

Meals with Jesus

One More Meal (Luke 24:36-53)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on November 21, 2021

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we'll be wrapping up our sermon series in the Gospel of Luke that we've called *Meals with Jesus*. The plan wasn't to go through the whole book (like we normally do) but to focus on specific episodes in Luke where Jesus shares a meal with others. **We were just going to preach that text, but we also wanted to highlight any lessons regarding the practice of table fellowship and hospitality.**
 - And I hope it's been instructive. To see how Jesus extends table fellowship to the least of these. To the despised in society. The rejected and outcasted. And he calls them into relationship with himself and invites them to be his followers. And he continues throughout the Gospel to eat with his disciples, using these meals to strengthen their fellowship and to give instruction.
 - **In this morning's text, we see Jesus sharing one more meal with his disciples before he ascends back to his heavenly kingdom, to return to the Father.** This is one more opportunity to reinforce his love and acceptance. And one more occasion to teach his disciples and send them out on mission.

- ❖ **One noticeable feature in our text is the rollercoaster of emotions experienced by the disciples.** It begins with them startled, frightened, and confused by the many reports they're receiving about their master – whom days earlier was brutally tortured and crucified. **The report is that he's alive and well.** Some women in their company said they saw a vision of angels at the empty tomb, announcing the Resurrection. Simon Peter had his own encounter with the Risen Christ. And two other disciples supposedly met Jesus on the road to Emmaus.
 - At this point, they weren't sure what to believe. In John's Gospel, this same event is recounted, and we're told that the disciples were huddled together in a locked room for fear of the religious leaders (Jn 20:19). They were afraid they might be next. Very soon it might be them hanging on a Roman cross.
 - **But by the end of that evening's meal, these same frightened and confused men would be bounding with great joy.** Ready and willing to testify before all of what they had seen and experienced – even before those religious leaders, the very ones who arrested their master (Acts 4:8; 5:29).

- ❖ What can explain this transformation? **How do you go, so suddenly, from a huddled group of fearful men – to a merry band of bold disciples sent out into the world, willing to lay down their lives over a message that they were not willing to compromise nor deny?**
 - There must be some explanation. People don't change like that overnight. Unless something significant happened. Unless they experienced something life-changing. Paradigm-shifting. So that they walk away with a totally different attitude and outlook on life.
 - What could it be? **Luke 24 makes it clear that what the disciples experienced was Christ in his Resurrection glory.** They encountered the Risen Lord. And from then on, everything was different.

- ❖ Friends, I would contend that this same life-transforming encounter is available to us today. It's not a unique experience that only the first Christians were privileged to enjoy. **You and I can also share in their experience and share in their transformation into new people, with a new attitude and new outlook on life.**
 - I wouldn't be surprised if you showed up this morning fearful and confused. **Fearful** – because of all the instability in your life and all the unknowns that are before you. **Confused** – because those whom you trusted, and in whom you placed so many expectations, have let you down. Have seemingly abandoned you.
- ❖ If you think about it, that's exactly how the disciples felt at the start of our text. Fearful and confused – for the same reasons. But just as their lives completely changed, I pray the same for each of us. **But that means we need a similar encounter with the same gospel realities that they experienced in this final meal with Jesus.**
 - Here in our text, we see the disciples encountering three gospel realities: (1) Christ resurrected in the flesh. (2) Christ prophesied in the Scriptures. (3) Christ ascended in his power. Friends, I believe all three can be experienced today – even in this moment as the Word of God is preached to you.

Christ Resurrected in the Flesh

- ❖ Let's start with the first reality they encountered: **Christ resurrected in the flesh.** It's important for us modern people to understand that we have a lot more in common than we think with these ancient 1st-century characters. **We might have a hard time, in our day and age, grappling with this idea of a man rising from the dead after being sealed in a tomb for three days.** But we just assume that ancient people had little trouble believing such miraculous claims. That resurrection fit comfortably within their worldview. But in reality, as we'll see in our text, ancient people were just as skeptical about it as we are.
- ❖ Our passage begins in v36 with the disciples talking over the reports they received that evening about the various sightings. Cleopas and the other disciple had just returned to Jerusalem with their story of an encounter on the Emmaus road. And Simon Peter had just retold his own experience.
 - But as they were talking about these things, v36 says, *“Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”³⁷But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.”*
 - In other words, they thought he was a ghost, an apparition. That was their first thought. **Within the ancient 1st-century worldview, it was more plausible that this was a ghost than this being a resurrected man.**
- ❖ The point is this – **the disciples were not anticipating the Resurrection.** Sure, compared to the secularism of our day, their worldview was more supernatural. Spirits, ghosts, apparitions; roaming the earth, haunting people. Those ideas fit within their plausibility structure. But *not* the idea of a dead man returning back to life in a body, in the flesh.

