

Luke 24:50-53

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Preacher: James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn this evening to the passage we read in Luke 24, looking for a short time at these final verses of the chapter from verse 50.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

They stayed continually at the temple, praising God. You notice here that Luke ends his gospel in the same way in which he began.

If you were to take this gospel of Luke as a great spiritual symphony, you would find that it ends on exactly the same note as the opening note.

Because Luke ends with an emphasis on worship, and he begins the gospel with an emphasis on worship. Worship of the living God in his temple on earth, but worship now at the end of the gospel as it focuses on Christ especially.

[1 : 20] And all the way between that opening verse of the gospel and the ending verse of the gospel, both of which deal with the subject of worship, it is the account we have of Jesus Christ that fills everything in between.

And that itself should show us that this great theme of worship, which so frequently appears in Luke, is something which at the very heart of it has Jesus Christ himself.

But not just Jesus Christ in any old way. It's Jesus as the risen Savior who died on the cross. That really is the theme, as you know, from this passage we read on these two disciples who were going to Emmaus, who were incredulous, who were not aware of the fact at that time to begin with, that he had risen from the dead, who had expressed to him that hope that this might have been, this Jesus who was put to death, might have been the one that was going to redeem Israel.

And then, of course, as we saw, he made himself known to them. But this is a very precious few verses at the end of Luke, because it really contains this little passage, some very profound teaching, but some very practical teaching for us as well, under the leadership of Christ that's mentioned here.

Because that's really, you could say, the main theme of it, that the leadership of Christ for his church did not end, either at his death on the cross, or even at this point, when he left the disciples physically and was carried up into heaven out of their sight.

[3 : 09] His leadership, as we'll see, continued through the ministry that he was emphasizing for them, that he would actually initiate by sending the Holy Spirit to them.

So three things, really, that we can briefly look at this evening, arising from these verses. We first of all come here to face Christ's leading of his people.

And the way in which Christ leads his people, and the fact of Jesus leading his people, is one of the great necessities of life. And in that we'll see two things.

The risen Christ is the leader of his people, and the sending Christ. The Christ who sends blessing, who sends the Spirit of God, is the leader of his people.

And both of these are very much part of this passage. Secondly, we will look at Christ's blessing of his people through the leading of Christ, through the leadership that he exercises as the head of his church.

[4 : 09] He blesses his people. He has a ministry of blessing to his church, and that too includes two things. We can see that it involves the lifted hands of Christ, which takes us back into a certain part of the Old Testament.

And also, the lifted up Christ, is the one who blesses his people as their leader. And thirdly, we look at Christ worshipped by his people, because that, as we said, is how the chapter and how the book, this Gospel of Luke, ends.

Christ is emphasised as one, or rather, it's emphasised for us, that the worship of this Christ goes on, even though he is no longer physically with them here in this world.

So let's look first of all at this matter of Christ leading his people, Christ leading of his people. When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

You have to ask the question, Who is this? Because that's really what they were asking themselves as they travelled with him on the way to Emmaus. And he made known to them that this was no other than, and no less than, the same Jesus they had known prior to his death.

[5 : 42] And that's such a hugely important point for you and for me tonight, and for all of Christ's church, and for that which indeed distinguishes the church of Christ from every other group in the world.

Because whatever leaders, the groups in the world have, they come and go. They may be hugely famous in their own time. They may have a lasting legacy to leave to whatever group they actually lead for the time that they are leaders of the group here in this world.

But they die. They are then no longer here. You cannot say that they, in any meaningful way, continue to lead whatever group they once led.

They're dead. They're gone. They're no more here. But the church is led by a living Savior. The life of God's people is under the presidency of Christ.

They are tonight led by this Jesus who demonstrated for these disciples who had been so amazed to discover, to have it unfolded to them that He was alive and alive from the dead, that they would actually be led from now on by this same Christ.

[6 : 57] He is demonstrating for them that their leader is the risen Christ. In other words, the leader of the church, the leader of every Christian in the church, the leader of God's people in every age since this moment, is the Jesus who rose from the dead.

Well, is that the case with your own life tonight? Is there someone in here tonight who cannot say this about themselves? Who is guiding your life?

