

Luke 24 v 36 - 53

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] If you'd like to have Luke chapter 24 open in your Bibles, we'll be dipping into that passage a little bit, picking up on one particular aspect of what goes on in the closing chapter of Luke's Gospel.

All of us make time for special events in our lives, special occasions. A week tomorrow, myself and the family are flying out back to Guernsey to celebrate my parents' golden wedding anniversary, 50 years of marriage.

This year, as you know, 2014 is the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. And throughout the world, many countries are remembering those earth-shaking events of 1914-18 with all sorts of commemorations.

One of the reasons that we mark anniversaries and we make time for them is because, of course, they have an impact upon our lives. They affect who we are now, whether it be a wedding anniversary, a birthday, whether it be, as it is, a historical event.

These things have some impact upon us and affect us even after a great deal of time. Now, during this coming week, there's a special event in the Christian calendar, which by and large has been forgotten by most Christians and certainly by the world.

[1 : 28] Unlike Christmas and Easter and even Pentecost, those holidays which have been hijacked to become a public holiday, so people have a day off but forget the reason why they're doing it, this day has not been hijacked as a public holiday, which is why it's probably been forgotten by and large.

This Thursday is Ascension Day, the day in which the Lord Jesus Christ physically was raised to heaven. Luke mentions it here as well as in his account in Acts.

He says this, verse 51, while he was blessing them, he left them, was taken up into heaven. And in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, sorry, verse 9, after he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid them from their sight.

It's a landmark event in history for the Christian but for the world. There are big repercussions because the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven physically.

But especially for us, it is a means of great hope, a means of great confidence and assurance as we've put our faith and trust in him. Jesus had told his disciples that's exactly what would happen to him.

[2 : 46] In John and chapter 16, in the upper room, as he was sharing and talking with them about his death, he made it very clear that he was going to return to the Father.

John 16, 28, he said this, I came from the Father and into the world, now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father. As we've seen in Acts and Luke, Luke records the events of Jesus' ascension and the writers in the New Testament point to it and bring out the truth and the reality of what has happened to Jesus after his resurrection, 40 days beyond that first appearing.

Ephesians 1 and verse 20, when he, that's God, raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, after he, that's Jesus, had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

Clearly it was something that was important to the believers, important enough for the New Testament writers to involve it and to build their teaching and truth around the reality of Christ's physical and bodily resurrection.

But what does it mean to us? What does it mean to us today, these years on? How does it affect us in our Christian life, in our Christian faith, as we continue to live in this world, the world in which Jesus did walk in and suffer in and die in and rise again in, that he has left and is seated in glory?

[4 : 23] Well, the first thing is this, that is so important for us and encouraging for us, is the reality that the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is the confirmation that he came from heaven in the first place and that he truly is the Son of God.

Confirms to us what we believe about him. Jesus made it clear as he was speaking to Nicodemus in John and chapter 3 and verse 13, that his coming from heaven and returning to heaven was a unique once for all event which only he fulfilled.

John 3, 13, no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven. Jesus came from heaven, that's why he returned to heaven.

So we can be sure that he who returned to heaven is the one who came from heaven. So we can be sure that he really is God. I want you to imagine that as you're walking along the road one day, perhaps in an unfamiliar part of town or another town or city, and as you're walking along the road you come across this incredibly large mansion set back from the road, with elaborate gates on the road with elaborate gates on the front and a pathway leading up to this engraved front with huge sort of lion statues beside it, and in the front an array of luxury cars.

And standing by the gate is a man, an ordinary looking man, and as you walk towards him he says, how do you like my humble abode?

[5 : 55] And, oh this is yours? You say, oh yes, of course it's mine. How can you get him to prove that this mansion belongs to him?

How do you know that he's not just telling you a great whopper of a lie? Well, simple enough. Ask him to go in through the gates and into the mansion. Because if he can go in, it proves it's his home.

It proves it belongs to him. And so as Jesus enters into heaven, it shows us that it is his home. It's where he belongs. Therefore he must be God. Now the ascension, of course, is not the only bit of evidence by which we can point to and say, this proves that Jesus Christ is God who came from heaven into this world because he's returned there.

It's just one of a great string of facts from the earthly life of our Lord Jesus by which we must draw the inevitable conclusion as to who he is, the Son of God.