- ❖ That idea would be as unthinkable in their day as it is in ours. But not only unthinkable – it would’ve been undesirable for someone living back then. Just consider the predominant worldview of their day – **the first-century Greco-Roman worldview**.
 - Now there were a range of opinions about what happens after you die. Some philosophers said you simply cease to exist. Others believed you lived on as a spirit in another realm or you might roam this earth as a ghostly apparition. But they all agreed that when people die they don’t come back to life in their bodies.
 - **Bodily resurrection was inconceivable. And more so, it was undesirable.** Greeks considered the body to a prison house for the soul, so death was viewed as the soul’s liberation. That means, within an ancient Greco-Roman worldview, no one expected nor wanted to be resurrected.

- ❖ The same could be said of **the first-century Jewish worldview**. There was a sect of Judaism called the **Sadducees** that denied the possibility of resurrection (Lk 20:27). Of course, they knew the OT had stories where the dead came back to life (2 Kg 4:8-37; 13:20-21), but those events were more like resuscitations. Not resurrections.
 - In those cases, there was no qualitative change to the body. It was still susceptible to sickness and decay and would succumb again to death. But resurrection is where you rise with a new, transformed body freed from the effects of sin – from sickness and decay. A resurrected body is one that never dies.
 - Now there was a sect of Judaism that did believe in it. They were the **Pharisees**. But they saw resurrection as a future, corporate reality tied up with the end times. It was a concept reserved for that final day of judgment that included all of humanity. **So the resurrection of one individual taking place in the middle of history would still make no sense to a Pharisee.**

- ❖ So why would all the early Christians (both Jewish and Gentile) insist upon Jesus’ bodily resurrection when it went completely against – not only what they considered to be common sense – but against their fundamental religious convictions?
 - **The best explanation for such a monumental shift in their thinking is that they encountered living proof to the contrary.** Something that shattered their existing worldview. They must have witnessed the bodily resurrection of an individual man.

- ❖ That’s why Luke goes to great lengths in vv38-43 to demonstrate that the disciples were face to face with a flesh-and-bones person. This is not a ghost. This is not a mass hallucination. **Jesus proves that he’s standing before them in the flesh by inviting them to touch his nail-scarred hands and feet.**
 - Now in response, it says in v41, that the disciples “*disbelieved for joy and were marveling.*” That’s not to suggest that they were outright disbelieving what they saw and touched. That’s just a little way of saying that the disciples were incredulous. It was hard to believe what was happening. This was all too good to be true!

- ❖ Now to further prove his point, Jesus asks for some food. He hasn't had a bite to eat for three days. Look at v41, “*“Have you anything here to eat?”* ⁴²*They gave him a piece of broiled fish,* ⁴³*and he took it and ate before them.”*
 - Ghosts don't eat fish. They don't eat anything. So if the Eleven of them just so happened to be seeing things – whether an apparition or a hallucination – then how would you explain the missing fish? That's what the disciples could not deny. There was a fish on the table earlier, but now it's gone. And none of us ate it! So we weren't hallucinating. Jesus really was here in the flesh, and he really did eat that fish!

- ❖ Now you're probably thinking that's great and all for the disciples. They're so lucky. They got a firsthand look at the Risen Lord. **They got to touch the scars on his hands and feet. If only you were given that opportunity, then you'd likewise be transformed.** Then you'd be able to believe, and you'd be bold to proclaim the gospel. Because you would've encountered Christ resurrected in the flesh just like his disciples. So we envy their experience.
 - **But last week's passage, about those two on the road to Emmaus, already proved the point that you can be face to face staring at the Risen Lord and still not believe.** Recall how they didn't recognize him while walking with him on the road.

- ❖ So for the rest of the trip, Jesus led them in a bible study, opening up Scripture. “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*” (24:27) And finally, when they got to their destination and were at table sharing a meal, that's when Jesus broke bread and blessed it. And that's when their eyes were opened, and they finally recognized him as their Lord, alive and well in the flesh.
 - But according to those men, the process of recognition began earlier on the road. In v32, they say, “*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*” So it wasn't seeing Jesus's face that did it. It was the opening of Scripture that began to warm their hearts with saving faith. **It wasn't because they saw the visible Christ in the flesh – but because they saw the prophesied Christ in the Scriptures.**

Christ Prophesied in the Scriptures

- ❖ Which leads to our second point – the second gospel reality encountered by the disciples – **Christ prophesied in the Scriptures.** I don't want you to get the impression that the kind of life-transforming experience we're talking about is limited to those who got a chance to see Christ in the flesh. **The point here is that a real encounter with the Resurrected Christ can be experienced by encountering the prophesied Christ in the Scriptures.**
 - Think about the **parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus** found in Luke 16. In the story, both men die, but the rich man ends up in Hades while Lazarus is carried off to Abraham's bosom. The rich man then asks Abraham to send Lazarus over to give him some relief, but he's told that a great chasm is between them that can't be crossed. So he begs for Lazarus to be sent to his father's house to warn his five brothers who are still alive, “*lest they also come into this place of torment.*”

