

It is *Not* Finished! **Luke 24:45-53**

This Gospel is the first volume of an originally two-volume work, Luke-Acts. In these few verses, Luke brings to a close the ministry of Jesus, and anticipates the coming ministry of the disciples, elaborated in volume two.

Day 1: Luke 24:17-21 The first-century expectation

First-century Jews universally expected that when the Messiah came, he would make everything right. He would conquer evil, reward the godly, and usher in a new era of peace and righteousness. Israel would prosper economically and spiritually, and the nations of the world would flock to Jerusalem to worship God and to honor his people. Life would never be the same again. This was the promise of the Old Testament prophets. So this was the expectation of first-century Jews.

Jesus' followers, themselves first-century Jews, share this same expectation when they describe their own expectations on the road to Emmaus: "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." For us, words like 'redeem' and 'save' conjure up notions of individual, spiritual salvation: the 'saved' are those who have prayed to receive Christ, whose sins are forgiven, who go to heaven when they die; we understand 'redeem' similarly. But these two disciples clearly have something else in mind. They seek more than the salvation of individuals; they hope for the redemption of the nation.

What is the difference? In the Old Testament, 'redeem' describes a previous era and a previous event in Israel's history. More than a millennium before Christ, Israel was a slave nation. In the days of Joseph (Genesis 37-50), during a period of prolonged drought, the patriarchs fled to Egypt in order to escape famine. After Joseph's death, and as the decades and centuries passed, the Jews grew into such a large minority that the Egyptians became anxious. To keep the foreigners in line, the rulers oppressed and enslaved them. The Jews cried out to God, who sent Moses to deliver them from captivity, and to guide them into the new land. In biblical language, God (or Moses) 'redeemed' (i.e., 'delivered') Israel.

In Jesus' time, Israel again perceived itself to be oppressed and enslaved. This time, their oppressor was Roman, not Egyptian, and they were oppressed in their own homeland, the place which God had promised them. So they are once again looking for a redeemer, and suppose that they have found him in Jesus: a prophet 'powerful in word and deed before God and all the people' (as Moses was) (Luke 24:19). They expected him to drive out the Romans, and usher in an era of national peace, prosperity, and preeminence. Not much different from

what we as Americans have come to expect from God: peace, prosperity, and international preeminence. Jesus challenges these expectations for them and, derivatively, for us.

Day 2: Luke 24:45-47 Jesus' correction of the first-century expectation

Jesus sets out an agenda for the future which contrasts at three points with the first-century Jewish agenda of his followers. We will explore each of the contrasts over the next several days. For today, we take an overview of the agenda as a whole.

The point to note is this: Jesus insists that his agenda for the upcoming future is not innovative. It does not derive from him, nor is it recent. Instead, it comes from Scripture, i.e., from the Old Testament. It has been God's declared agenda for more than 400 years previously.

The problem is, no one is paying any attention, neither Jewish leadership nor his own disciples. They both allow frustration with their national experience to distort Scripture. They read into the Bible what they hope to find in it. Understandably, after decades of foreign occupation and economic exploitation, they project their frustrations and worldly desires onto God's agenda. Jesus comes, they hope, to redeem Israel, without regard for what else Scripture might have in view.

Might we be guilty of the same, even two millennia later? Of putting our frustrations at the top of God's priorities? Of projecting our worldly desires onto God?

Jesus perceives their obtuseness and distortions, and "opens their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

Does he need to do the same for us? We will see, beginning tomorrow.

Day 3: Luke 24:45-47 Who is the focus of the agenda?

The Jews' agenda focused on the promised Messiah: when the king comes, he will conquer evil, he will reward the godly, he will usher in a new era of peace and holiness. Naturally enough, raised within Jewish culture, the disciples assimilated this agenda, with one shift: they identify Jesus as the Messiah, and so intuitively impose this pre-existing agenda onto him.

At first glance, that seems noble enough. In fact, typically one of our greatest needs, and one of our highest goals, is to change from self-preoccupied narcissists into God-centered followers of Christ. So far, so good.