Who's in control of your destiny? Who is the leader set over the way your life develops? The distance between you and I and eternity is not very long.

Life in this world is very short and very uncertain. As you very well know, even children and young people die in their young days.

So important to ask ourselves who's leading my life? Who's guiding me? Who's giving me the right answers? Who's making sure that I'm ready to die?

[8 : 14] What am I going to come with when I face God? Will my life be looked after then? Not if we don't have Christ as our leader. And so he's saying this is the leadership of God's people.

And of course, when you say that it's the risen Christ who leads God's people and God's church in every generation right down through to the end of the world whenever that will be.

What you're really saying by that is that ahead of me, between me and death and eternity, ahead of the church of God between now and the second coming of Christ is triumph, is victory.

you cannot have the risen Jesus go before his people and not come to the conclusion that in him and in his leadership of the church there is great victory, there is great triumph preparing the way for the people of God.

We might be disappointed many times in our lives. We might find many things to discourage us in our lives. We might feel that it's taking very long for our life to really reach the kind of development and the kind of structured happiness and peace and contentment that we're looking for.

[9 : 33] We may think as congregations that it's taking a long time for certain things to happen. We may look into the world and say the Christian church and the Christian church's influence is so small, so tiny.

The world is so big, so dark, so intimidating, so much in control of people's lives. But it's not.

Because this Jesus is. And it is one of the great things for every Christian to be able to take with them into their witness, into their own personal lives, into their own development and the confidence that they can have in it, is that their life is led by this person.

And that the whole of his church from beginning to end is under the leadership of this Christ. In other words, the church doesn't have disappointment going before it.

It's not disappointment or uncertainty that's preparing the church's destiny. The people of God's destiny in eternity is actually prepared for them by triumph, by victory, by success.

[10 : 47] And that's going before them all the way through until they get to heaven. Maybe it doesn't feel like that to you tonight. Things in our lives, our circumstances can dictate our thinking so much that we feel depressed, that we feel disconsolate, that we feel let down, we feel disappointment.

Life hasn't developed the way it was anticipated, unexpected events, all of these things. But then you come back to this and you say, well, if I have my trust in the Lord, whatever my abilities or inabilities, whatever my thoughts, whatever my disappointments, it's going to be all right.

It is all right. It's bound to be because it's victory in Him that's dominating my life. And we can build on that.

And we have to see that as part of the foundation of life from which we proceed onwards towards eternity. He led them out as far as to Bethany or into the vicinity of Bethany.

He, the risen Christ. He, the triumphant Lord. He, the one in whom the victory of His church is forever situated. He, the one who will never lose that from His own person.

[12 : 11] He is the leader and the Lord of His people. Is that the leader tonight for your life? Because so much of this age and of this world is dominated by leadership, by celebrity, by things which the world hankers after and seeks to emulate.

But of course, which can never possibly give true leadership. We're always being told that celebrities ought to be role models and so they should.

They have a great influence on people's lives, young people especially. But here is the great celebrity of His day and of every day. And His life and His ministry and His leadership continues.

and you can put all your confidence in Him because this leadership, this ability He has, it's never going to be diminished, it's never going to run out.

It's always the leading victorious Jesus. And then, secondly, He's the sending Christ because you notice what He had said to them just immediately before this.

[13 : 40] You're witnesses of these things in verse 48. 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 that of course referred particularly to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was going to send, Christ was going to send that Holy Spirit to His people.

And in doing that Christ was fulfilling His leadership in the way that actually carried through His promises to His people and His own life as that life in Him was channeled into their lives.

He is the sending Christ. And you notice that there is something here which fits in with the fact that it says He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany.

And there's in that language I think something that says well He's telling the disciples I'm physically going to go with you only that far. And then from then on you will have my leadership in another way.

[14 : 53] Still my leadership, still my power, still my resurrection power working in you and working for you but it will be through another mode.

It will be through the Holy Spirit another means by which this is actually going to be carried out. And that really fits in with the emphasis there that the whole of the Godhead, the whole trinity of God, this great amazing doctrine that God is one God but three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And how that is involved in this leadership. I will send you the promise of the Father. I will send you what my Father has promised.