- ❖ Abraham's reply reinforces our point. *"²⁹But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'³¹He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" (16:29-31)*
 - Did you hear that? **If you don't hear and believe the witness of Moses and the Prophets (Scripture), then neither will you be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.** That's how powerful and persuasive the witness of Scripture can be.
 - Friends, you are not at a disadvantage because you live in the 21st-century, thousands of years removed from these historical events. **Sure, right now you can't see the Resurrected Christ in the flesh, but you can surely hear the Prophesied Christ proclaimed in the Scriptures.**

- ❖ And that's why, beginning in v44, Jesus points his disciples to Scripture. *"⁴⁴Then 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."*
 - Notice the mention of the traditional threefold division within the ancient Hebrew Bible. The Bible of Jesus's day would've been divided into three sections: the Torah (the Law of Moses), the Prophets, and the Writings (starting with Psalms).
 - The point Jesus is making is that you're not just going to find random references to him in the OT – in this verse or in that chapter. **No, Jesus's point is that all of the OT Scripture is ultimately telling one big story where he is the main character.** Where he's the prophesied hero.

- ❖ Notice, in vv46-47, the three fulfillments that Jesus highlights about himself. He says these things were written about in the OT. **One, that the Christ should suffer** (Ps 22; 31; 69; 118; Isa 53). **Two, that the Christ would rise from the dead on the third day** (Ps 16:10; Isa 53:10). **Three, that the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in Christ's name to all nations** (Joel 2:28-32; Isa 42:6; 49:6).
 - Wouldn't you have loved to be there – to be a part of that bible study? **To listen to the Incarnate Word of God interpret the Written Word of God showing how it all bears witness to him.** How his life, death, and resurrection fulfilled Scripture.

- ❖ Imagine Jesus expositing Genesis 22, showing how the call to sacrifice **Isaac** foreshadowed the atonement he accomplished on the cross. Or explaining Exodus 12 and how he's the **Passover Lamb** who was slain so God's judgment could pass over us. Or how he's the **True Manna of Heaven** who satisfies the soul (Ex 16:4; Jn 6:35). He's the **Bronze Serpent** who will heal us if we look to him (Num 21:9; Jn 3:14-15).
 - He probably taught how the tabernacle and temple pointed to him since he's the **True Dwelling Place** where you meet with God (Jn 1:14, 18; 2:18-22). I'm sure he explained how he's the **True Prophet** greater than Moses (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22), and the **True Priest** greater than Aaron (Heb 7:23-25), and the **True King** greater than David (Mt 22:41-25).

- ❖ And he's the **Suffering Servant** of Isaiah 53 who was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. He's the **Psalm 22 sufferer** who cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46). He's **the seed of Eve** who will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15), and he's **the offspring of Abraham** through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 22:18; Acts 3:25). He's in every story. He's on every page. He's the point of it all.

- ❖ But if references to Jesus are so prevalent in the OT, then why isn't it more obvious to more people? **Why is it that people can read the OT today and still not find him in there? Because that's an effect of the Fall.**
 - Because of our sinfulness, our hearts have been hardened and a veil lies over it. Preventing us from seeing Jesus in the Scripture. That's the Apostle Paul's explanation in **2 Corinthians 3:15**. He says "*to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.*"

- ❖ And that's what Jesus does in v45. **He removes the veil that was preventing his disciples from seeing him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.** Look at v45, "*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*"
 - That's the only way it happens. You can read the Bible cover to cover. You can listen to a thousand sermons from the best preachers in the world. **But unless the Lord opens your mind – you won't be able to understand the Scriptures.** That's why we need to pray for his mercy and power to open our minds every time we study Scripture. Every time we sit under a sermon.
 - **And that's what we need to pray for our unbelieving friends and family.** Let's do our part to expose them to Scripture – whether inviting them to listen to biblical preaching or to proclaim to them the Bible ourselves. But most of all, pray for God to open their minds, to remove the veil, so they can see Jesus as the Christ, the fulfillment of all the prophecies and promises of Scripture.

