

Luke 24:50-53 "Who's in Charge?"

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Preacher: Will Spink

[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 to Luke 24. Luke 24 is page 885 in the Pew Bible. We're going to finish Luke's gospel this morning, almost three years after we started.

Except don't get too sad yet. We're actually going to spend one more Sunday here next week. It's Memorial Day weekend and I think we'll find it helpful at the end of a long journey to look back and remember on that weekend in particular some of what God has taught us through this study before we get to jump into the exciting summer series I mentioned earlier.

But remember where we are here at the end of the book. The risen Jesus has shown himself to his disciples so that they really know him through his word, through personal encounter with him.

And so that he can send them out as witnesses to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations to make him known. He's just told them in fact to wait until he sends power from on high for this mission and then he leaves to his heavenly throne.

[1 : 31] Listen to these final four verses of Luke's gospel. Luke 24 at verse 50. Then Jesus led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

While he blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Thus far God's holy word. Let's pray. God thank you for your word. Use it this morning in our hearts by your spirit who is living and active in us.

Open our hearts to see King Jesus. Even more glorious than we've yet realized. Speak to our hearts.

Father that we might hear your truth. Fight back the lies of Satan whispering in our heads. Remove anything I would say that would distract from us knowing you more.

[2 : 46] Speak to us clearly. We ask. We need to hear from you. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Earlier this year I had to step out of a classroom and make some copies for a math team I was coaching.

And I left a third grader in charge. He was supposed to keep everyone quiet to tell me who wasn't. And he probably did a pretty good job.

But later my daughter said, Dad, you can't put him in charge. He's the worst behaved kid in the room. I knew that. He writes down the names of people he doesn't like.

Who's in charge matters, doesn't it? Now you know the difference it makes when a substitute teacher is in charge in a class, right? You've all lived that. Or think about the difference it makes when a new king takes the throne.

From Old Testament stories and European history class, we know how important it is who ends up on the throne. We've heard many people who went very quickly from lives of great privilege to running for their lives when the new king in charge was against them.

- [4 : 07] Makes a huge difference. How about in your life? Have you experienced the difference that it makes when you're mistreated at work, but the boss won't tolerate bullying?
- I mean, you're hurt, but you know the guy in charge will make it right. Have you felt the confidence inspired when your kid is having some issues at school and you go to the principal and she actually listens and cares and has ideas and passion for making things right for your kid?
- She'll actually help. Or maybe you felt the frustration and the confusion when she doesn't seem to understand or care. See, who's in charge makes a huge difference in many situations in our lives, doesn't it?
- In this passage, it's transformative for Jesus' followers. They move from confusion and hopelessness to joy and confidence for, honestly, if you've been here for three years, for the first time in Luke's whole story that they function and feel this way.
- And it happens as a result of experiencing and seeing clearly who is in charge. Not merely in charge of one particular situation or setting, but who is ultimately in charge.
- [5 : 40] Because still, here at the end of Luke, if they looked around them, who seemed to be in charge? Rome did, right? They looked like the ones who were strong and in control.
- It might appear after the crucifixion of their leader that they're left on their own in a dangerous world, full of unjust leaders, self-serving bullies.
- But something has changed. Their encounters with the risen Jesus leading up to this final experience that's now a few weeks after Easter help them understand who is actively and ultimately in charge.
- And it makes all the difference. We often skip over the ascension of Jesus. It's not one of those great, wonderful passages.
- We focus on the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection. And those are great things to focus on. Nothing wrong with that. But the ascension is of great importance.
- [6 : 46] When we read Jesus was carried up into heaven, it means that he immediately, physically, and currently is living and ruling over everything from the high throne of heaven.
- See, it's very different because Jesus doesn't come back to life merely to live for a few weeks and then die again, does he? I mean, that would be neat, but it would be a big difference from him being alive today.
- Every other key figure and leader in the world religions can be located with latitude and longitude coordinates today. They're buried somewhere here on earth.
- But the ascension of Jesus demonstrates something quite different from that. His ruling still today in heaven with all authority given to him, as Matthew records, as king of kings and lord of lords.
- If you read Hebrews and other New Testament books, you'll find lots of things about Jesus' ascension and what he's up to now. Today, he is sustaining the universe by his powerful word.
- [8 : 05] Today, he is leading his church against the forces of hell. Today, empathizing with our struggles. Today, praying for us and pouring out his spirit to empower us in our need.
- There's so much more that I could say here about what Jesus' ascension means, but that's the significance of what's happening in this brief passage.
- Jesus is taking his heavenly throne. The one God has promised the Messiah would sit on forever, right? Jesus completes the circuit, if you will.
- Coming down from heaven and taking on flesh in his birth. Living 33 years to fulfill all righteousness. Dying on the cross to pay for sins.

