.
- Society doesn't. Kind of turns things upside down on us. The poor who are blessed. He says. Children whom he welcomes into his arms.
- [17 : 31] Women who are regularly influential among his followers. Even Gentiles and religious outsiders like the Good Samaritan. Good Samaritan?
- Yeah. Tax collectors? The prodigal son with the pigs? Shepherds? Jesus must really believe that he and his kingdom are good news of great joy for all people.
- Do we believe that? Sure, sure. Of course, of course we believe that. Yet do I share meals? Conversations?
- Relationships? Regularly in the course of my life with people who are least lost or left out? How do the values, the company, the priorities of King Jesus challenge what's natural, normal, and comfortable to you?
- Because, man, they do for me. And when they do, when the ways that Jesus lives and the things he says are important challenge our values and our priorities, which ones win in our lives?
- [18 : 52] Can we be honest about that? How does it usually go then when you feel that tension? Whose values practically win out in your life?
- Would you say your life looks like it's defined more by the things you value or the things Jesus values? Spending time with people you like or people Jesus likes?
- Jesus says any of us who claim to follow him must deny ourselves, take up our crosses sacrificially, and follow him.
- In fact, he says if we prioritize other matters over him, there will be eternal consequences. Just meditate on this series of verses for a minute.
- None of those men invited shall taste my banquet. Therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.
- [19 : 55] The one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.
- Jesus' words. I'll put it this way. No one encounters Jesus and leaves unchanged. He's coming to change us, to call our hearts back from what we're chasing after, to repent at the cost of our own lives if we don't.
- But if your life is not being challenged and transformed by King Jesus, the most likely explanation is that you haven't acknowledged him as king.
- You may have been here and heard most of the 77 sermons in Luke, but if Jesus is not changing your life, you may not truly know him.
- And nothing, nothing at all could be more important than that for you actually to know and trust and love him. His kingdom is upside down from ours.
- [21 : 03] And he calls us to trust and follow his values, his priorities for his glory.
- A uniquely focused mission for a king of a uniquely upside down kingdom.

And finally, something you can't miss in Luke. Jesus extends a uniquely personal offer. What Jesus offers as the good news himself is not merely deliverance, although that's wonderful.

It's not merely transformation, although that's necessary. It's not merely an example, although he's a good one. Jesus offers a uniquely personal relationship.

He wants us to know him intimately. Not merely to know all these things about him. See, if Luke writes his gospel to make sure his readers get the true story about Jesus, that true story makes it very clear that Jesus wants his hearers to get Jesus himself.

[22 : 25] Throughout the book, that's the call of Jesus. To align yourself with the king. Now and forever. For example, Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, listening to him, while Martha does lots of wonderful things and waits for Jesus to praise her for all she's doing.

And what does Jesus say? Mary has made the right choice. She's seen the right value. She's commended for choosing the greatest value.

Jesus. Jesus. Knowing him. Loving him. Treasuring him. Is of first importance. You may remember several weeks in a row last year.

Where one passage after another. The real question was, do you actually know and trust Jesus? Have you really personally trusted him?

Have you completely reoriented things to have him at the center of your life? Is he your only hope? That was the focus of several sermons because it was the focus of Jesus over and over and over.

[23 : 44] From different angles, he kept driving us there. He doesn't want us to learn about him and miss that vital matter. Because that happens a lot in Luke.

A lot of people miss him. It seems to be these really needy people that Jesus loves so much who see this most clearly. They see who he is. The Samaritan leper.

The only one who comes back to say thank you. A blind man who recognizes who Jesus is. A tax collector who sees him clearly.

But it's the religious leaders and his disciples in the midst of those situations that are missing him, isn't it? It reminds us of how easy it is to be really close to Jesus.

And know a lot about Jesus. And not actually know Jesus. That's a warning for us.

[24 : 43] Because knowing Jesus is what it's all about. It's not a quiz bowl where it's how much can you tell somebody about him. How many questions can you get right when you get there. It's about actually knowing him.

And Luke makes clear that the whole Bible is actually about that. It's not just Luke that thinks that's important. From the Old Testament prophecies that we started this service with.

To the post-resurrection sermons that Jesus gives to his followers. They're about all the scriptures teaching of Jesus. He's showing us how important it is for us to know him.

And how passionate Jesus is about that reality. Right? That may be the reality that has most impacted me in this whole book.

How committed Jesus is to our knowing him. He comes to earth to reveal God to man.

[25 : 46] He bears patiently with his followers, his disciples through the story. The followers on the road to Emmaus as they struggle to understand. And as he has to reshape them and reorient them.

Because their kingdoms are upside down and need to be flipped over. In fact, he tears the curtain, doesn't he? So that we can come in prayer into the very presence of our Father.

And talk with him. And be with him. And know him. You remember what that's like? Anytime you want right into that office. Because he's your Father.

