

“Reasons for Joy”
Luke 24:36-53
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It is often a good feeling to reach one’s destination. Today we finish our journey through the gospel of Luke, which started back in November of 2017. This is sermon #95 in the series. The Lord has encouraged and challenged us in many ways as we have explored the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, culminating with His death and resurrection. Now we come to what is kind of the epilog, as Luke tell us about events following Jesus’ resurrection. Our text today is Luke 24:36-53. If you have your bible turn there, otherwise the verses will be on the screen. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use this passage to encourage and challenge us again today.

In verses 13-35 of this chapter, Luke recounts the experience of Cleopas and his companion who walked with Jesus on the road to the village of Emmaus. When they realized it is Jesus with whom they are traveling and speaking they hurry back to Jerusalem and find the disciples or apostle. Judas is no longer there of course and John’s gospel tells us Thomas is also absent. The report their encounter with the risen Lord.

Luke 24:36-37 As they 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.

(Some verses say ‘ghost’) It is now late on Easter Sunday, and its’ the first time the disciples encounter Jesus after His resurrection. Since they had seen Him very much dead on the cross, it’s not a surprise they have doubts. How can a dead man be alive? Jesus responds,

Luke 24:38-39 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.

The disciples can hear Jesus, see Him and how He says, go ahead touch me. You would realize I am not a disembodied spirit of some kind.

Jesus is very intent on making that clear.

Luke 24:41-43 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave

him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Ghosts do not eat food. How, a resurrected body digest food, I am not sure. I guess some day we will find out.

Jesus then turn His focus to seemingly more significant issues.

Luke 24:44 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.”

This is similar to the explanation of the Old Testament Jesus had given to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus, verse 27. Despite what some think, the bible is not a series of stories that teach moral lessons, like a Hebrew Aesop’s Fables. Rather the bible is one story that culminates with Jesus the Messiah. The story is really about Him.

Luke 24:45 The he opened their minds to understand the scripture.

Friends, at one level anybody can understand what the sentences in the bible mean. However, this indicates a true grasp of the scriptures, an understanding of how redemptive history all fits together, that is a gift. In 1Corinthians 2:14, the apostle Paul says the natural man cannot understand the things of the spirit, spiritual truth. We all need the Lord to open our minds and hearts to clearly see the truth and be able to understand and believe it.

And then he adds,

Luke 24:48 You are witnesses of these things. The culmination of redemptive history has happened right before your eyes.

Luke 24:49 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.

They are to share this great news with others. But there is no reason to be intimidated by this assignment, because the Holy Spirit – the promises of the Father – will enable them to be faithful and effective witnesses of Jesus.

Luke then gives a brief account of Jesus’ ascension to heaven.

Luke 24:50-53 And he led them (His disciples, the 11 and others) out as far as Bethany, (the village on the east slope of the Mount of Olives) 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.

Luke's second volume, the book of Acts, gives more details, but he is obviously describing the same event here as in Acts chapter 1. Incidentally, I would note that Jesus had various encounters with His disciples during the 40-day period between His resurrections and ascension. So, for example, Matthew's and Luke's different versions of the great commission, are likely because they are describing two similar, but distinct events, where Jesus gave instructions to His disciples.

Okay, that is the book of Luke. Twenty-four chapters, 95 sermons. In some ways, I would like to go to Acts, chapter 1, next and continue this historical account. We are not going to do that, but I believe there is an important lesson for us at this point in the story. I would phrase it this way: Followers of Jesus have great reasons for joy, even when facing adversity. This was not an easy time for Jesus' disciples as He ascended into heaven. Jesus leaves His followers in a challenging situation. Six weeks earlier the Jewish Leaders and Roman authorities had arrested Jesus and executed Him. The reports of His resurrection had not made either group more fond of Jesus' followers. And now, Jesus, their leader, their master is gone. Yet, following His ascension, **Luke 24:52,53** They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Why? Why are they so happy?

