

VII. The Church in Biblical Perspective  
*The Ekklesia: God's Church for the Ages*  
"His Heart—Our Vision"  
Luke 24:44-53  
Dr. Harry Reeder  
March 6, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Let's look at Luke 24 and then we'll look at two other passages as well. Our passage in Luke is the 14<sup>th</sup> appearance of Christ after the resurrection. Luke 24:44-53 says **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."* **45** *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,* **46** *and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 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."* **50** *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.* The grass withers. The flower fades. God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Please take out your faith promise cards. I love mission's conferences. This has been a great week. I love to see the missionaries encouraged. I love to see you informed, inspired and encouraged. I love the anticipation and what this will mean in this coming year. This will initiate this coming year of world evangelism where we take the Gospel to the world because God's heart for the world becomes our vision. I also love it because it's a great commitment time so I do hope you walk your family through this. The front side of the cart has to do with our faith promise giving for the year whereby we look to the Lord and ask Him "Lord, what is it You want to give through me?" When I was a kid growing up I remember the pastor that said, "The Lord will get to you what He knows will get through you." "You'll get through me" is my promise so what is it that You'll get to me? By faith I'm looking to the Lord and so I pray about that.

If I could sit down with you individually I would share this with you. How do Cindy and I get here every year? Here is the way we do this. We pray about it individually and then we come together and take three steps. I call it the three "S's" which stands for supernatural, systematic and sacrificial. We pray supernaturally what we think God is going to take from the Egyptians and give through us, not meaning Egypt but everybody. Remember when Israel came out and the Egyptians were just throwing gold at them and said "Would you get out of here?!" Say "Alright God what will the world give me from Your Divine hand that I can now give to world evangelism?" That is what we pray about supernaturally. We have already been through like you our every member commitment. Here is our tithe, our regular giving and knowing how that is going to be used through our congregation now God, faith promise which will be 100 percent committed to world evangelism including cross cultural, church planting and revitalization, leadership development, Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice out there

in the world. So Father what is it we believe that You're going to get through us. That's what we pray about.

Then we decide and we do this systematically. We give ours once a month. That is our systematic way. You might say "What if the Lord has not supernaturally brought that yet?" The reason we can give it once a month is because we have a third "S" which stands for sacrifice. It's interesting how people talk about what they are going to give up for Lent on ash Wednesday which happened this past week and that's okay I understand the purpose behind all that. Cindy and I try to anticipate each year what we can give up and from that whatever it was we were going to get and take the finances that would have been used for that and add it to what we believe. So that is our sacrificial part and our offering has sacrifice to it. What is it that we can sacrifice to go with what we believe is coming supernaturally to systematically set aside every year and then we come to that conclusion. We had a little debate this year. That's always fun. We don't need marital counseling. Cindy won so it went up a little more than I anticipated. Well, the Lord won and so then we make our commitment with you.

We do it at the front of the church with our missionaries. We do it reflecting on the Old Testament where they would bring the offerings to the feet of the Apostles. We don't have Apostles with a capital "A" but we have apostles with a small "a" who are sent ones. We bring them up here and make our commitment and that's how we do it. By the way, the card is more than that. Look on the back of it. On the back it says "I will develop a strategic prayer plan." What will be your prayer plan? This is crucial. You have heard the missionaries this week and others how important intercessory prayer is.

What did Jesus say? "This is My Father's house and it shall be called a house of prayer for the nations." I don't know how you're going to do it. You may have zeroed in on some missionaries. In your prayer time you may start out by saying "Lord, here is the missionary list so remember the missionaries on the list" but I encourage you to get a little more personal. You may want to work through continents or areas but develop this year a strategic prayer plan for world evangelism. Another thing is if you currently give to missions then you may want to let us know that and I know full well that much more come out of this congregation that goes to missions. There are some things Cindy and I give to beyond what we give to missions so if you'll check that on the card we'll pray for God's blessings upon you in that area of what you are giving outside.

I enjoy giving through the Briarwood missions because of all these missionaries are accountable. I know they are prayed up. I know what they are doing and I know it's not superficial or superfluous but it is something that is important and God is blessing them. I am fully aware of it. There is accountability that is built in as well as the opportunity to encourage and that's why Cindy and I enjoy working through our Briarwood Faith Promise but also let us know so we can pray about that. Cindy and I have those as well.