In other words, it is, if you go to Romans chapter 8 for example, you'll find it beautifully described there. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

And of course, He Himself as the Spirit of God is the other person of the Trinity. So the leadership of God's people is not confined to the one person, to Christ Himself.

[16 : 10] He is the leader over His church and head over all things for His church, but it's through the Holy Spirit and it's the promise of the Father that is being fulfilled in that Holy Spirit's ministry.

And that's a very rich vein of doctrine, of theological teaching that you can follow out for yourselves in other parts of this chapter indeed as Jesus speaks about that and especially in the Gospel of John where these issues are brought out more fully and more clearly, where the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as they combine together in the ministry of Jesus, in the leadership of Jesus is mentioned there in particular.

So it is Christ's leading of His people. It is Christ's leading of His people as the risen Christ. It is His leading of His people as the sending Christ, the one who is constantly sending blessing, as we'll now see through the ministry of His Spirit.

And again we ask ourselves the question, is my life under that guidance tonight? Is that what is dominating my outlook?

Is that what is keeping me on the right path? Am I under this leadership of Jesus? Because if not, the only leadership we have is our own.

[17 : 44] And really that's not going to take us very far. And it will end in lostness forever. And tonight that is such an important question.

You can't run away from it. You can't hide in a corner of a church from it. You can't duck down beneath the pew from it. It's there facing us in the gospel.

Secondly, Christ's blessing blessing of his people. When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

And the blessing of Christ as the leader of his people involves these two things, the lifting up of his hands and the lifting up of himself or himself being taken from them up into heaven.

And both of these points really are important to further look at this leadership of Christ. You remember in the Old Testament, back in the days of Moses, as we find in the book of Numbers, that the Lord there gave command or instruction to Moses.

[18 : 58] In chapter 6 we find it at the end of that chapter, verse 22, the Lord said to Moses, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites.

Say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.

Aaron represented of course Christ as a foreshadowing of Christ in that blessing. The Lord was saying as Aaron does this he is anticipating the blessing that I have for my people that will come especially to its fruition in Christ.

this fullness of blessing the blessing by which he as the high priest lifts up his hands over them and pronounce them blessed. And you know it's important too that we haven't got time to go into it but again it's a point for you to follow out that God said you shall therefore put my name upon the children and people of Israel.

The blessing of God as it comes to his people to be applied to his people it puts God's name upon us. And that carries with it a great thrill and great responsibilities.

[20 : 17] Because whenever our lives are blessed by God when we know that God has blessed us when we know especially that by his spirit he has blessed us spiritually in the things of eternal life God is putting his name upon us.

We become his property. We then owe our allegiance to him and he becomes our leader our God our master.

It fits in with the whole theme of this end of this chapter in Luke. So he lifted up his hands and he blessed them fulfilling these words of God to Moses for Aaron to do to the people.

Except of course there's this great difference that Aaron pronounced the blessing and said the Lord bless you. and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you. Jesus doesn't do that. The blessing is his own. He is the Lord who is blessing.

[21 : 17] And he is blessing them with the blessings that he bought for them on the cross. The blessings for which he shed his blood. The blessing for which he died.

Isn't it a marvelous point tonight that you can ask the question why did Jesus die? Why did Jesus have to suffer so much and then suffer this death that he died?

He provides the answer so that this rich blessing would be applied to his people as the fruit of that suffering, as the fruit of that death, as the benefit that he procured for them by that death on the cross.

That priestly blessing, that blessing by which he lifts up his hands and blesses them. You remember how Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians.

In the third version, the first chapter there, after beginning the usual way, he says, blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him.

[22 : 36] And you see how that fits together with what you have here. He's saying blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father that Jesus mentioned as the one who had promised the Holy Spirit to his people.

Why is he blessing him? Why is he giving him thanks? Why is Paul giving him thanks there? Because he says he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

You notice the tense? It's not future. It's past. He has blessed us. And there's a sense in which Christ is blessing us on a daily basis out of the whole amount of blessing, if you like, that he has purchased for us by his death.

In other words, Paul is conscious that God has already blessed his people by what Christ has done. In other words, I like to think of this picture somewhat as a great storehouse of blessing.

