

What's your favorite sequel? I looked forward to the *Avengers: Endgame* (**picture**). Apparently, I'm not the only one. Sales have topped \$832 Million and account for 39% of this summer's box office sales thus far.

Sequels can be wonderful or awful. *Star Trek* (**picture**) sequels run hot and cold, yet *Star Wars* (**picture**) have been hits for the most part. I'm not sure that I'm up for *Toy Story 4* (**picture**).

This morning we're coming to the end of our study in Luke's Gospel, *Finding Jesus*, but there's a phenomenal sequel – the book of Acts. It's why Luke's Gospel ends somewhat abruptly compared to the other three Gospels.

Famed British poet, T.S. Eliot (**picture**) said, "*What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.*" That's true of Luke and Acts. And all of life is a series of transition points. There's a transition from being a toddler to being a student and then the transition from Grade School to High School. Heading off to college is a transition. Marriage is a transition. Having children is a transition. When your children leave home you face another one. Retirement is a transition. At each of these points, you begin a new chapter in your life.

As we come to the end of the book of Luke, we reach a time of transition for these first believers. Jesus' earthly life and ministry is complete. The baton is passed to His disciples to testify to the truth and build His Church. Luke reflects this transition by ending his Gospel and picking up with Acts. The book of Acts is the record of what happened through the work of His disciples. At the end of Luke, the risen Christ meets with His disciples and commissions them as witnesses of His life, death and resurrection. Then, He leaves them and ascends to heaven. Please turn to Luke 24:36-53 (p. 885).

Our text brings Luke's narrative to a triumphant conclusion, yet it also prepares for the taking up of the sequel in Acts. The story of Jesus now becomes the story of the Jesus movement.

We begin with the confirmation of Christ's resurrection. Jesus' resurrection separates Christianity from all other religions. No other religion claims its founder was bodily raised from the dead and that His spirit is now present with those who serve Him.

It's **Endings and Beginnings**. It ends with two notes that look to the future. It's why our Lord commands His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the enabler who makes it possible for the Church to complete the mission. We have marching orders. Our passage also begins with great fear, yet ends with great joy! Luke begins his Gospel with the coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven to earth in the incarnation, and ends with His going from earth to heaven in His ascension.

The pre-existent and eternal Son of God entered space and time, became a human being so that He might secure for us here in this world forgiveness, peace with God and the certainty that God's will shall ultimately be done on earth even as it is done in heaven. That's not all. By His going, Jesus has taken humanity to the pinnacle of the universe in that all who trust Him will one day be brought Home to share His glory for all eternity. If you're taking notes...

Jesus' presence brings peace. "*I think I saw a ghost.*" While that might be a great movie line, it's a terrible thing to hear if it's dark, you're behind locked doors and already terrified. That's the disciples' experience. Verse 37, "*But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.*"

Most cultures believe the dead can reappear in some immaterial form. The Bible doesn't teach that. Dead people don't become ghosts or zombies or even angels. The disciples' terrified reaction reveals that they had more faith in superstition than their Bibles. But if someone, even Jesus, hadn't been there one moment and then is suddenly there, we'd be shaken up too.

Have you ever walked in a room and been startled to find someone else already there? This is a bit like that but much more intense, since Jesus just appeared. They thought they saw a ghost. People don't normally just appear. We don't have *Star Trek's* beaming technology. People have to walk through a door to get into a room. It was beyond shocking.

You'll encounter those who ridicule Jesus' resurrection. They equate it with fairy tales. Maybe that's you this morning. Jesus' disciples were the first and perhaps the worst skeptics. They had to be convinced. Jesus had to offer them empirical proof, "*See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*" The focus on His hands and feet connects with how He died, with nails through them. To touch Him confirms not only physicality but His identity. Jesus offers them proof positive.

Satan's plan hasn't changed since the Garden. He wants us to doubt God and His Word. Jesus gives them proof that He really is alive. They can trust Him.

Jesus didn't change into energy able to permeate all existence. He still had a body. It was the same body that was crucified, complete with the scars from the cross, and He showed it to them. With that their mood changed. They were no longer frightened but are filled with joy and amazement that Jesus was with them in the flesh, but they still doubted.

It's hard to understand how the disciples could be filled with joy, amazement and doubt...all at the same time. It's because they thought it was too good to be true. The One who died on the cross is standing in front of them. It's like football fans whose team just scored as the clock ran out to win the game. After this meeting with Jesus, none of the Eleven ever again doubted the reality of the Resurrection.