The third thing on the back of the card says "I'd like for the mission's pastor to contact me in the following areas." Maybe you want to serve on the Global mission's team. I would like to challenge some of you younger folks to pray about being on the mission's team that you could be developed on this team for the coming generations. Maybe you want to talk to one of our mission's pastors about a special project. This year we have a 2.1 million plus dollar goal to get us and keep us moving forward in what we are committed to with some slight development. We have a challenge goal of 2.2 million

plus and in that is a leadership development project for the pastors and lay leaders of Nicaragua, Vietnam, of Scripture distribution of both written and technological we want to get done. I believe that what is happening technologically is akin to the Guttenberg press that God used for the Reformation. We have some special projects in relation to that.

The other thing is the orphans and foster care internationally as well as some things we want to do here. There is a childless ministry that we would like to do as well to add to, if we can get to that 2.2 million dollar goal. You may want to teach English as second language. You can teach southern English as a second language. You may want to be a partner with our international ministry in Birmingham or you may just need some help or you may just want to know some more about our mission endeavors. That's where we are now.

Where we are today is we have been walking through the foundational elements. God has blessed this congregation so that we celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> year last year and now we're moving into the next 50 years or until Jesus comes back again so we have been taking the time to look at how God so builds His church. What are those basic elements? We have been walking through Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled on the life lines of prayer and the Word. In the last study on this we looked at God's mandate which is our mission. That is to make disciples of all the nations.

Today, is God's heart our vision. God's heart our vision is when we go forward into the world. This is my Father's world – God's heart for the world to hear the Gospel so that from every tribe and nation His people will be called to give Him praise in the new heavens and the new earth. As God through His Son formed the earth where He made man in His image and said through Adam "I want you to fill this earth." Now God has sent a second Adam which is His Son Jesus Christ. Through the second Adam He has said, "Fill up what I'm about to form, a new heavens and a new earth." He formed and said "Fill." Now He is filling and when it gets filled up He'll form the new heavens and the new earth. That's what we're doing. We are filling it up by embracing what God has called us to do. That is His heart – the Gospel to His world, to all the nations – and that becomes our vision.

Now, Briarwood, has imperfectly, fulfilled that mission statement. So I want to remind you of our mission statement. It is simply this. For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the **world** for Christ. That's intentional on our part. That's our mission. That's God's mandate. Our mission is to equip Christians who will worship and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. That's what God has called us to do. Now, imperfectly, but gratefully and graciously by God's grace we have been growing in that for 50 years. We have been embracing that personally. God's call for our membership members right now with almost 400 missionaries are out there that we're supporting and over 100 of them are actual members of this church. Over the 50 years by God's grace right at 1,000 missionaries have been sent out and 400 plus have been sent to national and local missions with over 500 to world missions. We are on our way.

For the next 50 we have already sent six out this year. We have some more we're sending out this year so we are on our way to the next 500 or 600 or however many God allows us to do until Jesus comes back again. Through those faith promises in moments like this in the life of this congregation over 42 million dollars has gone for world

evangelism. I'm not talking about national and local but world evangelism through faith promise giving.

A fellow said to me the other day "Pastor, I was talking to someone about a church that at the end of the year they had a surplus and they gave over 50 percent to missions and mercy. Don't you think that's a good idea?" I said, "I have a better idea. I actually was brought to a church that said not 50 percent of the surplus but 50 percent of the budget goes every year to missions and mercy." You ought to see what happens to the surplus but 50 percent of the budget goes there. A key element that 50 percent of our budget goes to is our faith promise time every year. Over 50 percent would end up going for the cause locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Faith promise is the way we extended out there in a very specific way. Our sons and daughters have gone. We've gone.

There are short term mission's trips, leaderships, strategic thinking, faith promise giving and how many prayers have ascended from this congregation? I want to tell you something that was so encouraging to me this week. I had three different missionaries come to me and say "Something unusual has happened to me." They didn't all say it exactly this way so I will just sum up what all of them said. "We kept running into people that are praying for us. Did you know your congregation is actually praying for us? They knew our needs and had actually been praying for us." I can't tell you how many times that has been repeated that you actually are embracing intercessory prayer for the nations through these missionaries. Now we are moving forward to those next ones with our sons and daughters and those next short term mission trips. Starting faith promise and moving into the next 50 years, what will God do through us starting this year as we move forward? All of that is in front of us.