That God has purposed and planned and all was prepared for his people from all eternity. And it was secured by the work of Christ. And now that storehouse is full.

[23 : 48] And it is out of it that Christ's blessing as the leader of his people day by day is bestowed and applied to his people. And of course, that great storehouse never runs out, never becomes empty, not even half full, because the blessings he has purchased are eternal.

They're full. That's why Paul said with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Why does he say in heavenly places? Because he's taking us back to this whole concept of victory, of triumph, of already secured in Christ, this triumph for his people.

So it's with the lifted up hands, with priestly blessing, with the pronouncement of that which he has purchased for them, which his death has secured for them. He lifted up his hands and blessed them.

He blessed them as their priest. He blessed them in such a way that they would recognize that he was fulfilling every promise of blessing for God's people in himself.

But then he speaks about the lifted up Christ himself. He didn't just lift up his hands. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

[25 : 13] And you notice, it's while he was blessing that he was taken up into heaven from their sight.

Why is that important? It's important because it showed them that the blessing they were now seeing from Jesus with his hands lifted up over them in priestly blessing, was going to continue even after he was physically out of their sight.

They were still to conceive in their minds of him, in their thinking of him, they were still to think of him as the Christ who still had his hands lifted up in the act of blessing, in the act of continued and continual blessing of his church forevermore.

They were not allowed to think of Christ in any way letting his hands down. He didn't let his hands down before he was carried out of their sight into heaven.

While he was yet blessing them, he was lifted out of their sight. There's no interruption to the blessing. The physical act of departure, of exaltation to God's right hand for Jesus does not bring any hiatus or interruption into the blessing.

[26 : 35] the blessing continues uninterrupted, unaffected by this lifting up of Christ physically out of their sight.

While he was blessing, he was taken up to heaven. The blessing continues to flow despite what they see physically taking place.

That's so important. These men were going to be leaders in the apostolic church. They were going to be, many of them, going to fulfill important roles in the development of the church in the New Testament age.

Absolutely critical in the way that the church of Christ would grow and bring the gospel into the Gentile world. They had to know that this Jesus still had his hands lifted over them.

Imagine the apostles in the days ahead as Luke records it for us in the book of Acts. If they hadn't this confidence, this conviction that the same Jesus that was with them here was still the same Jesus in the same act of blessing, continuing them, how disconsolate they would have actually been.

- [27 : 54] How would Peter have faced the likes of Herod? And these other tyrants who sought to exterminate the church? How would their preaching have been without this conviction that the Jesus they preached about was the Jesus whose hands were still high and held above his church in the act of blessing them?

And how important for you and for me, how important even individually for us, that poor, wretched, ill-equipped human beings, sinners like you and I, should actually be able to say, the Son of God has His hands lifted over my life and they will never be dropped.

I will never come from out, from under His priestly blessing when I have my trust in Him. What a wonderful way to go to sleep every night.

What a conviction with which to face the uncertainties of life. What a thing to bring into the development of your life as a child, as a young person, on the threshold of adulthood, or just beginning to think about a career.

That whatever things develop and however they might be totally different to what you imagined yourself, as a Christian, as someone who trusts in the Lord, supposing there was no one else in the whole world but yourself, Jesus, Jesus, with His blessing, is going ahead of you in the way.

- [29 : 57] The lifted up hands of the lifted up Christ, the advance of His church, the blessing, the benefit of His people individually.

That's what this Jesus is about. Where can you find anything similar? Where can you find in whatever other religion or in cults or in any secular philosophy, where can you find anything remotely like this?

You can't. It doesn't exist. That's why the greatest and the most thrilling and the most necessary thing in the world is to be a Christian because you're under the leadership of Christ.

And under the leadership of Christ, you're under the lifted up hands of Christ. The lifted up hands of the lifted up Christ. A life and a church being guided by this sovereign, this powerful, this great leader of His people.

You know, Paul goes so far in Ephesians to say that God has made him head over all things to His church. Why are there all the things in the world that are happening in the world tonight, today, in our age?

- [31 : 27] Why all these great unfathomable acts of terrorism, of violence, these wars? Why has there been all of these things in the history of the world not pretending in any way to have any easy answer?