I can think of five reasons. Number 1: They know Jesus is the resurrected Lord. Now, if I didn't believe the bible contains words of God, and the gospel writers wrote exactly what God intended them to write, I would be tempted to think this 40-day time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension is an under reported chapter in His life. We are told of a number of encounters Jesus has with His disciples both, near Jerusalem and up north, in Galilee. The apostle John implies there are more. These post-resurrection meetings with Jesus certainly strengthened the apostle's faith. After the first, they might have wondered if it was

just a dream, but after the third or fourth encounter, and after they had touched Him and eaten with Him, they knew Jesus really was alive. And I suspect spending time with someone you know has conquered death can be an exciting and encouraging time. I think their joy as they return to Jerusalem is in some ways a continuation of an Easter celebration. *Jesus is the risen Lord.* That is a reason for joy even 40 days after His resurrection.

Well, none of us have had an in the flesh encounter with Jesus of 40 minutes, much less 40 days. Yes, we enjoy fellowship and communion with the Lord, through His Spirit. There is real joy in that. Yet, those who truly love Jesus long for that in-person, face-to-face, encounter we will one day have when He returns. Then our joy will be complete. However, like those first century disciples, we do find joy in the truth and hope of His resurrection. The primary reason that Christians gather on Sunday, the first day of the week, which it is even if you have a calendar that puts Monday in that slot, anyway, we as Christians gather to worship on Sunday because that is the day Jesus' tomb was found to be empty. In a sense, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection not just on Easter, but on every Sunday we gather to worship. Our's is a truly a resurrection faith, and that is a reason for joy.

Number 2: Joy is the hope the apostles now have in the face of death through Jesus' resurrection. This gives them a whole new perspective in life and death. We talked about this on Easter Sunday. Blaise Pascal, the mathematician and theologian, said that death casts a dark shadow over human beings, we can only be truly happy if we attain immortality. Since that doesn't seem possible, most people try not to think about death. They choose diversions to occupy their time and minds. They seek to be oblivious to their eventual oblivion. Because of Jesus' resurrection, however, as Christians we no longer need to be afraid to die. The promise that because Jesus has conquered death, we will conquer death as well, share in His resurrection, experience eternal life, *is a reason for joy.* Again I love this verse from **Hebrews 2:15** Jesus came to earth to defeat the devil through His death and resurrection, **And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Jesus has freed us from that bondage, and that is a reason for joy. It doesn't mean the death of a loved one is fun. It doesn't**

mean contemplating our own death is easy. But being freed from that fear of death is a reason for great joy.

The **third** reason why the disciples experienced great joy is because they have a new purpose. They may have thought their lives would be very empty with Jesus no longer alongside them. Yet, the Lord called them to be faithful witnesses for the gospel, the great news of who Jesus is and what He has done. This gives a clear purpose for their lives. These days many folks seem to lack a purpose in life. They remind me of Alice in Wonderland. When Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, “Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?” The cat responds, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice says, “I don’t much care where.” To which the cat replies, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.” Friends, I am afraid for many people it doesn’t really matter which way they go. Yet, having a sense of purpose is essential for us as human beings. A study done by the National Institute of Health finds that a lack of purpose is one of the two major causes of depression and suicide. A lack of connection with other people is the other. However, both 1st and 21st century believers in Jesus have a clear purpose. We are to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** Friends, no matter what else is happening in our lives, no matter what our “job” may be, being an ambassador of Jesus is a calling for each and every Christians. We never have to wake up wondering, “Is there anything worthwhile for me to do today?” We always have opportunities to represent Jesus, through our words and actions, to anyone around us. Knowing that is a reason for joy.

The **fourth** reason for joy is that the apostles would be empowered to fulfill their calling through the Holy Spirit. That is what Jesus meant when He said the promise of the Father would give them power from on high. Just looking forward to that gave them joy. Ten days later, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and other believers, their joy increased and the world would never be the same. Having a clear purpose as Jesus’ ambassadors was a very good thing, but it would not be easy. The apostles would face a lot of opposition, even violent persecution, as they proclaimed the great news

wherever they went. But, they would be able to do it through the power of the Spirit. The apostle Peter, for example, was a coward the night Jesus was arrested. He was afraid to admit to a servant girl that he even knew Jesus. On the day of Pentecost however, he stands in front of thousands of people and tells them clearly who Jesus is and that they need to turn to Him. This remarkable transformation is due to three things. First, the resurrection of Jesus – Peter was an eyewitness to that. Second, the interactions Peter had with Jesus during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, and third, I think most significantly, the filling of the Holy Spirit Peter experiences at Pentecost. It was the Spirit who enables Peter to be such an effective evangelist. The promises of Spirit is reason for joy, the filling and empowerment by the Spirit brought even great joy.