Now why do we do that? It is because it is God's heart and that has become our vision. Let's look at Luke 24. Jesus has this fourteenth appearance after the resurrection and in it He talks to His disciples and this is what He says to them. He opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. This is tremendous. Then He says "This is what the Bible says..." He is the fulfillment of the psalms, the prophets and the law. All that is written in the Law of Moses and the prophets must be fulfilled and what is the fulfillment? It is Jesus. The Scriptures bear witness of Me. They specifically bear witness to what it says in Luke 24:46; "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.*" I will do the intercessory work to save you from your sins. The glorious Gospel shall be secured because Christ goes to the cross saves His people from their sins.

I want to tell you something else the Bible is telling you. All the way from Abraham He says "Abraham in you, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." The Old Testament Scriptures not only pointed to Me but pointed My truth, My Gospel, My saving work on the cross, triumphant resurrection, is to be proclaimed to the nations starting with your own. He goes on to say in Luke 24:47 "*that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" Now you're the witnesses. You are the missionaries. Do you remember our vision statement? It is For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** (church) where every member is a minister and a missionary. You are My witnesses. So He says that's My Father's heart.

When He says “from Jerusalem to all the nations” can’t you just see the things starting to click in His disciple’s minds? Just a couple of days ago we were standing in the temple and we asked Him “When will be the end of the age?” He said to us “You will know the end of the age because the age will end when My Gospel has been preached to all the nations.” Just a couple of days later He says “By the way that’s your task.” As far as I know there are two things that have to happen before Jesus comes back. Jesus is coming again! When is He coming again and what two things have to happen? One is when all of the elect have been saved from the tribes and the nations. Two He is coming again when the Gospel which is how all these people will be brought when the Gospel has been preached to all the nations.

When Peter is talking about hastening the coming of the Lord, he is talking about missions. When we talk about “come quickly Lord Jesus” we are talking about missions. It is the Gospel to all the nations to gather all of His people in from every tribe and nation. Now He says “Then shall come the end and by the way I’ll be with you till the end of the age.” This is a sublimely ridiculous statement, isn’t it? Who is He talking to? He is talking to people who just a few days earlier were running and hiding. We have about 120 people, some rich, some poor, some men, some women and everything but it is kind of a rag tag group here. He says “I’m going to shake the world with you.” Is that not sublimely ridiculous? What a vision! How can this thing possibly happen? I would have probably looked around at the 120 and say “Now, how is this thing going to get pulled off?”

Jesus said, “Let me tell you how. I have two encouragements for you.” Encouragement number one is “I will be with you to the end of the age. I’ll give you the power.” The promise of the Father will come to you which is the Holy Spirit. So now the sublimely ridiculous becomes highly feasible. The impossible mission becomes possible. Then He says a second thing “Remember the cross I was on? Let me give you the vision. Look the fields are white unto harvest.” Because of His work on the cross to save His people from their sins, all these fields are white unto harvest. I have saved My people, now send and pray for the laborers to go. It is not for us to prepare the field for I have prepared the field but go harvest the field. That’s what I have called you to do. So Jesus gives this glorious word in the Gospel of Luke.

Then Luke has another word for us. Let’s look at Acts 1. In Acts 1 Luke again is writing and he records this amazing moment. We move from the fourteenth appearance of Christ to the fifteenth appearance. Before we look at Acts 1 I want to go back to Luke 24 for a moment. Jesus has promised them power from on high, the Holy Spirit which is how He is going to be with us to the end of the age and then He leads them out in Luke 24:50. Luke 24:50-53 says **50** *Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51* *While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52* *And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53* *and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

This conclusion of the Gospel of Luke he then fills in the blanks in the opening paragraphs of his next volume, Acts 1. Now let’s fill in the blanks. What happened? He led them out. They went to Bethany and it was there that He ascended. Now look at Acts 1:4-11 which says **4** *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5* *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not*

*many days from now.” 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 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.”*

So He is coming again. When will He come again? When the Gospel with power through the witness of His church will go from Jerusalem, Samaria to the utter most parts of the world. Do you see the concentric circles? Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the world. Acts 1 – 8 is going to Jerusalem, Acts 9 – 12 is going to Judea, then Samaria and then Acts 13 and beyond is throughout the world. That is the very unfolding of it and that’s exactly why we say from Birmingham which is our Jerusalem, into the South and to North America and throughout the whole world we want to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. These concentric circles are working out and it has come to us in the world. Now from us it will go from Birmingham to the South to North America and to the world. That is what God has called us to do. That’s what God’s vision is that we would be engaged in that work to take the Gospel to the world.

