

Luke 24:36-49

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[0 : 01] I wonder if you ever feel that there is a distance, be that great or small, between where you are and where you want or ought to be.

Now that can be the case in different areas of our lives, from the relatively insignificant to the very significant. How far can you drive a golf ball down the fairway?

I don't know if we've got any golfers actually in Bonacord. I never hear people speaking about golf, but if you're not a golfer, you can apply it to your own sport in one way. You know, you'd like to drive at 300 yards, but actually you can only drive at 150.

You're not where you would like to be, maybe where you think you should be. Maybe for some of you this would be very relevant. You're not where you ought to be in the matter of preparing for a given exam.

There's ground that you have to cover, and in your own mind you should be here, but you're over here. And you desperately have to try to get here before the day of reckoning arrives.

[1 : 06] Maybe in the matter of your work, you don't feel you're paid what you should be paid. You're here, and you really feel you ought to be up here. You're not where you want to be.

There's a distance between where you are and where you want to be, or even perhaps where you ought to be. Now, as Christians, we can be very conscious of a distance between where we are and where we ought to be, where perhaps even we want to be.

That can be in our knowledge of God's Word, in the time we dedicate to prayer, in our progress, or lack thereof, in holiness.

As we honestly try and examine ourselves, we say, well, I'm here, but really I ought to be over here. And there's a distance. And it seems so difficult to get from A to B, to get from where we are to where we want to be or where we ought to be.

This evening, I want to pick up on a theme we considered this morning our status as witnesses or messengers of the resurrection.

[2 : 14] We were thinking of the angel as a witness of the resurrection, but seeking to draw lessons for ourselves, for we also as believers are witnesses of the resurrection.

And so we were thinking a little bit about that. And I want to pick up on that theme by considering the disciples on the evening of that first Easter Sunday. In our passage, we will notice that the disciples, or where the disciples are, and how distant that appears from where the risen Lord would have them be.

We'll find in this group of disciples that they're here, but they need to be over here. There's this distance from where they are to where they need to be. But what we'll also discover, very importantly, and I hope very practically, we'll discover what was needed for the disciples to move from where they were to where they needed to be.

Now, that contrast is vividly seen when we compare words that we find in the passage. First of all, if we notice in verse 36, the beginning of that section, when the disciples are gathered together, in John's gospel we're told, behind closed doors for feet of the Jews, and Jesus appears.

And at the beginning of that section, in verse 36, we read, while they were still talking about this. What are they doing, these disciples? They're talking about this.

[3 : 46] They're talking among themselves about the events of the day, what the women had reported who had come from the tomb, what Peter and John's report had been of the empty tomb that they had discovered, of the appearance of Jesus to Peter that they make reference to there in verse 34.

It is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon, or other intriguing reference, given that in the actual resurrection accounts, no mention is made of that. But clearly, it had happened, and here

reference is made to it.

The point is, they're talking about these things. And now, they're also talking about Cleopas and his fellow disciple who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. And they've come with their own report.

And all of these things, they're talking about these things among themselves. How could they not talk about the amazing events and reports of that first Easter Sunday?

That's where they are, talking about these things. But then, in verse 47, we can contrast where they are with where Jesus would have them be.

[5 : 00] Then in verse 47, what do we read? Well, if you pick up the reading from verse 46, he told them, Jesus is speaking to them, this is what is written, that Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. The disciples need to move from talking about to preaching to all nations.

And I wonder, and we're going to come back to this in a moment and maybe recognize that we can't be too hard on the disciples in the circumstances that they find themselves, but I wonder if we're not stretching things too much. I wonder if that's a description of where many of us are.

Is it the case that often we're very adept at talking about these things, talking about these things among ourselves, talking about the good news, talking about the gospel, talking about the passage, talking about the sermon among ourselves, and that is a good thing to do.

But we're rather pedestrian when it comes to preaching to all nations. Here the disciples, they're talking among themselves, but they need to move from there to this new place where Jesus would have them be, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations.

[6 : 33] Now, before we consider what was needed to get the disciples from where they are to where they need to be, let's just pause and consider a little bit more carefully these two points, where they are and where they need to be. First of all, where they are. Now, as I've already just hinted a moment ago, it would be very unfair to criticize the disciples for talking about this, as it's described there in verse 36, while they were still talking about this. Of course, they were talking about this.

Of course, they were talking about the events and the accounts of that momentous day. How could they not talk about all that had happened and all that they had heard of that day?