But there is an answer in summary. Though we can't understand how it all fits together, the answer in summary is that Christ, as the leader of His church, is steering and guiding all things in His wisdom, in His power, towards that great climax that He has always had in mind for His effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even

Christ. People can say what they like, but of one thing we are absolutely sure from the scriptures, that Christ will yet be demonstrably to every human being, the head, the one in charge over absolutely everything.

And He is your Savior tonight, and He's the leader that your life needs, if you've put your trust in Him. And if not, that is what you're missing.

That's what's detached from your life, or your life is detached from, this leadership of Jesus. And He finishes by, we finish by looking at the third point, which is Christ worshipped by His people.

- [33 : 45] Then they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. Now this really, you could say, is the beginning of the worship of the unseen Christ.

The Christ who is no longer physically with His people in this world, but has gone to heaven. And really, when you look at the epistle, the letter to the Hebrews, that's one of the great issues that's addressed.

Because people, I think, were really asking questions like, would it not be better for us if we were back in something like the Old Testament days, when we could see our high priest?

When there are things which are tangible, and visible, and touchable, and these sort of things make us feel more secure. And the writer to the Hebrews sets out, not just to answer that question, but it is one of the things, and he answers it by saying, we have a far better situation than they had in the Old Testament.

because we have a high priest who has entered, not into a physical temple, but into heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us, there now to appear in the presence of God for us.

- [34 : 57] He's the pioneer. And what does a pioneer do? Well, there's probably not much of the world left unexplored anyway, but in the old days when there were great parts of the world still unknown and unexplored, a pioneer was somebody who went for the first time into that territory, and then others were able to follow that.

And that's what Jesus has done. He's pioneered the way into heaven for us through death, through sin, through all of the things that he himself has overcome, and he is now in heaven appearing with God for his people.

And that's what's beginning here, the worship of that Christ. Christ. This Christ who leads his people by his own power, and that's the one who is lifted up over them.

And you can see the element of joy that's mentioned here as they worshiped him. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They didn't go back to sconsolate.

They didn't say, if only he had stayed with us the way he was. They didn't even say, though they knew very well that they were a very small group compared to that big world out there.

- [36 : 20] But they didn't say, this is going to be so difficult. This is so depressing. How can we rejoice? How can we have joy when we consider and contrast ourselves and our numbers with the numbers in the world, the number who oppose us?

they returned with great joy. Why can't we have great joy? Why shouldn't we enjoy our faith?

Why shouldn't we be able to show that we know rejoicing? Whatever things are in life, I know it's easy to speak in pulpits and people have difficulties in their lives and I know that sometimes people can feel utterly crushed in the things of providence.

And yet even then God's people will often testify that they know of an inner heart joy that overcomes even these difficulties. Because they know the leadership of Christ.

And because they're confident that whatever things happen outwardly, what they possess in him is infinitely greater than everything that's in the world.

- [37 : 39] You put it on in the balances, you weigh it up in the balances, and it always tips down on the side of Christ and his people.

Because under this leadership, his church ultimately is bound to prosper. And the rejoicing that belongs to his people is a well-founded rejoicing.

They can rejoice because this is true. It's not a theory. It's not something that has not yet fully been discovered. It's not something that might change as a basis for life in the future.

It is reality. It is real and lasting. And it is really ultimately the only thing that's worthwhile to have life lived under the leadership of this Christ, who led and who blesses his people and who is worshipped by them.

May God bless his word to us. Let's pray. Eternal and devil-blessed God, we give thanks at all times for the way in which you lead your people.

[38 : 58] and for the way in which they come to know through your word of the benefits of that leadership for themselves. We bless you for that rich experience of knowing that you lead your people and that you guide them through that victory that you have achieved for them.

Help us, Lord, to believe these things in a way that would seek that we can take confidently into our life ahead these great principles that belong to your people, that great victory that they have in yourself and in your own triumph over death.

Bless us, we pray, as we now part from one another, as we come to towards the end of this day, we pray that the services of your house will be blessed to your people everywhere. We pray that that priestly blessing will continue with us and we will know your own hands lifted over us in whatever activities we engage in in the week ahead.

We ask these things, confessing our sin and seeking pardon and cleansing in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.