They ask Him an interesting question, don’t they? They say “Is it at this time that You will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” He says “It is not for you to know the times and the epochs but you will receive the Holy Spirit and with power you’ll be My witnesses in Jerusalem.” So He didn’t answer the question did He? Oh yes He did. They thought the Kingdom was Israel. He is telling them “No, the Kingdom came through Israel. It will come back to Israel but the Kingdom is from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and the utter most part of the world. Here is My Israel.” It is no longer found in this small little plot called the Promised Land. It’s not coming from the world. This is My Father’s world, from all the nations. I believe that Gospel is going right back to Israel. It came through them and it will come back to them but it came through them to do what He said to Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That is the Father’s heart. It is the Gospel to the world.

Is the Father’s heart vision ours? Do we embrace it? Will we embrace it personally? Will we embrace it with all of our heart, with the encouragement? This sublimely, ridiculous, seemingly impossible mission now simply sublime, achievable, and will be accomplished because the Holy Spirit is working through us to accomplish it.

I have two takeaways. The first one is if we embrace our Father’s heart vision for the Gospel of His Son to go to the world we have to have a heart to reach the world with Biblical integrity. What do you mean by that? He is the phrase I use for this. We can’t be a donut church. That’s a church that is committed to getting the Gospel to the world but it’s not doing anything at home. It’s just big hole. We’re not going to send out there to feel good about ourselves while we do nothing here. We are called to personal evangelism. We are called to being a witness here. We are called to embracing what God has called us to do here. That’s why I want you to take the Bridge to Life training because every member is a missionary.

You once were a mission field then God saved you. Isn't it amazing? We who were the products of the missions now become the participants in the mission. We were saved. Now we become ambassadors to proclaim that salvation. So that means we want to do it here. That's why I say take the Bridge to Life training. The little group I met with on Friday I told them "Get your testimony down pat." You ought to have your discovery Bible study testimony that you can do over weeks. You ought to have your dinner conversation testimony where you can take the whole night and share Jesus meaningfully and then you ought to have your elevator testimony where you only have three floors to tell you about Jesus. You ought to have all three of those in your arsenal, right in your tool box. We are missionaries here.

By the way, look at the things that are happening around us. Look at the open doors that are there. I'm so excited about our Briarwood Youth Group this year. There are so many things to be excited about. There is this virgining evangelistic opportunity through orphan ministry, through foster care ministry. What an extraordinary opportunity wide open to us and the world looks to us for that. The mission trip for the Briarwood Youth Group this year is in Birmingham. The Bible says "Don't wall yourself off from the city" in the book of Jeremiah but He said "seek the welfare of the city." So our BYG is doing 'seeking the city' and they are taking our high school kids right into the city to do outreach, discipleship, and ministry relationships. I hope your kids are one of those missionaries. They are engaged in this seeking the city. Birmingham, there is no hole in the donut here. Here are these opportunities all around us to be engaged with integrity in our own Birmingham, planting churches and revitalizing churches so that there is this local impact that is taking place. We want to do that with integrity. We are not a donut church.

The second takeaway is we want to reach the world with sacrificial intention. Why? It is because we don't want people to think Christianity is a tribal religion of Americans or Birminghamians. Jesus is not our tribal God. He is the Lord of the worlds. He is the Lord of the nations. So He is not our tribal Jesus just for us and just for our country. We want now intentionally with sacrifice to send Him into the world. That's what He said to us when He said "As the Father sent Me into the world to save sinners now I send you into the world. You will have tribulation but go into the world. I sacrifice to save you now sacrificially I want you to give yourself so that the Savior is sent to all the world."

Pastor, I know how I can go to Birmingham. I know how I can go to Alabama but how can I go to the world? This is the third passage I want to look at in 3 John. There is great news here. You and I can not only participate here but we can participate around the world. Here some missionaries had come. Hospitality was being shown and John is encouraging the hospitality but he says there is no great joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth. Now 3 John 1:5-8 which says *5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.*

So we go here but when we send out there with our resources and our prayer support and maybe our own children, we're fellow workers with them as they go out

there so that our sacrificial commitment to that strategic prayer life, those financial resources with faith promise, that short term mission's trip and all those things we're doing we're actually going with them as we send them out. We're going. We're sending. We're giving. We're praying and we become fellow workers with them.