And Jesus says call him that. But don't just say the words. Know him like that. You can have this kind of relationship with him. And then what does he do? To make sure we have help in knowing him.

He sets up his church as a group of people who've experienced Jesus. Who can share what they have experienced in him. Who can look at his word together. And have his spirit empower them to understand who he is better.

[26 : 53] So that they'll really know him. So encouraging to me. The words of Jesus. The prayers of Jesus especially for us.

Maybe most especially. The tears of Jesus. Do you remember those? More than once. But tears of Jesus over people not recognizing him.

Not knowing who he really was. The good news of great joy that he is. Don't you love Jesus' heart? Oh Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. The city that kills the prophets. And stones those sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together. As a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

That's his heart for the worst of us. For those who've killed the prophets. And run off people who were sent to help.

[27 : 56] Jesus says I want to bring those kinds of people under safety. He says it as he goes to the cross doesn't he? Even those who would do the very worst to him.

And he prays for them. Father. Forgive them. I don't want them to see this danger that I myself am walking into. At great cost to himself.

Even his own life he wants to protect. The worst of us. The horrible sins we've committed. The ones that cause him deep agony.

That send him to the cross. And that's all of our sins. And Jesus says Father. I'm coming to protect them. To gather them where? To some safe place off there somewhere else?

No, no, no. To bring them to me. To gather them under my wings. I want them with me. Remember Jesus is a treasure hunter.

[28 : 57] And so when we fail. When we blow it big time. When we know that we've denied him. When we've sinned in ways that we think cause him to mark us off his list.

And be done with us forever. That big black X that he's putting on our names marks what? The place not of one he trashes.

No, no. That's not what he's doing. No, he's marking one that he treasures. That's when he'll be at the end of his search. Is when he finds that one.

And brings him home. Right? He comes to redeem us so we can know him. And help others know how much he loves them too.

He longs to meet us in his word. In our daily lives. In his people. So that we know him and love him forever. That's what Luke longs for us to see in his gospel.

[29 : 58] It's what I long for us to see. That Jesus. He is, after all, good news of great joy for all people.

And that includes you. That includes me. If that's true, how does that reality, how does he, how does Jesus himself impact your life today?

Today. What's he changing? Jesus is not merely interested in your knowing more about him. It's really not as important as we sometimes think.

It's more important to him that as we know more about him that he becomes central. To who we are. To your identity. Your purpose.

Your joy. Your today. Your eternity. He's got to be at the heart of that. All the way back to Sermon 1 in this series.

[31 : 02] I know that was a long time ago. I brought this football. It's come out a few times since then. So you wouldn't forget it. And each time, I've quoted Vince Lombardi.

Who would start every season saying, Gentlemen, this is a football. Your success is centered on your focus on this.

You may do a lot of other things really well. But it has to start and end here. You have to remain focused on the football. Or you will lose.

Lose sight of this. You can run fast, block well, tackle hard. But lose sight of this and you will lose. And that's what Luke has been telling us.

As we leave Luke, we will continue to study God's word. Which, as we've learned, is always about Jesus. Not football.

[32 : 00] Jesus. But may we never forget that. May we never forget that it's not merely about Jesus.

But that he is there to meet us. Because the story of Luke assures us that just as certainly as Jesus was alive then in these historical events.

That he wants us to understand that Jesus is alive today. That's where the story goes, right? That he's reigning. That he's working. That he's forgiving. That he's praying. That he's healing.

Jesus is doing that. He's living and active. So the question is, how will we respond to him? How much more important a question than with this lifeless football?

With a living Jesus who's in us and at work in and through us. How much more important is it for us to say, how will we respond to him?

[32 : 58] To the living Savior? Will we keep our focus on him? No matter how much distracting chaos is going on around us, will our eyes be fixed on him?

Will we allow him to be the one that transforms our focus and tells us what's most important? Will we cling to him in hard times and trust that no matter what storms blow around us, that there's actually one thing that we can count on and hold on to that will anchor us?

Will we actually run to find refuge in him because he said he's the only place where we can find that? Will we worship him as the one true and reigning king?

Will we witness to everyone around us of his greatness and glory and grace? That's what it's all about. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people today, a Savior, Christ the Lord.

Let's pray. Jesus, we know these things.

[34 : 28] Most of us have learned them in children's Sunday school. Most of us have forgotten them. We've moved on to more important things.

We've busied our lives with other pursuits. We've, if we're honest, lost sight of Jesus more days than we'd like to admit.

And Holy Spirit, we ask for your help. It's not a magical sermon series on a gospel. Everything in all your word points us to Jesus.

It's our hearts that need to be convinced and to see again his greatness, his glory, his grace. Grace that we might truly have our hearts and our lives focused on him.

Do that work in our hearts now. Keep doing it. Don't ever let us lose sight of Jesus. We ask it in his name.

[35 : 31] Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you.