He shares His peace with them. *Peace to you* was a typical greeting, yet pregnant with meaning. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. It was very significant to the Jewish way of thinking. It's much more than peace of mind or a ceasefire between enemies. It means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight. *Shalom* is the way things ought to be. By His death and resurrection Jesus secured the certainty that all things will be made new and we'll one day live in a place of perfect peace. He begins with His disciples by giving them...

Peace from fear. *Why are you troubled?* "Troubled" means to be "stirred up with distress." Jesus asks us the same question: What's troubling you? What's causing you to be "stirred up"? What are you losing sleep over?

I rarely wake up in the middle of the night. But when I wake up and can't get back to sleep, it's because I'm *troubled*. I'm worrying. God has to remind me that I don't need to worry. I'm safe with my Father. He's got it under control.

Remember advice columnist, Ann Landers (**picture**)? She'd receive 10,000 letters each month, nearly all of them from people with problems. She was asked once if there was a predominant theme in all those letters. She said, "*The one problem above all others seems to be fear. People are afraid of losing their health, their wealth, and their loved ones. People are afraid of life itself.*"

If we're honest, we also fear God. If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, you should. But the cross means that we don't need to anymore. His mercy and grace means our sin debt is paid. He loves us just as we are and considers us special despite all our warts and weaknesses. A holy God seeking a loving relationship with us seems too hard to believe, but it's true. Accepting Christ as our Savior frees us from the greatest fear – we now have peace with God.

Peace from doubt. "*They still disbelieved.*" Doubt is often a secret sin. We don't talk about it, but we all doubt from time to time. Yet, doubt can be the catalyst for new spiritual growth. Jesus isn't fragile. He can handle our doubts. He's a big God, so tell Him your doubts and ask for His help. And don't fight the battle alone. Share your struggles with a mature Christian friend, someone with strong faith and godly wisdom. Ask them to come alongside you as you face your doubts honestly. Then, act on faith, not doubt. It's what the disciples did. It's what Noah did when he built the ark. It's what David did as he took out Goliath. Every step forward in faith is a way to "doubt your doubts."

The foundation for our faith is not in our *feelings*, but in the *facts* of God's Word. Feelings fluctuate. Who knows why we feel up one day and down the next? Don't live by your feelings. Live by faith in the facts of God's unchanging Word. No matter how we feel, choose to trust in God.

2. Jesus empowers us for mission. "*But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*" Have you ever wondered why the Church today so often seems so ineffective? Here's the key. We depend on programs or personalities, yet neglect our desperate need for the power of the Spirit.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus indicates that His global strategy of starting in Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth would only be possible by the power of His Spirit. Receiving power is what must precede being a witness for Christ. The Spirit's power is so crucial that they must wait for it before they launch out on the mission. The Spirit's power is essential for an expanding witness to Christ. In both Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8, Jesus says that power must come first. "*You are my witnesses...stay in the city, until you are clothed with power.*" "*You shall receive power...and you shall be my witnesses.*"

It takes God's power to become a Christian. It takes another dimension of His power to carry out an expanding witness for Christ. There's a big difference between a "sales talk" and Spirit empowered witness. Please understand. This is not something that we do for the Lord. It's something that He does through us. "*People do not come to Christ at the end of an argument,*" said Southern Evangelist, Vance Havner (**picture**).

Only Luke records this, what's been dubbed "*the Easter sermon of Jesus Christ.*" Jesus preaches the gospel of His own resurrection and its implications to these disciples. It's a biblical, Christ-centered, evangelistic, missionary sermon and outlines **three implications** of their mission.

The mission is to proclaim that all of God's Word is true. "*everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*" Leon Morris (**picture**) points out that "*The solemn division of Scripture into the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms (the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible) indicates that there is no part of Scripture that does not bear its witness to Jesus.*" Our Lord wanted them to ground their experience of His resurrection on the massive testimony of Scripture.

That Easter night the blinders were removed as the Spirit opened their minds. What a dynamic combination – God's Word illumined by God's Spirit. The teaching of the early church was framed by the rich background of Old Testament exposition. Jesus is found in the Law – the Passover Lamb, the snake on the pole. He's found in the Prophets. Read Isaiah

53 and you'll find the suffering Savior. The Psalms – Psalms 22, gives a description of the crucifixion before the cross was invented. Jesus is the theme of all Scripture.

Luke's Gospel has the only biblical reference to the three divisions of the Old Testament. Every part of God's written revelation points to Jesus, suffering for our sins and rising triumphantly. It underlines that we're not free to make up our own message. The gospel is fixed in God's Word. The disciples weren't a bunch of religious geniuses who came up with some new ideas. Faithful witnesses don't make up a story; they tell what they've seen and heard. What they saw and heard in Jesus was completely in line with what God had already revealed in His written Word.