But the passage, of course, provides us considerably more information about where they are than just those words that we've focused on concerning where the disciples are before and even as Jesus comes among them. The first description of the state they are in, we find in verse 37, on Jesus' appearance among them. We read there in verse 37, they were startled and frightened. Where were they? What was their emotional state? Well, they were told they were startled and frightened. Now, as regards what's said there in verse 37, it would be unwise to give too much weight to this, as it was in all likelihood a temporary state provoked by the sudden appearance of Jesus.

Seemingly, on the basis of John's account that we read, having negotiated a closed or locked door to appear in their midst. Hence the conclusion that they were seeing a ghost. He's just appeared.

[8 : 27] They didn't know from where, and there he was. This was very unusual. Of course it was. And they wondered, well, who is this one who has appeared in our midst? They thought that he was a ghost.

And so they were startled and frightened. Understandable. But as I say, probably a temporary state that they were in. Of greater significance, as we establish where they are as a group of believers, is the question that Jesus poses to them in verse 38. Notice what Jesus says with the question He poses.

He said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?

With that question, we discover very clearly from the very lips of Jesus that the disciples are troubled. We discover also that they are doubtful. Doubts rise in their mind. And then in John's account that we read, we're explicitly told that they were frightened. They were in this room behind closed doors for fear of the Jews, we read in John's Gospel. So where are they, these disciples? Where are they? What is their state?

What is their condition? They're troubled, they're doubtful, and they're frightened. That's where they are. But where do they need to be? Well, they need to be what they are. They need to be witnesses.

[10:00] Verse 48, Jesus says to them, You are witnesses of these things. And here He's simply not describing an objective reality, but He is commissioning them. It's not just, yes, you've seen these things, and so you're witnesses, but you are the ones who must witness concerning these things.

That's where they need to be. They need to be in the place where they are preaching or proclaiming, making known repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all the nations. From a place where they are huddled behind locked doors, terrified of even venturing into the streets of Jerusalem, these same disciples need to reach the place where they are preaching to all nations. And it seems really quite a stretch to get from A to B, from where they are to where they need to be.

Troubled disciples are not going to get very far. Disciples in whom doubts are rising are unlikely bearers of the good news to all nations. Disciples gripped by fear hardly seem ideal candidates for the task of world mission. So, what is required? What is required? What will enable the disciples to cover that distance from where they are to where they need to be? What do they need to do? Although the question, in actual fact, more accurately is, what does Jesus do for them? What does Jesus do for them to enable them to cover that ground from where they are to where they need to be? And in this passage, we discover what it is they need and what Jesus is able to provide.

[11:47] And three words sum it up. What they need and what Jesus will provide them is conviction, understanding, understanding, and power. Conviction, understanding, and power. Conviction that will calm their troubled minds. Understanding that will dispel their rising doubts. And power that will quell their fear and sense of inadequacy before the task set before them. Conviction, understanding, and power. Let's find that and see where this is provided by Jesus in this passage. First of all, conviction. Conviction is granted or secured for the disciples by an encounter with Jesus that assures the disciples beyond any doubt that Jesus is alive. This is what we have here on this occasion as Jesus appears among them. But even this encounter with Jesus is a journey, albeit a very short one, a very short space of time, a journey towards ever greater conviction. Let's just follow the account as it is laid out before us. Where does it begin? Well, it begins with the disciples seeing Jesus as He appears among them and hearing words of comfort pronounced by Jesus. Then in verse 36, Jesus Himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. Peace be with you. This is where they begin to be granted a measure of conviction that is so lacking. But it continues. It continues with the invitation on the part of

Jesus to touch His wounds. Verse 39, Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

But even with this invitation to see for themselves, to touch for themselves, to discover for themselves that it really is Jesus, that He really is alive, even then there is still need for greater conviction.

Verse 4 describes disciples for whom what is happening seems almost too good to be true. What does it say there in verse 41, rather? And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, almost seems contradictory. They're rejoicing, they're amazed because of what they're seeing and yet they still don't believe. And I think that phrase we use maybe sums it up well. It was almost too good to be true. Yes, it is true, but it's too good to be true. It can't be true, but it is true. That's where they are at this point. But things continue as Jesus would grant them that conviction that they need. We have this very homely request of Jesus for something to eat.

[14:54] Verse 41, Do you have anything here to eat? Why does Jesus ask for something to eat? Well, is He hungry? I imagine He is. I imagine that is in some measure certainly the reason He asked for something to eat. He's hungry. But I'm sure that the reason He asked for something to eat also has to do with providing the opportunity for the disciples to be fully persuaded that it really is Jesus in the flesh eating a piece of broiled fish. This really is Jesus. So conviction that Jesus is indeed alive, but also important, and we'll mention this just much more briefly, also important is conviction concerning who they are, who they as disciples of Jesus are. They are, Jesus assures them, witnesses of these things. Verse 48, You are witnesses of these things. And as I've already commented, that statement of

Jesus isn't simply an objective statement of fact. Yes, you've seen these things, you're witnesses, but it's more than that, I think. It's a commission. You are to be the ones who go out and witness to these things. You are the ones who are to go out and preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. And the disciples required conviction not only concerning Jesus and who Jesus is and the fact that He's alive, but conviction concerning themselves and who they are. Of course, we too need similar conviction. That conviction that Jesus is alive, that He is amongst us. We need to hear Him speak to us.