From the very beginning, his miraculous conception, being born of a virgin, the miracles that he performed, which all of them he said clearly again and again point to the fact that he had come from God, his healing of the sick, his raising of the dead, which no one else has ever been able to do except by God's power, his teaching ministry whereby people were amazed and said, no one ever spoke like this, the effects he had upon those who met him, who were transformed and changed, his death, of course, by which even as he died, the centurion said, surely this was the Son of God, his resurrection from the dead on the third day, showing himself for 40 days and eating and drinking and talking with his disciples so that 500 people, we're told, saw him.

[7 : 42] All of these things along with his ascension make it blindingly obvious that we can only accept one conclusion, that this person is God come amongst us.

John, as he writes at the very end of the life of the Lord Jesus, at the end of his gospel, John 20, says this, Jesus did many other signs.

The NIV calls them miraculous signs, but it's simply signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that by believing you may have life in his name.

And so it's only rational, if I can put it that way, it's only reasonable that we should accept and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Hebrews in chapter 4 makes that clear as well. Therefore, since we have a great high priest, that's Jesus, who has gone into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God.

[8 : 53] Let me ask you that this morning. What do you need to be convinced of to accept Jesus Christ as God? What more evidence can you want than to acknowledge and accept that this is truly God who came into the world and who went back to heaven again?

It's indisputable. It doesn't matter what arguments you throw up, no matter what things you have to say, there is the evidence proven by witness after witness after witness, Jesus is God.

It's only reasonable and rational and proper and sensible to believe and to acknowledge and to accept him as he is.

The ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ also assures us of the completion of his work on earth. It's not just a confirmation that he is God, the Son, but it tells us that he has completed what he came to do.

He came from heaven into this world on a mission. He came to do a work, a work which he would not leave earth to go back to heaven until he had accomplished it, until he had completed it, until he had finished it.

[10 : 08] That was the great proclamation, wasn't it, that Jesus made at the cross in the Gospels. Very penultimate words he spoke were a cry of, it is finished.

He didn't say, I am finished, but he said, it is finished. And it is the terminology used by someone who is a builder or a construction worker of those days to say it's completed.

It's fully and absolutely and perfectly done. That's why immediately after he was able to say, Father into your hands, I commit your spirit.

Jesus came on a contract to fulfill a job. And now that it was done, and only now that it was done fully and perfectly to the satisfaction of himself and of God does he return back to heaven.

In fact, the whole of Jesus' life from his birth until his death, resurrection, ascension, was all to the end of completing the work that had been given him to do. In John chapter 4, his disciples came to him and asked him if he wanted something to eat.

[11 : 18] And he says to them, My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. And literally, Jesus ate, slept, drank, lived to do this work.

The Father's work. The mission he was sent on. The mission to save and rescue men and women from sin and hell. Remember we read there in Luke chapter 24 how Jesus had to explain to the disciples that everything that had happened to him was in fulfillment of what God had already promised.

Verse 44, This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

Before the world was made, God the Father, Son and Spirit drew up the perfect plan for the saving of men and women and boys and girls in their sin.

That plan was been carefully revealed bit by bit all the way through history, all the way through the Old Testament, leading up to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the world as it were to finish it off, to bring it to fulfillment, to make it possible and make it to be completed that we could be saved.

[12 : 40] That plan which had been promised again and again in the scriptures, Jesus fulfilled in every single detail. Read through the Gospels and you'll often find that either Jesus or the Gospel writers will say this was so that this verse in the Old Testament might be fulfilled.

This was done that because God had promised in Isaiah or wherever it was that this must happen. So Jesus' life was in that sense fully and freely given over to accomplish and to complete the work he had come from heaven to do.

That's why Hebrews 1.3 we read it before after he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. After thank the Lord that our Saviour Jesus Christ is not somebody a bit like us who does a bit of a job and goes away and then realises perhaps I better go back and finish the job and then does a bit more.

You know what we're like men aren't we? When we're asked can you get that door hung up at the bathroom? Yes of course I'll get on and do it. So we get the door from Wix's or Homebase whatever it is yeah I've got the door dear yeah but it's not hanging on in the place yet.

Well I'll do that later so you know me if you realise we've got to go and get some hinges and then we go and get some hinges and we put them on the door but we don't actually still hang the door and so it goes on but thank God the Lord Jesus isn't like that.