Recently, a nationally known preacher said that contemporary Christianity relies too heavily on the Old Testament and we must "unhitch" our teaching from the Old Testament. That's not what Jesus taught. Without the Old Testament we have no gospel. Martin Luther (**picture**) said, "*The function of all interpretation is to find Christ. Christ is the heart of the Bible.*"

The mission is to proclaim that repentance brings God's forgiveness. Jesus connects, "*repentance for the forgiveness of sins*" You can't be saved without repentance. Many are sorry for their sins, yet not sorry enough to change and seek to sin no more. Repentance is sorrow for sin and an earnest desire to cease from former sins. While a person who begins to follow Jesus will never, in this life, be sinless. They should however, endeavor to sin-less.

The disciples' mission is to teach repentance. Repentance means there's a change from the former lifestyle. It means turning from sin to Jesus for salvation. If you've been a liar, you stop lying. If you've been any angry person, you seek to leave anger. Repentance means leaving known sin.

What's known sin? It's those things we know are wrong, where we feel guilt. Most of us know what needs to be repented of. Salvation isn't just asking Jesus into your heart. That's a half-gospel. Jesus is Lord of all or He's not lord at all. Each one Jesus called to follow Him was called to leave a former life of sin.

Did you see the movie, *The Blind Side* (**picture**) with Sandra Bullock? It's the true story of a Christian family, Sean and Leigh Ann Tuohy, who took in a homeless young man, Michael Oher, and gave him the chance to reach his God-given potential. Michael Oher not only dodged the hopelessness of his dysfunctional inner city upbringing, but he became a 1st-round NFL draft pick for the Baltimore Ravens in 2009.

Sean Tuohy noted that the transformation of his family and Michael all started with two words. When they spotted Michael walking along the road on a cold November morning in shorts and a T-shirt, Leigh Ann Tuohy uttered two words that changed their world. She told Sean, "*Turn around.*" They turned the car around, put Michael in their warm vehicle, and ultimately adopted him into their family. "*Turn around*" is repentance. To come to Jesus, you must "*turn around*" and run toward the cross. That's salvation. Repentance is the other side of forgiveness. Both are necessary for salvation.

The mission is to proclaim God's plan of salvation to the whole world. It's to "*be proclaimed...to all nations.*" This is Luke's version of what's known as the Great Commission. The gospel is universal. Jesus died for the whole world.

It's why we're to be gospel men and women who proclaim that "*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Our message isn't a religion. It's a relationship. It's a way of life. Gospel people are mission people. The gospel demands that we share Christ everywhere, and that we use our time and resources to reach the nations. It's a matter of life and death. It shows that you've been saved and love Jesus.

Are you obeying and part of the mission? When was the last time you shared your faith? What about just inviting someone to church? Ask the Lord for opportunities to witness. Pray for world missions. Pray about being involved in missions. All the stuff we work so hard to collect is going up in smoke one day. Souls we reach for Christ will be with us in heaven for all eternity.

But we can't do this in our own strength. We need His power. The word for *power* is the same one from which we get our word *dynamite*. We need the dynamite power of the Holy Spirit to win our world.

Satan wants to sideline us in the sandbox of the trivial, even at church. In all my years of ministry, I've never had anyone ask me: *Scott, how can we reach more people for Jesus?*

Most of us are more concerned when our car gets a scratch than we are that our neighbors are lost and headed to Hell. We're modern day Pharisees, focused on the trivial. Remember, they got all bent out of shape when Jesus healed on the Sabbath and missed that someone was healed and forgiven.

The longer we're saved the easier it is to forget what it was to be lost, and forget our mission. Jesus didn't call us to be some religious social club. Churches forget and get involved in all sorts of activities and programs. The mission is to reach the lost and see them become fully devoted Christ-followers. If we're going to please Jesus, we must be committed to the mission.

3. Jesus' absence cultivates joy for a promised future. "*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him*

and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” Luke succinctly tells the story of Jesus’ ascension that he’ll share in more detail in Acts. Here he’s content to give the main facts, leaving us with a picture of rejoicing disciples.

His ascension differs radically from Jesus vanishing from sight of the disciples at Emmaus. There’s an air of finality. It’s the consummation of Christ’s earthly work, the indication that His mission is complete. They can no longer expect to see Him in the old way any longer. It means that humanity has now been elevated to the most exalted place of highest possible authority.

As Francis Turretin (**picture**) wrote, “*The divine descended but the human ascended.*” Comprehend this staggering thought. Because of the incarnation and Jesus’ bodily ascension, the dust of earth now sits on the throne of heaven.