Rising from the dead to conquer death. And now, returning to heaven, crowned as the victorious king. So, Jesus is ultimately in charge.

[9 : 14] Every day. In every situation. He's in charge. Before we talk about what difference that makes in our lives, let's see three quick things about Jesus here in Luke's account of his ascension.

Who is this Jesus going up into heaven to be in charge of everything? Well, first, we see him as the son accepted by the father.

Verse 51. Jesus parted from them and was carried up into heaven. A living person carried up into heaven.

Y'all, that doesn't happen every day. In case you didn't notice. A cloud, Luke tells us in Acts, takes Jesus up. He was carried by a cloud representing the presence of God.

God's glorious presence comes and receives Jesus. He is carried up into heaven. And it's affirming one more time.

[10 : 23] That the crucified Jesus, who appeared to be what? Cursed by God. Who cried out as he was being crucified that he was forsaken by God.

Now he's welcomed home by his father. The curse reversed. Blessing and exalted status bestowed.

What a glorious reminder that is for those of us who deserved to be forsaken ourselves for our sins. That as John Bunyan wrote, our righteousness is in heaven.

Can you just imagine for a second the homecoming party for Jesus that day? What do you think it was like when Jesus, having risen from the dead, comes back to his father and comes to his eternal home where he's lived there with his father?

I bet that was an awesome celebration. Can you believe that God celebrates you like that? That he welcomes you home that same way?

[11 : 33] Secondly, Jesus is the savior who blesses his people. We see it twice here.

Lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. The picture here in the Greek is of Jesus continuing to pronounce benediction on his followers as he leaves them.

It's as though he's carried up and he speaks all the way until he's gone from their presence. Blessing. The first words of God to people, to Adam and Eve in the garden.

He blessed them. He comes to Abraham and he blesses Abraham. And over and over through the Old Testament speaks blessing to his people.

And here Jesus joins in. Blessing. I don't know the words. Luke doesn't tell us. Was it perhaps the benediction from numbers?

[12 : 39] The Lord bless you and keep you. Make his face shine upon you. Be gracious to you. Maybe it was some other good words that spoke hope into the lives of these floundering disciples who've struggled so much.

But Jesus speaks blessing on them. One more thing. Maybe my favorite part of this is that Jesus is a leader who believes only with provision made.

He leads them out here, doesn't he? Verse 50. He's a part from them. He blessed them.

And while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And y'all, how would the disciples normally respond to this, being parted from Jesus?

Well, we've seen, haven't we? We've seen earlier in Luke. They get frightened. They're terrified. They're terrified when Jesus is not there. After he dies on the cross, they get despondent and hopeless.

[13 : 46] And now they're okay with it? Joyful even? Well, there could be many factors in this change.

But Jesus must have convinced them that something different was happening now. The previous verses that I haven't read yet tell us Jesus has promised to send the Holy Spirit, the promise of his Father to them.

In fact, he's told them that he will actually continue to be with them in this way. In an even better way than if he stayed physically with them.

Jesus says it will be better for you if this happens. How's that possible? Better than Jesus? Come on, pastor. Lost your mind.

You're telling us something's better than Jesus. It's what Jesus himself tells them. He can physically be only in one place at a time, right?

[14 : 46] But if he sends the Spirit, God dwells in each of them all the time. The King over all the world can be present with you in Huntsville and your sister in India.

And this fits with his mission, by the way, right? Because when Jesus is physically on earth, if you need something, you better get to Jesus. Need healing? Teaching?

Food? Counsel? You better get yourself to wherever that one place in the world that Jesus is, right? And we see people flock to him. Now.

Now. There's a new plan. The blessing flowing to his followers will flow through them by the power of the Holy Spirit. As they fill the earth, they go everywhere and declare and demonstrate the reign of King Jesus.

You don't have to come to one place to find Jesus. No, that's another religion altogether. Now his people go out on mission. And their living king goes with them.

[15 : 58] He goes with them as they go out to find people who need forgiveness and healing. Who need a reign of justice and peace.

And so he sends his people out and he goes with them to find them no matter where they are. The king comes. And we get to be a part of that mission with King Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Luke focuses here in this passage on the impact more than on the details of Jesus' ascension.

It's pretty short. And so I want us to turn and look at how this impacts us. What difference it makes. But first I want to name a real struggle that we face.

For many of us, it often doesn't feel like this is true. Does it?

[16 : 56] The active reign of King Jesus doesn't seem very powerful sometimes. Have you felt that before? Perhaps your heart or your world doesn't look like Jesus is in charge.

