

In our message two weeks ago, Jesus broke the news to His disciples that He was leaving, which troubled their hearts and made them afraid. In last week's sermon, Jesus taught them practical Trinitarianism to explain why it was good that He left; namely, so that the Father would send the Spirit to ensure that God would always be with His people, even when Jesus was gone. This teaching moved them from fear to peace.

This week, as we shift from the gospel of John to the gospel of Luke, we also jump forward in time. In terms of the gospel story, our text today is on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, and from that vantage point, Jesus is able to make connections for His disciples that they just couldn't see before. He reminds them of what He had said earlier, that the clue to understanding what had to happen to the Messiah was found in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms. Now, after His death and resurrection, He points them back to the Scriptures, and opens their minds so that the prophecies about Jesus make sense.

But even though His great work of atonement was finished, God's plan to renew the world was just beginning. And so Jesus is not only explaining *His* place in God's story; He is also explaining the place of His followers. He is not only answering the question "What just happened?" But also the "Now what?" question. Jesus explains the past, and prepares His disciples for the future before ascending into heaven. And through Jesus' teaching, He adds on to the peace that He had given them, and leaves them filled with great joy.

This is why Jesus is so wonderful: You come to him with a troubled heart and full of fear, and He gives you His peace and fills you with joy instead. Here's the point, though: in order to move from fear and trouble to peace and joy, you need to be taught by Jesus. Because Jesus teaches you to see your troubles and fears *in light of God's plan* for fixing His broken world. Don't focus on yourself – what's God's wonderful plan for *my* life? Don't put yourself at the center; put God at the center. How does my life serve God's plan to make the world new?

And so today I want to look at today's text under five headings: **First**, where is God's plan found? **Second**, what is God's plan? **Third**, God's plan and Jesus; **Fourth**, God's plan and the disciples, and **Fifth**, God's plan and us.

The **first** thing Jesus does is to remind His disciples that the plan was explained long ago in the Scriptures. This is what is happening in verses 44-45. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms contained the plan that Jesus was fulfilling as the Messiah. This points the to fundamental unity of the Bible – not just a few prophecies in Isaiah were about Jesus, but the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were written to prepare the way for the Messiah.

This is why it just won't do, as some have done, to make a couple of quick apologetic points about fulfilled prophecy, but then to forget about the rest of the OT. We aren't supposed to be “New Testament” Christians, but *whole Bible Christians*, because the whole Bible is about Jesus. We do not ignore the Old in light of the New; we understand and apply the Old in light of the New.

The information that the Church needs to follow Jesus is found in the Bible, the whole Bible. This is why, for example, the Ten Commandments and the Psalms have such an important place in our worship. They didn't *expire* when Jesus came. They *came alive* when Jesus came! God's plan to re-make the world through Jesus is found in the OT Scriptures, which means that the New *Testament* is not a new *plan*. The New Testament opens our minds to see the plan in a new way, through Jesus. **Point 1: God's plan is found in the Bible. The whole Bible.**

Second, Jesus summarizes the plan. What are the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms saying? This is verses 46-47: Jesus Christ suffering and dying and rising from the dead so that repentance and forgiveness of sins can be preached in His name all over the world.

What should stand out to us is that this plan is **all about Jesus**, and not about us. Jesus saves the world; we just talk about it. *We caused* the problem and broke the world; *Jesus fixes it*. And the way He fixes it is not by military conquering or political maneuvering or practicing random acts of kindness. Jesus saves by suffering and dying, **and** on the third day rising.

We need to hold these two things together as we preach. Some folks want to skip the suffering and dying and go straight to the victory, and so when Christianity loses all sorts of moral and cultural battles, they become fearful and afraid. Others rightly understand that suffering is necessary, but they make their peace with suffering and death, and think that it is a waste of time to work for victory in this world.

But although Jesus doesn't win the way the world wins, He doesn't lose either. He doesn't avoid death, but He doesn't stay dead, either. He “loses” in order to win. And so this is God's plan: as we follow Jesus, we die a thousand deaths, not because death is all we have to look forward to, but so that when we die, a seed falls into the ground and produces a harvest of life. **Point two: the plan is that Jesus saves the world, and then that salvation gets preached all over the world.**

That's the summary, but I want to flesh it out a bit more by focusing on the different *roles* within the plan. My **third** heading is “God's Plan and Jesus”. What is Jesus' role in God's plan? Of course, Jesus' role is central, but I want to look at what *this text* tells us about His role. And so as you listen, hear what Jesus has done for you. And everything that Jesus has done is another reason why you should love Him, praise Him, and thank Him. I'm reminding you again, so that you will *love* Jesus more and *worship* Him more.