But, given the disciples' obtuseness to this point in the Gospel, it is not surprising to find that they continue to misread Jesus. Their focus remains on his role: "We had hoped that *he* was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (24:21). But he has finished the task set for him: "This is what is written: The

Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day”: he has suffered and he has risen from the dead. So his job is complete. Now, his focus is no longer on his role, but on theirs: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins *will be preached* in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. *You are witnesses* of these things.”

Jesus has something for them to do. Something foretold in the Old Testament. Something that Jews overlooked for centuries. Something that the disciples have so neglected that they do not even realize it to be missing. They have an agenda for Jesus, but he – and Scripture – has an agenda for them. His work is done. Theirs is just beginning. If only they realize it. If only they embrace it.

What about us? Which is foremost in our minds: The work that Jesus has already completed, or the work that he calls us to do? What is foremost in our prayers: What we still need in order to make life our lives full, rich, and complete, or the work that he calls us to do? Jesus “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.” Has he also opened your mind?

Day 4: Luke 24:45-47 *What is the focus of the agenda?*

The disciples’ agenda focused on Jesus. In particular, on him securing redemption: “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to *redeem* Israel” (24:21). Now that he has secured redemption, his focus is their activity: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be *preached* in [my] name ... You are *witnesses*” (24:47). With Jesus dying and resurrecting, he achieved redemption. But the job is only half-done. Redemption has been accomplished; now it must be received. The necessary prerequisite is completed; now people must hear and repent, so that they can actually be forgiven.

So, at Easter, we rightly celebrate our redemption achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ. We rightly also remember our role, and redouble our efforts, in extending the invitation to repentance and forgiveness.

Day 5: Luke 24:45-47 *Where is the focus of the agenda?*

Jesus has already corrected the Messianic expectations of Judaism and of his own followers, respecting both ‘who’ and ‘what’. Now he corrects them at a third point: ‘Where’.

“We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (24:21). This was the widespread Jewish hope, that God would redeem Israel. Understandably, albeit inexcusably, the disciples slipped into this same mistake. Jesus calls them to higher ambitions: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to *all nations*.”

This was, after all, the original expectation of the Old Testament prophets:

that the Messiah would come, liberate Israel, make Jerusalem the center of the earth, and then extend his glory and grace to all nations. Yet Jesus modifies even the prophetic expectation. For the prophets expected the nations to come to Jerusalem to learn from God (often called 'centripetal' missions: a pulling inward toward the center). Jesus instead sends his followers out from Jerusalem, to all nations ('centrifugal' missions).

Day 6: Why Luke wrote Acts

So here we have the explanation for why Luke wrote not just a Gospel, but also Acts. The current order of the New Testament separates what Luke originally conjoined, inserting John between Luke and Acts. But Luke's intentions could not be clearer: he ends the Gospel and begins Acts with the same theme and much the same wording (cf. Luke 24:47-49 and Acts 1:4-8).

This conversation took place almost two thousand years ago. Yet still the task is not finished. Jesus has suffered. He rose again. He commissioned his followers. He poured out the Spirit. His first followers preached the Gospel in Jerusalem, and around the Mediterranean world. Many lost their lives pursuing this mission. Yet until now, the Gospel has still not reached every nation, much less every culture and people group.

Until now, we still tend to forget that the Gospel is not just about Jesus' redeeming us and saving those whom we love. It is no less about the preaching of repentance and forgiveness in his name to all nations. Beginning, perhaps, in Boston. And then, across America. But not just here, or there. Everywhere.

This is why our church sends missionaries, and prioritizes the less reached nations and peoples. This is why our missionaries go. This is why we pray. This is why we give toward their financial support.

Because Jesus died and rose two thousand years ago, completing part one, *his* part, of the mission of God. Even two thousand years later, we, and the rest of his church, have not managed to complete part two, *our* part, of the mission of God. This is his calling for our church, and for our lives. To ensure that in our lifetimes, we advance the task further toward its completion, until the day dawns, when the task – not just part one, but also part two – is finally complete.

"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Not just the Scriptures pertaining to part one of the mission of God, but also the Scriptures pertaining to part two. Not just the Scriptures about him, but also the Scriptures about us. Not just the part about redemption, but also the part about repentance and forgiveness. Not just the promises to Israel, but also the promises to all nations. He opened their minds; may he also open our minds – and our hearts – so that we understand, and obey, his call.