[14 : 09] He hasn't done half a job His returning to heaven assures us and tells us and gives us confidence that dear friends our sins have been dealt with forever that they've at all been dealt with that our reconciliation with God is not a part job that there's something more to be added or something more for Him to do or something more for us to do because the reality is that He has perfected it all He's finished it all there's nothing in one sense that we can do or add to apart from enjoy it enjoy it it's complete it's not like an airfix kit you used to get when you were a kid before you could play with it or zoom around with it you had to put it all together no Jesus has put everything together and He presents it to us as this gift and He says enjoy it take it receive the forgiveness receive the peace that it brings receive the relationship with God the Father enjoy it are we doing that perhaps we're still so many of us studying we might say or thinking about it and saying well I don't know whether this Jesus you know whether this salvation they talk about this Christianity is something that really is enough for me is it really

I'm scrutinizing it or working it through or whatever we're sitting there looking at it studiously maybe even coming to church regularly and thinking about these things but in the end it's as useless to us as a chocolate teapot because it's just sitting there it's not doing anything we're not doing anything are we taking hold of what God has done for us in Christ are we enjoying it and applying it into our lives are we receiving it because this work that Jesus has done for us is a completed and finished and perfect work and includes not just the sins of our past but the sins of our present and the sins of our future too here's Hebrews in chapter 7 such a high priest that's Jesus meets our need one who is holy blameless pure set apart from sinners exalted above the heavens and like the other high priests in other words those of any other religion he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day first for his own sins and then for the sins of his people listen to this he sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself and therefore

Paul is able to assure us and say to us there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Romans chapter 8 there's no need for you dear friend to go around gloomily feeling bad about yourself there's no reason for you to keep on hauling up the sins of the past and saying to yourself I can't possibly be a Christian because of this or letting those sins drag you back I can't possibly live for Christ today or witness for Christ today or serve Christ today because I've failed again and again in the past yes you have but Christ has completely and fully and absolutely dealt with those sins so that you can enjoy forgiveness and enjoy living for God today the chains have been broken off we sang that last week didn't we that wonderful hymn of Wesley my chains fell off my heart was free

I rose went up and followed thee we can follow because Christ has gone ahead of us and done everything for us the ascension says to us and assures us it's completed and perhaps there may be we might think well yes but yes but we always like to have yes but don't we but God has the final but as it were in these things we'll say well yes but I've I've got to do this and I've got to do that and I've got to do the other no you don't no you don't anything that comes from this salvation comes freely not because you must but because you want to anything that comes from our lives that is living for God and seeking to serve him does not come because I must do it because if I don't do it then perhaps I won't get to heaven no it's because we love him and because we know that he has done it that we are free and liberated to do those things so we want to please him we want to obey his word we want to live for him and bring glory to him we want him to be first in our lives not because the word says you must but it says you now can you can before we couldn't when we were in our sin when we were bound up in trespasses and dead and chained that we couldn't please God we wanted to we tried to we wanted to keep his law but we found all the time our sinful nature kept holding us back and preventing us from doing those things now that those chains have gone now out of joy and liberty we want to we say yes Lord your law is good as we're teaching the children the law of God is good and perfect it's not for our enchaining it's for our liberating it's not for our condemnation it's for our comfort that we might please him that we might live lives that are fruitful and satisfying and useful for him and all of it's because of what he's done for you and for me it's fully completed and this is true but also the ascension lastly this morning and I hope God willing that we may have opportunity to come back to this next week we'll see how we get on because I want us to think about what Jesus is doing even now though he's finished that earthly work completed that the ascension assures us that he is continuing so it assures us and gives us the confirmation that he is the son of God it tells us and assures us that the work that there's been a completion in the work that he's been doing in this world but it tells us also because he has risen there's a continuation of his ministry there's a continuation of his work as well that goes on and will go on all through the whole of history until that time when he comes again just in that passage in Hebrews in chapter 7 where we are told these words of encouragement therefore Jesus is able to save to the uttermost well the NIV puts it completely

I like uttermost better to the uttermost absolutely he's able to save perfectly those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them in other words because he's always at work for them he's continuing what he did he's applying that completed work into our lives he's bringing us into the fullness of what has been done for us he paid the price in full and now he's ensuring that you and I get the blessings for which he paid for he's working to make sure that what is rightfully ours through faith in him we receive Philippians chapter 1 verse 6 being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion to the day of Christ Jesus our Lord as I said we'll think more about that I hope God willing next week about what Jesus is doing ascended in heaven now but it's enough for us to know this that when Christ completed that work of salvation for us on the cross and in his resurrection and in his ascension he is now at work in our lives so that that work does not come to an end and doesn't bear doesn't isn't fruitless but bears fruit for us in other words when you become a Christian it's not now