Friends, Christians today have a reason for joy. All of us, as believers in Jesus, have received the Holy Spirit. **Romans 8:9a** tells us **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.** In other words, if you don’t have the Holy Spirit you are not really Christian. When you have the Spirit, He will equip and empower you for whatever ministry or task the Lord has called you to do. It is the Spirit who would enable us to be a faithful witness for Jesus to your friends and family. See if this illustration helps in understanding this. I remember a couple of times when one of our boys would get a new video game. He was excited, because it looked really cool to play. But there was a problem. The game was too complicated. Maybe too complicated to install on the computer or just too complicated to play. So he asked dad to help, which didn’t do much good, because the game was too complicated for dad. What was the answer? Wait for your older brother to come home. He will know how to install it. He will be able to figure out how to play the game. And, sure enough, older brother was able to do just that. And there was much rejoicing.

As we said a few minutes ago, like the apostles, we as Christians have been given the wonderful responsibility of being Jesus’ ambassadors in our world today. That is a great privilege and a very fulfilling role. However, it is very frustrating if we cannot figure out how to represent the Lord Jesus in a clear and effective ways. It is frustrating if we lack the courage to speak up when we have the opportunity to do so. And folks, it is probably

going to be more and more difficult to be an ambassador for Christ in this rather confused and chaotic world. But, the Holy Spirit will help us do that. He will enable us to have the wisdom, the grace and boldness we need to represent The Lord Jesus in a way that is honoring to Him, and helpful to other people. That is a reason for us to rejoice.

The **fifth** reason why the apostles have great joy as they go back to Jerusalem following Jesus' ascension, is the promise of His return. Luke does not highlight it here in chapter 24, but this is his description of Jesus' ascension in **Acts 1:9-11** **As they (the disciples) were looking on, he (Jesus) was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."**

Friends, it is no fun to say goodbye to a dear family member or friend. Yet, when that person promises the parting is temporary and promises to one day return, there is comfort. When you are confident the person who made the promise will indeed keep it, it is even more encouraging. In fact, the expectation and hope of the return, brings a certain joy that can only happen if a loved one is absent. Folks, it is obvious that Jesus did not come back during the lifetime of the apostles. They all died without seeing Jesus return the same way He had gone to heaven. Yes, when that day of resurrection comes, they will be among the dead in Christ who rise first. To meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Yet, that possibility that Jesus would return during their lifetime, provided hope and joy.

When will the Lord Jesus return as the angels said He would? We don't know. We do know that He certainly will, that is guaranteed. And we know that we are one day closer to Jesus' second coming than we were yesterday. Knowing this, knowing that we may very well may be among those who are still alive at the Lord's coming, these are reasons for hope and joy each and every day.

So friends, the same things that enabled the apostles to be filled with joy even after Jesus had ascended to heaven, can enable us to have joy even if the world around us is going crazy and even if things are crumbling in your own life.

Knowing that Jesus is the risen Lord, knowing that we don't have to fear death, knowing that God has called us to a most amazing role of being ambassadors of Jesus Christ, knowing that the Holy Spirit will enable us to fulfill that role, knowing that Lord Jesus has promised to return and surely will one day, these are all reasons for joy. Oh, it doesn't mean there won't be tears sometimes. It doesn't mean life won't be painful and frustrating at times. It doesn't mean we won't sometimes face tragedy. It does mean, however, that as believers in Jesus we can be, as the apostle Paul said, **2 Corinthians 6:10a Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.** This enable us to follow the instructions the Lord give in **Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** May the Lord cause us to find joy in Him, each and every day.