It is I myself. I am here. I am with you. But also conviction as to who we are. Witnesses commissioned by Jesus to testify to the world. As the disciples have to make this journey from where they are to where they need to be, this is required, and this is provided by Jesus, conviction. But secondly also, they need understanding. Conviction is important, but conviction alone does not guarantee effective witness. Conviction alone does not secure a sound proclamation of the truth. People may be intrigued, even impressed by our zeal and passion. But if what we say is incoherent or muddled, if we're incapable of clearly expounding our message, then we will fall short, even recognizing that God in His grace and goodness uses us when we are muddled and often incoherent. But it ought not to be for us a sense that, well, that will do. No, we need to have understanding of the message.

Conviction is good, but it needs to be married with understanding. The disciples need it, as we do, understanding, and this is precisely what Jesus provides for them. Notice there in verses 44 and 45, He said to them, 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. And then very especially in verse 45, then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Jesus reminds them of what He had already taught them. He identifies Himself as the leading actor and the golden thread in and through the entirety of the Bible story. The law of Moses, the prophets, the Psalms, and that encompasses the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. And Jesus is saying, it's all about me. You find everything about me in the law, in the prophets, in the Psalms. They needed understanding concerning the place of Jesus in God's big picture, and they're granted that understanding by Jesus. And then as we very significantly discover in verse 45, then He opened their minds so they could understand the

Scriptures. This is what the disciples needed. If they were to move from where they were to where they needed to be, conviction was important, but also understanding. And that is what we need.

[19 : 28] I wonder if we appreciate this in the measure that we must, that as Christians, we still stand in need of another, God Himself by His Spirit, opening up our minds so we can understand. I wonder if sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that we've gone past that point, that we know the Bible, we can understand the Bible, we can read it and discover things for ourselves, and we don't really need outside help.

But no, as with the disciples of old, we also stand in need that God would open up our minds so that we might understand the Scriptures. We need to pray asking God that He would do so. But as we pray, so we must also make use of every opportunity that will allow God to do so, if we can use that language.

We can't pray, give me understanding, and then not open the Bible. We can't pray, give me understanding, and then not make use of the opportunities to study the Bible together with others that are provided for us.

Understanding. Conviction was necessary. Understanding was necessary. But there's a further crucial element that is required. They need power. The disciples needed power. God's a power for mission, and so do we.

You see, we might make the mistake, and perhaps it would be an understandable mistake to make. You might imagine that conviction and understanding would suffice. Conviction and understanding, quite an impressive combo for mission. We've got conviction. We've got understanding. We're ready to go.

[21 : 08] The world's our oyster. Let's go and win the world. We're persuaded concerning the truth. We understand the Scriptures. We're ready to go. Surely, disciples fully persuaded that Jesus is alive, and with a clear understanding of the gospel message, are well equipped to proclaim to all the nations the good news.

But no, a further element is required. The disciples needed power. They needed God's power, and so do we. Now, we know there in verse 49 where we have this reference by Jesus to the power that

they needed.

And we'll just read the verse, I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Now, we know that here Jesus is referring to Pentecost, to the day of Pentecost, and we know, consequently, that Jesus has now fulfilled that promise.

Pentecost has come and gone. Jesus has already sent to His church and upon His church what His Father has promised. The Holy Spirit was sent once and for all to and upon the church at Pentecost.

Now, we know that that is so. Now, given that that is so, I wonder, is it not the case then that we're not in the same place as the disciples with regard to this matter of being clothed with power? So, we could read the account and say, well, yes, for the disciples at this moment in redemptive history, yes, they needed conviction, they needed understanding, and they also needed power. But, well, we're in a different place because Pentecost has come and gone. The Holy Spirit has been sent, and we as believers are indwelt by the Spirit. So, perhaps in this matter, our circumstances are different. Of course, in some sense, that is true. We have already been clothed with power. We are clothed with power. And yet, as we endeavor to be honest with ourselves, and I want to be honest with myself and invite you to be honest with yourself, is it not an intriguing thing that so often it's power that precisely seems to be what we most lack? Of these three elements that we've identified, conviction and understanding and power, what would you say is most lacking in your own life and in our own congregation? You might be able to very honestly say, well, conviction regarding who Jesus is, conviction that He's alive. Well, I have that.