I want to conclude with this. I know that God doesn't need me. I know that God doesn't need our sons and daughters. I know that God doesn't need our prayers or our resources. One time I heard a mission person speaking trying to give encouragement to give and go and he said "God wants to win people from the world but His hands are tied behind His back and until you give, go and pray His hands are tied." God's hands aren't tied. If Briarwood doesn't participate God will still get it done and you can take that to the bank but we'll miss out on the blessing. While God doesn't need us or our resources or our sons and daughters or our prayers, God has divinely designed His delight to use me, our sons and daughters, our prayers and our resources and He lets us get the delight of His delight to use us and that's why we do it. God's heart vision has become the vision of our hearts.

When I was in high school there was a movement that came along called the Jesus People. Do you remember that? Its signal was the upraised index finger. I remember getting the sticker to put on my car and Cindy didn't speak to me for a week because she didn't want stickers on the car. The sticker had the index finger pointed up and underneath the hand it said "One Way." Some Christian athletes got a hold of that in the 70's and when they would score a touchdown or hit a homerun they would do the 'one way' sign to point to God. Now it was just their attempt to say 'I did this because God enabled me and I did this for God's glory.' That was their attempt to take the 'one way' sign that was pervading the Christian culture and they brought it into athletics.

Now I want to step over here from the Jesus People to a whole different place and it's called the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is the place I rescued my wife from. If you'll notice when their basketball players get to the pros, even in the pros like Michael Jordan or Bobby Jones that when they score the basket have you ever noticed what they do with the index finger? They point to the person who passed them the ball. Do you know where they learned that? They learned that from Dean Smith.

Bobby Jones was a high school athlete a couple of years behind me from Charlotte, North Carolina. Bobby Jones went on to play at the University of North Carolina and you may have heard of him. He played for the NBA and was one of the top 50 players in the NBA. He was voted number one defensive player of all time of the NBA. He actually broke my scoring records. It took him ten minutes of the first game that he played. He went on to have this phenomenal career and he actually led Dr. J to Christ. He had this great ministry when he played with the Philadelphia Seventy Sixers. He was just an extraordinary guy.

He saved up his money and came back and became the athletic director for Charlotte Christian School. My kids had the chance to grow up under his leadership. One day I'm riding up with him to go to Raleigh to go to a State Tournament and I began to ask him about this pointing with the index finger. He said to me "Dean Smith told us that when you score everybody applauds you but if that guy doesn't pass you the ball you're not going to score. So while they are applauding you, you point to the guy who passed you the ball. If you don't you don't play." It was interesting how that became a real habit in their life real quickly. It carried right on into the pros where they actually



enjoyed doing it. Bobby talked about how much joy it was when they scored that instead of beating your chest and pulling off their jersey, they pointed to the guy that passed them the ball. They just loved that moment.

We are ending the study now and we are going to make our commitment, our faith promises. We are going to send these missionaries out, and by God's grace, church planting, evangelism and leading people to Christ they will score. Do you know what they can do? They can point back to you because you passed them the ball with intercessory prayer, with sacrificial giving and then all of us can point upward. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. This is my Father's world. This is my Father's Son. This is my Father's heart vision. Will the Father's heart vision be the vision of our heart? We are going to bring our cards up in a minute and place them at the feet of the 'sent ones.' Then we're going to send the flags out but right now let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, here is my heart vision for the vision of Your heart, the Gospel to go to the world. You so loved the world You gave Your Son. Father, I love what You love so now I want to give by praying, by going and Father You may be leading someone here to go on one of those short term mission trips or You may be leading them to cross cultural missions. I want to go by sending with intercessory prayer and finances. God, I want Your heart vision to be the vision of my heart. Thank You for using our sons and daughters. Thank You for using our resources. Thank You for delighting in using us and designing all of this that we who have been saved can now be ambassadors for that Savior going and sending. God, I try to imagine what that little boy must have felt like in the multiplication of his fishes and loaves but I can't wait to see what You're going to do in multiplying this. We'll point to one another but together we'll point to You. All that we have, all that we are is for Your glory. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

### **The Briarwood Mission**

“Our Purpose”

For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

### **The Briarwood Vision**

“Our Passion”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister and a missionary.

### **The Briarwood Strategy**

“Our Ministry”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood will prayerfully seek to

Implement the Biblical strategy of:

1. Gospel Evangelism and Disciple-making
2. Gospel Church Planting and Church Revitalization
3. Gospel Deeds of Love, Mercy and Justice
4. Gospel Leaders Developed and Deployed