[22:17] Jesus saying here you are I've done it all for you it's handed over to you you get on with it it's rather the sense of I've done it all for you and now I'm going to continue to do it all for you I'm going to continue to give you grace I'm going to continue to help you I'm going to continue to guide you at the very start of Luke's account the Acts of the Apostles he says to Theophilus the man whom he's writing this account of what Jesus and what the disciples did he says this in my former account O Theophilus I told you what Jesus began to do and to teach see that he doesn't say I told you all that Jesus taught and did but what he began to do our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ is still actively at work he's finished his work for us but now he is continuing to work in us so we find it again and again in the New Testament 2 Corinthians 3.18 tells us he's changing us and transforming us by his spirit he tells the readers there in that passage that we are being changed and transformed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another that's why dear Christian you have not arrived yet that's why you are still struggling that's why it's still hard why because you're still being changed you're still being transformed that's Christ working you and in one sense can I say this in genuine love and concern if you are not changing if you are not growing if you are not different to the person you were as a Christian this time last year or two years ago or three years ago then the question is really this are you saved

I have to ask if you haven't really changed if there isn't something going on where God is dealing with you by his word and his spirit so that you are growing and maturing and things are happening then you've got to ask yourself well has it started yet because if Jesus says he's going to carry on what he began has there been the beginning please don't put your hope and faith in your salvation in something that happened 30 40 years ago or even 10 years ago the faith that we have must be alive today it must be real today it must be Christ with us today otherwise we may be mistaken we may be deceived we may have thought or somebody may have told us you're a Christian now because you've been baptized you're a Christian now because you're confirmed or you're a Christian now because you've prayed this prayer or you're a Christian now because you do this but dear friends we need to ask ourselves is it real today is the work of Jesus going on today in my life am I changing the wonderful thing of course because

Jesus is ascended and he's continuing this work he sustains us and keeps us from falling back Jude in chapter Jude in verse 24 rather he says this unto him who is able to keep you from falling now that doesn't mean that we won't slip up it doesn't mean that we won't backslide it doesn't mean that we won't get it wrong but it does mean this that we will not ultimately fall see your salvation dear friends and mine the assurance that you will be in heaven one day is not based upon you and what you do or what you've done but upon Jesus and what he's completed on earth and what he's continuing to do in you he will keep you and get you to heaven and nothing no power of hell or earth or even your own failings and sinfulness can prevent that from happening because he is almighty he keeps us from falling and lastly he keeps pouring out into our lives the strength that we need yes we feel weak yes we feel like we're making a muck up of it sometimes yes we feel like we can't go on how can I go on in this Christian life I just can't do it Lord no you can't but when we acknowledge that truth when we acknowledge our weakness it's then that we receive the strength here's Paul probably one of the greatest Christians who ever lived and he says this the Lord spoke to me and said my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore says Paul I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that

Christ's power may rest on me in other words I'll say to people yes I'm weak and I'm frail and I can't do it I'll gladly acknowledge that and boast that and say that it's not me not my strength because I want more of the power that God gives more the power that Christ gives the weaker we are dear friends the stronger we are the weaker we see ourselves the stronger we are in Christ so if you've come here this morning and you said again Lord I just need you and I can't make it without you then you're in a very good place dear friends our Lord Jesus has ascended on high God the son who came into this world has returned to his rightful place he has fulfilled the work that he has needed to do that we could never do for ourselves and now he is at work to bring everything in your life to completion too don't be afraid trust in him realize again that he is all that you need and if you haven't trusted him dear friends whoever you are and you're still holding back and you're still saying I hope I can make it myself in life or I hope I can make it to heaven because I think I'm good enough then please give up that false hope it's never ever going to be enough you're deceived and put your faith in

Christ and call on him the risen and ascended saviour for he's pleased pleased to give to you his grace let's sing then our friends as we close together 296 before the throne of God above I have a firm a strong a perfect plea a great high priest whose name is love whoever lives and pleads for me O'er the throne of the Lord

[29 : 26] I have a stronger perfect me My praise I preach to give his love And I listen to me slowly My name is greater in his hands My name is greater, all his love I know the glory of the Lord No one can give me thanks to God No one can give me thanks to God Christ says and tempts me to despair And tells me of the guilt within But when I look and see him there You made an end to all my sin Because the sinless Savior died My sinful soul is granted free

For God the justice satisfied To look on him and pardon me To look on him and pardon me With all in reverence and love And perfect slaughter's righteousness The great unchangeable I am The King of glory and all grace But with himself I cannot die I saw his merchant by his blood My life is lived with Christ on high With Christ my Savior and my God With Christ my Savior and my God To him who is able to keep you from falling

And to present you before his glorious presence Without fault and with great joy To the only God our Savior Be glory and majesty Power and authority Through Jesus Christ our Lord Before all ages Today and forevermore Amen