The New Testament is filled with references to the ascension. Paul refers to the ascension on numerous occasions. The Book of Hebrews contains numerous allusions to the ascension of Jesus Christ. It’s a truth filled with comfort for believers. Jesus is now on His throne at the right hand of the Father. He’s our great High Priest and praying for us. Jesus came into this world and had to depart this world somehow. Though we still experience Jesus’ presence by His grace and through His Spirit, we won’t experience His bodily presence until He comes again to take His Church Home.

His ascension means that His work is complete and assures us that one day we’ll be with Him. It affirms that we’ll share His inheritance. His ascension draws our hearts away from this temporal world and causes our hearts to long to fellowship with the One at the right hand of the Father. It sets our hearts on heavenly places and focuses our ultimate hopes on divine communion. Unbroken fellowship with Jesus is the heart’s desire of every Christian. The ascension draws us from the transitory to the eternal.

Good-byes are usually sad. Modern technology has lessened the impact of being separated from our loved ones. The most difficult good-byes are those that are final in this life. When you know that you won’t be seeing your loved one again on this side of heaven, you’re filled with sorrow at the parting. That’s why it’s noteworthy that the disciples’ response to Jesus’ final parting as He ascended into heaven wasn’t sorrow, but great joy.

Luke began his gospel with angels announcing to the shepherds Jesus’ birth, “*I bring you good news of great joy*” (Luke 2:10). Now Luke leaves his readers to ponder this thought: ***Why did the disciples have great joy when Jesus ascended?*** Let me point out that...

Joy comes from worship. Luke’s Gospel ends as it began with worship at Jerusalem. Worship gives us joy because worship is at the heart of the Christian life. They bowed in awed adoration. The last thing our Lord did was to bless His people and the first thing that they did was to worship Him. The two always go together. Too many of us miss His joy because while we attend church, we fail to come to truly worship.

Joy comes from obedience. Jesus told them to return to Jerusalem and wait there...and they did. There’s nothing more miserable than a disobedient child of God. Jesus said in John 15:10-11, “*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love...These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” We have a sin nature. Obeying God’s commands isn’t something we naturally want to do. Satan lies to us, telling us that sin is more satisfying. It’s not. Being obedient is the only way to have joy.

Joy comes from community. “*they... were continually in the temple blessing God.*” The word *fellowship* comes from the Greek word, *koinonia*. It means “to share in common.” Community is more than attending church. It means having relationships, becoming “one” in worshiping, caring and sharing. Scripture teaches that fellowship isn’t optional. 1 John 1:7, “*If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...*” Joy comes when fellowship is a priority.

Joy comes from praise. Blessing God and joy go together. That wise theologian, Erma Bombeck (**picture**), reported an experience she had in church. A row or two in front of her sat a mother with a normal five-year-old boy, which means, he couldn’t sit still. As he squirmed and looked over the pew at those behind him, he was smiling. Then Erma heard the mother sternly whisper, “*Stop smiling! Don’t you know that we’re in church?*”

Praise always brings joy. It’s hard to praise and complain. And God desires our praise. It gets the focus off us and back on God. That’s where the joy is.

And He’s worthy of our praise, no matter what we face. Through praise, we’re focused on Him, no longer allowing too much attention to be centered around our temporary struggles. We’re reminded of what He’s already done in our lives. We’re reminded that He knows what concerns us and is capable of taking care of all that burdens us. Through a heart of praise, we realize that God changes something much more important than our struggles, He changes us. ***Joy comes from praise.***

Conclusion: “*But all endings are also beginnings. We just don’t know it at the time*” Mitch Albom (**picture**). But the disciples did know. They knew that this wasn’t the end. They knew that it was just the beginning.

There's a wonderful story of how Jesus, after his ascension into Heaven, was surrounded by the angels who began to enquire about His work on earth. Jesus told them about His birth, life, preaching, death and resurrection, and how He had accomplished the salvation of the world. Then, Gabriel asked, "Well, now that You are back in Heaven, who will continue Your work on earth?"

Jesus said, "While I was on earth, I gathered a group of people around Me who believed in Me and loved Me. They will continue to spread the Gospel and carry on the work of the Church."

Gabriel was perplexed. "You mean Peter, who denied You three times and all the rest who ran away when You were crucified? You mean to tell us that You left them to carry on Your work? Hmm...What's plan B? What will You do if this plan doesn't work?" And Jesus replied, "I have no other plan."

It's a great plan! It did work and it still works. Please read Luke's sequel, the book of Acts this coming week and you'll see it's a phenomenal plan.

We're the plan. It's on us. It's on Grace Church. Earlier in this series we worked through Luke 10:2. Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*"

There's plenty of harvest. There's just not enough workers. Will you pray for more workers? Will you be one?