And I can say it over and over but you're looking around thinking, I'm not sure. It doesn't feel like that to me. Maybe you've wrestled with this as we have in our small group lately.

Questions like, how come I'm battling this sin in my life and feel like I'm losing? How come I ask Jesus to work in my marriage and nothing changes?

How come Jesus doesn't fix the broken school system, wipe out the wicked governments, cure cancer, or bring the bullies to justice now? If he's in charge, why not?

Have you ever asked any of those questions? If you have, you're not alone. He's in charge, but... Man, that's a hard place to live, isn't it?

[18 : 10] He's in charge, but I don't see it. I don't see it in my life and it's a hard place to live. I've been imagining the disciples this week as they go and do what Jesus says.

They go back to Jerusalem and what do they do? They wait. Can you imagine what their friends said to them while they sat around praying and waiting and for quite some time nothing is happening?

Come on, guys. Seriously, get on with your lives. Nothing's happening. Even after Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to them at Pentecost and there's great rejoicing, great things start happening, they still feel pretty weak compared to local leaders, especially compared to Rome.

Many of those who watch Jesus go into heaven get thrown in prison, don't they? Quite a few of them will eventually be killed for their faith.

And so many of them will get understandably discouraged. I mean, we know He's in charge, but look what happens in our lives.

[19 : 24] And they're going to have to remember that the brokenness of this world does not take King Jesus off His throne. That truth may even frustrate us at times when we don't understand what He could possibly be thinking.

I remember as a child being so frustrated that I didn't live on earth when Jesus lived on earth so that I could know Him and really see Him and know what He was like and have stronger faith and really be able to trust Him.

It didn't seem fair. Sometimes I still feel that way. That's actually a lack of faith on my part, isn't it?

A lack of faith that Jesus knew what He was doing when He said that sending His Spirit would be better for me. And I just wanted it my way.

Why let these awful things continue? Why not crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and bring all of us to heaven right then and be done with it? We don't often know why, do we?

[20 : 34] But we know at least part of it is God's divine patience. He desires, longs for repentance to be proclaimed to everyone, to all nations.

So many more will bow to King Jesus. And we know because King Jesus is eternally on the throne, we can trust Him for how this works out all the time.

So I'm not trying to give answers to every situation. But I want you to know when we talk about the disciples' lives of worship, joy, trust, it's not some idealistic, simplistic reality, just kind of make-believe, just pretend to feel this way, it's easy.

No, it's that the ascension and the active reign of King Jesus offers deep hope in the midst of deep struggle.

Struggle that even enables many to lose their lives for Jesus and meet Him with joy. Hear these responses the disciples have in that context of your own struggles this morning.

[21 : 50] Look at the disciples' response, verse 52. Let's not miss this most basic response to Jesus' glory as our ascended, reigning King.

We must bow before Him. If Jesus is in charge, I can serve Him above all else.

In fact, I must. None of the gods my heart chases after for fulfillment and meaning and purpose are ruling the world and sustaining me by their word, are they?

None of them. None of them. My economic status and bank account aren't worthy of worship, are they? You mean that?

My own comfort and the temporal success of my kids aren't appropriate things to shape my life around, are they? Easy things, but not worthy.

[23 : 11] Power and social influence won't ultimately save me more than they would have ultimately saved the disciples if they gained the upper hand on Rome for a few days.

Will they? No. Then why do we chase them like they will? It's Jesus who alone is worthy of our worship.

He alone has power over death. He alone holds the keys to our eternal and current security. Where are you bowing before a lesser God?

The worship of King Jesus is priority number one. See this morning the ascended Jesus reigning in power and glory.

The only one worthy for you to bow yourself before Him and turn your heart back to Him. Secondly, the disciples respond with lives full of joy.

[24 : 16] Perhaps contrary to what we expect from them, they see Jesus depart and they return to the city, to Jerusalem, with great joy.

Joy, as Ron said to me this week, through many tears. Not happy, clappy, everything is the way I want it to be. But deep joy because everything will ultimately be okay.

Jesus is ultimately in charge. Many days in this world, joy is hard to find, isn't it? Darkness is easier to feel.

Injustice is easier to see. Depression is easier to explain. But you can have great joy because of Jesus.

You remember that great joy? It's the exact same words that the angels promised to the shepherds when they said Jesus is coming and He's going to be good news of great joy for all people.

[25 : 31] God was sending great joy to us in Jesus. Friends, that great joy, lasting hope, true purpose, ultimate glory is found only in Jesus.

It's a joy that clings to Jesus when I can't find a source of happiness or control in this life. And you've been there. But you see, the ascended King, you know there's someone that you can delight in no matter what.

The fact that He loves me and blesses me. The fact that He is making me and everything else new. The fact that eternity will more than make up for all I'm afraid of missing out on in this life.