First thing: Jesus **spoke**. One of Jesus' roles in God's plan was to be a teacher, and His teaching opened your mind. Verse 44 tells you that you need the Old Testament to understand Jesus, but verses 45-46 tell you that you need Jesus to understand the Old Testament. If Jesus doesn't teach you, your mind stays closed, and you don't understand any of it.

Second thing: (46) Jesus **suffered and rose on the third day**. Jesus is more than a teacher; He is a Savior. He atoned for your sins through His sacrificial death, and He won the victory over death by rising from the grave.

Third thing: (48) Jesus **commissions**. Jesus affirms that His disciples are qualified and called to serve as witnesses. Here Luke is referring briefly to the same thing that we know from Matthew's gospel as “The Great Commission.” When Jesus departs, He leaves behind authorized representatives to spread the message and carry out the plan.

Fourth thing: Jesus **sends the Holy Spirit** (vs. 49). He did not leave His disciples alone, but sent them the Holy Spirit, just like the Father promised.

Fifth thing: (50) Jesus **blesses**. In our culture, a blessing is what happens after a sneeze, but in the Bible, a blessing is an empowerment, a gift, a commissioning. A blessing is a *powerful* word that accomplishes things, not just a wish that somebody would have good luck. Jesus doesn't wish His disciples good luck when He leaves. He *blesses* them.

Sixth thing: Jesus **ascends**. And the meaning of the Ascension is what makes the whole plan go. If Jesus had done everything else on that list, but not ascended, it would have all been a waste. It would be like winning the presidential race but never taking office. Getting engaged but never married. Sowing and watering, but never harvesting.

The Ascension of Jesus is the key that unlocks God's plan for a man to rule the world in righteousness and justice in the image of God, which was God's original plan for Adam that Adam failed in. If Jesus doesn't ascend to God's right hand and take His place on the throne, then the plan is dead in the water, but in verse 51, we see that *while He was blessing His disciples, Jesus parted from them and was carried up into heaven*.

And because the disciples understood that the Ascension led to Jesus' coronation as the King of kings and Lord of lords, they *worshiped* Him and went back to Jerusalem *with great joy*. In a sense they were sorry to see Him go, but because they knew *where* He was going and *what* He was going to do, they were *glad*.

This was God's plan that Jesus carried out: Announce the coming of the kingdom. Defeat the great enemy and win the kingdom. Send out heralds to proclaim the victory. Empower the citizens of the kingdom. And then ascend to the throne and reign as king forever.

Point three: We celebrate the Ascension as the day that Jesus went to receive His kingdom from the Father. O, worship the King!

My **fourth** heading, much more briefly: God's plan for the disciples back then was what we saw in the book of Acts: “Be my witnesses.” Proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. But first, stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes. Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday, which is when we celebrate just that, the sending of the Spirit, which causes the gospel to burst out of Jerusalem like a volcano. God's plan for Jesus was for Jesus to become King. God's plan for Jesus' first disciples was that they would announce that good news to world: “God has made Jesus Lord and King.” So that's **point four: the disciples were called to become the King's heralds.**

My **fifth** heading: God's plan for us. And **point five is simple: Jesus does, you tell.** It's simple, but we still manage to get it backwards sometimes, and think that Christianity is all about Jesus *telling* us what to do, and us *doing* it. This leads us to think of Christianity mostly as a system of morals, do's and don'ts, and to see Jesus mainly as a judge, and since we never measure up, Christianity becomes oppressive and exhausting.

But that is not the easy yoke and the light burden of Jesus! **The heart of God's plan for Christians is that Jesus does the saving of the world, and we tell the world what Jesus has done.** What we are called to do in light of the Ascension of Jesus is to worship the King, and bear witness to His kingship through our joyful worship. In verse 53, the disciples did this by being in the temple continually, blessing God. This is what we are doing right now when we are called together in the King's name to praise and glorify Him, listen to His teaching, and feast at the King's table. By doing this each week, we are declaring to the world that Jesus is King.

But the Church is also given a glorious missionary assignment that began in Jerusalem and continues to this day. This is why we encourage personal evangelism. This is why we support local and international missions, Steve Kaiss and Metro Maryland Youth for Christ, and Blake Purcell and the Slavic Reformation Society. This is why we love Bible translation, Christian education, training new pastors and planting new churches, building for the kingdom because King Jesus has ascended to the throne.

Christians are those who respond to the glory of the king in worship, and who are joined with other worshipers into a kingdom community. The mission of our worshipping community is to bear joyful witness to all the world of the glory of our Risen and Ascended King, who was carried up into heaven to receive His eternal kingdom from the hand of His Father, and to celebrate the fact that He shall reign forever and ever.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*