- ❖ That is our mission. We are sent into the world, to all the nations, as witnesses of these things. As Jesus explained, the OT Scriptures prophesied that the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed to all nations. **Church, we're the ambassadors. We're the royal heralds of the King's message of good news.**
 - Listen to vv48-49. "*⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And 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.*"
 - **Notice how the disciples are not just commissioned to be his witnesses, and then expected to accomplish the job in their own strength.** No, Jesus instructs them to wait in Jerusalem until he sends the promise of his Father upon them. **Then they will be clothed with power from on high to accomplish their mission.**

- ❖ Now we know by reading Acts 2 (which is the companion book to this Gospel and also written by Luke), that the promise of his Father is referring to the Holy Spirit, who comes down in power at Pentecost, indwelling the first Christians.
 - And the book of Acts, picks up where the Gospel of Luke concluded. **Beginning from Jerusalem, the proclamation of the gospel – the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – had a ripple effect.** Starting in Jerusalem, then in all Judea, then in on into Samaria, and eventually to the end the earth – the gospel was continually preached by – not just the apostles – but every day disciples.

Christ Ascended in his Power

- ❖ Because the same life-transforming encounter that the apostles experienced is available to (and experienced by) every Christian who has since followed. This leads to the third and final gospel reality we're confronted with in our text – **Christ ascended in his power.**
 - Jesus told his disciples, on the night before his arrest, that it is to their advantage that he go away. *“For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”* (Jn 16:7) **So by virtue of his ascension in power, Jesus will then send down his Spirit in power to strengthen his disciples and enable them to accomplish their mission as witnesses.**

- ❖ Let's read the last four verses of Luke's Gospel. Start in v50, *“⁵⁰And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³and were continually in the temple blessing God.”*
 - These verses recount what is known in theology as **the Ascension of Christ.** We're told in Acts 1:3 that the Risen Lord appeared to the apostles during a forty day stretch from his Resurrection to his Ascension. And during those days, he would appear and disappear, often mysteriously. But now he makes it clear that he's leaving for good. **He's returning to his heavenly kingdom, to be seated on his throne, at his Father's right hand** (Ps 110:1; Heb 1:3). That's what's happening in vv50-53, and Luke starts the book of Acts with the same event, with a few added details (1:6-11).

- ❖ Notice how it says in v52 that the disciples leave Bethany and return to Jerusalem *“with great joy.”* Which is a surprising reaction. You'd think the disciples would be sad that Jesus has ascended to heaven and left them here on earth. But instead they're filled with joy! What could explain that? **There are two good reasons that could explain their great joy.**

- ❖ **First, it goes back to those first few words they heard out of Jesus's mouth in v36. “Peace to you!”** That might sound like a generic greeting. But given the context, this offer of peace carries a much greater significance.
 - Think about it. **Since their last encounter with Jesus, the disciples were not just gripped with fear but with shame.** They were shouldering a ton of guilt for having abandoned their Lord. They deserted Jesus when he needed them the most.

- ❖ So put yourself in their shoes. Suddenly, Jesus appears before you and your fellow deserters. You're afraid. Not just because you think you've seen a ghost. **But because you fear what he's going to say.** You feel so horrible for what you did, and now he's going to let you have it. **But the first words out of his mouth are not "Shame on you" but "Peace to you!"**
 - Can you imagine what that did for the disciples? Think of how those words transformed them. **The one Person who had every right to be angry at them was merciful towards them.** Showing grace. Offering peace. A blood-bought peace that he secured by dying for their sins, making forgiveness an accomplished reality. That's one huge reason for great joy.
 - Have you experienced this joy? Do you know this peace? It can be yours if you trust Jesus and give your life over to him today.

- ❖ So peace with the Lord has something to do with it. **But, secondly, these disciples can abound with great joy because they know where Jesus is going.** He's going to go sit on his throne – to receive all authority over all the earth. The Ascension was literally the crowning moment of Jesus' life and ministry. It's when he finally sat down after all his work was done.
 - **Jesus ascended on high so that he could sit down at his Father's right hand, in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion** (Eph 1:20-21). God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Phil 2:7). He has been crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.

- ❖ That's what the disciples understood about the Ascension. Jesus was leaving them. There good reason to grieve that in itself. **But he was leaving to receive his kingdom – to sit on his throne with all power and all authority at his disposal.** Just think about what that means for the disciples and their mission to be his witnesses to all nations. All that power and authority is now at their disposal on their mission to proclaim his gospel of repentance.

- ❖ One commentator I read put it like this, *"There is all the difference in the world between going out on mission with the motive of helping Christ to become King, and going out because the [One who is already crowned] King has sent you."*¹
 - That makes sense. **I wouldn't feel great joy if I was sent on mission to advance the kingdom of someone whose kingship was not yet established.** Whose rule and reign was far from certain. Who is still competing against rivals. There's a scary risk involved when you hitch your wagon to someone who might not come out on top.

- ❖ **So when we think of Christ's commission to go to all nations as his witnesses, it makes all the difference to know that he's ascended on high.** That he's sitting on his throne, and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Mt 28:18). It matters to know that we've been sent with that kind of kingly authority. **That you've been commissioned by the victorious, crowned King of kings is a reason to worship and a good cause for great joy.**

¹ Bruce Milne, *Acts: Witness to Him*, 43.