That's what I mean by joy. Jesus doesn't change. Finally, Luke says they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

What are they doing? Why is that a big deal? They're obeying Jesus. If He's in charge, I can trust Him in every situation.

[26 : 52] There's no other good reason for going back to Jerusalem, for sitting around and waiting, unless Jesus can be trusted.

You see? Unless He's meeting us there with Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us, unless He's in charge and that's where the mission that extends to the uttermost parts of the earth begins from, unless that's true, why go back?

Well, He told them to. He told them this is how it would work and they joyfully do what He's told them to do. It is always best to shape your life around following God's Word.

Even if it's not what we would call safe. There may be a lot of pain along the way. And you say, but well, I've been reading my Bible and I don't feel any different.

Don't lose heart. Jesus is living and reigning and you can trust Him. He will meet you there.

[28 : 02] But Pastor, divorce seems like the best thing for my kids and every article and friend agrees the Bible is just too strict and old-fashioned and out of date.

Don't give up. Follow His Word one day at a time. He will direct you by His Spirit. But will I keep praying and the cancer doesn't go away?

I keep sharing the gospel and I just lose friends. I keep trying to be a kind friend at school and they keep making fun of me. And it hurts.

I don't want to do it anymore. I can't believe in this any longer. Listen, look up and see Jesus this morning. Alive.

Reigning. In charge. Seeing you. Praying for you. Hearing your cries. Coming back for you.

[29 : 15] You can trust Him again. One more day. I want to leave you with two pictures this morning. The first for those of you enduring some of the struggles that I just described.

Hurting. Suffering. Perhaps feeling abandoned by King Jesus. Hearing He's in charge just almost creates more pain where you are today.

Luke tells us in Acts 7 of one of Jesus' early followers, Stephen, being martyred. He actually is stoned to death.

He's been proclaiming the name of Jesus boldly. And for that, he receives death. They gather around him and they stone him.

And you can imagine what that would feel like. Where are you, Jesus? And Luke tells us in Acts 7 that Stephen looks up.

[30 : 26] And he sees Jesus. The ascended, glorious Jesus. In the throne room of heaven. Standing up.

And it brings great comfort to Stephen. In fact, in the midst of this unbearable suffering that we can only imagine. He doesn't despair.

He entrusts His Spirit to Jesus. And like His Savior, He prays for the forgiveness of those killing Him. How in the world?

How does that happen? He looks up and sees His reigning King welcoming Him to His eternal home with Him.

And He finds comfort in the midst of the worst that this world has. Jesus is ultimately in charge.

[31 : 24] He loves you. He speaks blessing to you. He's got you. What great comfort. The second picture is fictional.

It's for those of us maybe in the midst of battle but exhausted and discouraged. Or maybe we're not so much in the midst of battle. We're kind of comfortable staying on the sidelines where it's a bit safer and we won't get hurt trying to do what King Jesus has called us to in His mission.

It feels easier to run after my own. And it's a picture from J.R. Tolkien's The Two Towers. When in the battle of Helm's Deep, Aragorn and his friends are running out of steam.

They're being overcome by the evil forces of Saruman. And evil seems to be winning. Darkness has covered the battle all through the night.

But then it's dawn on the fifth day. And as he promised, Gandalf appears in the east. They look up in the midst of the battle and there's a bright light of the only one they know who's stronger than their enemies.

[32 : 45] And it's not just him actually. It's not just Gandalf standing there. It's this host of reinforcements that he's bringing with him and sending into the battle with them to strengthen them.

And they shine into that darkness. And they fight on to victory. No matter how overwhelming the odds seem against you where your king is calling you to fight.

Be confident that you're not alone. That he will send his helper to meet you in your weakness. And that he will come again to conquer hell and bring you home victorious with him.

Jesus is in charge. And that must make all the difference. Let's pray. Jesus, you are our king.

We believe you to be the one holding this world together by the word of your power. The one who is able to enter into every dark place and bring light and hope and glory.

[33 : 59] And we confess that we struggle when you don't do that in our time and in our ways. And we ask, Holy Spirit, that you would help us to trust.

Give us eyes to see Jesus and to know that he speaks blessing over us. That he is with us. That he is fighting for us.

And that he can be trusted with the outcome even when we are discouraged. We thank you that he is alive.

That he is victorious. That he has conquered death and hell and all opposing might. And so we worship him. Give us hearts that find joy in that.

Not just in a church building. But in where we go tomorrow morning. In the things that shape our priorities. In the ways we find hope in dark places.

[35 : 04] Would it be our king Jesus. That we remember is in charge. Do that work by your spirit in our hearts. We ask for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Women.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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