[23 : 47] I really do believe. An understanding of the Scriptures? Well, by God's grace in some measure, yes, I have an understanding. But power, that often is it not the missing element or seem to be so often for us. The truth is that the unrepeatable nature of Pentecost in redemptive history does not preclude our continuing and urgent need of being clothed with power from on high. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer.

We are, in a very real sense, filled with the Spirit of God. And yet, the Apostle Paul, as he writes to the believers in Ephesus, can exhort them, as he exhorts us, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And the very verb that he uses, or the tense that he uses, carries the idea of go on being filled with the Spirit of God.

There in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 18, yes, we are indwelt by the Spirit, and yet we are called to go on being filled with the Spirit of God. I remember as a young Christian, which wasn't yesterday, a few years ago, I spent some time challenged by what we might call the traditional Pentecostal contention that as believers we needed to experience a second blessing. Various described, different languages used, the baptism in the Spirit, or the more old-fashioned designation was of a second blessing, quite distinct from conversion. And I was challenged by that and just wasn't very sure what that was about, and well, maybe that was true, and maybe that's what was missing.

I wondered if in my own experience that indeed was what was missing and would explain the absence of power and effectiveness in service. And as I was struggling with these matters, I read a number of books on both sides of the debate, but there was one little anecdote that helped me greatly to understand this matter. And of course, it's a very important matter, and we're not going to exhaust it with one little anecdote, but let me share one little anecdote that was certainly very helpful to me.

Some of you, some of the more mature members of the congregation will remember Professor Finlayson. Well, Professor Finlayson was speaking at a youth fellowship on one occasion, obviously many years ago, and seemingly this was a matter of concern to one of the young people there, and they posed him a question.

[26 : 23] They said to the professor, they said, Professor, do you believe in the second blessing? And by that they meant this distinct experience, distinct from conversion, being baptized with the Spirit or whatever language you wish to use. And Finlayson's reply was both pithy and, I would say, profound. He was asked, do you believe in the second blessing? And he responded, I believe in as many blessings as I can get. I believe in as many blessings as I can get. I can certainly warm to that. Second, oh, give me a second. Give me a third. Give me a fourth. As many blessings as I can get.

Today, we need to be clothed with power from on high. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God again and again and again. In the matter of power for mission, power for service, power for proclamation, we need as many blessings as we can get. We need the power of God. Without His power, we can do nothing.

Even deep conviction, important though that is, and profound understanding, necessary though that is, will fall short in the absence of power from on high. We know that in the history of redemption, and as the account proceeds, we know that the disciples did as they were instructed. They waited in Jerusalem, and in due course, they did receive power from on high. And the rest is history as this fearful, motley crew turned the world upside down as they preached repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Are you, are we as a congregation, some distance from where God would have us be?

Well, may we actively seek and be granted ever greater conviction and understanding, and please God, power from on high. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that as we turn to Your Word, we are ever reminded of how we do stand in absolute dependence upon You.

We thank You for the great privilege that is ours to be Your witnesses, to make known to all nations the good news concerning Your Son, Jesus Christ, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. And we recognize that we stand in need of Your permanent and constant help. We stand in need of ever greater conviction concerning who You are and what You have done and who we are and what Your purposes are for us. We stand in need of greater understanding of the Scriptures. We do pray that You would indeed open our minds that we might understand the Scriptures. And we recognize also that we stand in need of power from on high. We pray that we would indeed be permanently and continuously clothed with power from on high, that as we would go out and seek to be Your witnesses, we would be able to experience and recognize that You accompany us and You are going before us and You are owning and blessing all of our efforts, however feeble they are and so often are. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[29 : 58] Now let's close our service this evening by singing again. We'll sing from Psalm 46. Psalm 46a, and we'll sing verses 1 to 7. God is our refuge and our strength, our ever-present aid, and therefore though the earth gives way, we will not be afraid. Psalm 46a, verses 1 to 7. We'll stand to sing.

Psalm 46a, and we'll sing.

Psalm 46a, and we'll sing. Psalm 46a, and we'll sing.

Psalm 47a, and we'll sing. Psalm 47a, and we'll sing. The Holy place in which the Lord most high has his above, God is within this holy place, the city will not yield.

O'er God who come and bring of Him to be your help and shield?

[32 : 17] The nations are in disarray, the kingdoms disappear.

God speaks and at His mighty voice the whole earth has made fear.

The Lord Almighty is with us to strengthen and sustain.

For Jacob's gold are strong defense and fortress will remain.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.