

Introduction: Jesus knew that the early church would wither unless He quickly returned to strengthen her after His resurrection. So He intentionally walked with and listened to His disciples in their post-Golgotha despair in Luke 24:13-35, and then opened the Scriptures to them so that “their hearts burned” with renewed hope of eternal life (Luke 24:32). In the same way, when Jesus met with the whole Apostolic band, He again “opened their minds” to understand the Scriptures in Luke 24:44-45. What a Savior! He knows just how to speak to our hearts in order to rekindle our hope in Him! May this week’s notes greatly encourage us as we hear the voice of Jesus bring new life to our faith in Him!

Monday: read Luke 24:44-46 & Acts 1:1-3. We discover this week that the first reason Jesus came back to His disciples post-resurrection – instead of going immediately up to heaven to be enthroned as the King of all – is to reinforce their shaken faith by “opening their minds” to all that He had said and done in His earthly ministry, as well as to explain how His resurrection fulfilled all that the Bible had foretold. “Beginning with Moses and the prophets”, He expounded the Word of God about Himself. Nor was this the first time that Jesus sought to intensively imprint His teaching on His disciples. How often they needed to be reminded of the truth of God, and how easily they forgot it!

Reflect: Let us begin this week humbly, by praying as follows: “Lord, we so quickly forget the very words of God. We are like leaky buckets into which you, by your Spirit, must continually pour the Word of God lest we lose all experience of its reassuring power. But thank you, Jesus, that you can cause your Word to stick in our hearts and minds. Thank you for the ‘memory work’ of your Spirit, whereby we remember, at just the right time, the exact promise, command or warning of your Word that we need in order to maintain our profession. After all, this is why you sent the Holy Spirit, to not only teach us the New Testament truth which the Apostles wrote down, but to “remind us” of all that God has spoken through His Son in terms of Gospel promises and hope. Thank you for this “reminding ministry”, (John 14:26): *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* Amen.”

Tues/Weds: read Luke 24:44-47. Despite His disciple’s slowness to believe in the reality of His resurrection, Jesus nevertheless was full of confidence that God’s Spirit would give these disciples courage to go out in missionary endeavor for their Savior. This is why He promises in Luke 24:47 the future progress of the Gospel, promising that the Gospel message of repentance and faith would indeed be proclaimed in His name to all nations! Let’s think about this proclamation, and how God is able to sovereignly save through it.

First, notice that the ability to repent and believe comes through the proclamation of the Gospel, and not through any inherent human ability. In other words, God’s command to believe, when effectively applied by the Holy Spirit to the sinner’s heart, *contains within it the enabling power to believe!* (As the hymn by Charles Wesley says, “He speaks and listening to His voice, new life the dead receive”.)

True preaching, therefore, *is not in any way* an appeal to people’s “better side”: urging people to try harder to be sorry for their sins, or stirring them up to make a decision to have faith in Jesus. Preaching should never imply that we take the first step of asking Jesus into our lives. It is rather that we “receive and rest” upon Jesus Christ as proclaimed and offered in the Gospel of God’s grace. Consider these **bold words** from our Shorter Catechism underlining the Grace of God as the power behind both repentance and faith.

Q. 86. *What is faith in Jesus Christ?*

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we **receive and rest upon him alone** for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 87. *What is repentance unto life?*

A. Repentance unto life is **a saving grace**, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

Thursday: read Luke 24:48-49. The Apostles and the disciples under their care in the early church were not in their own wisdom and strength to go forth into the world to do evangelism and to build the church. Even from the start, the church was never to be built upon human tradition or effort. This is why, for example, our Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) opens by declaring that only the Spirit of God can convince men that the Word of God can and will save them. It is not the church's job to perpetuate itself or to convert sinners – it is the Spirit's! He alone can “convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8-11). This is why the Apostles are explicitly told by Jesus in Luke 24:49 to wait in Jerusalem until they are, “clothed with the power of the Spirit from on high”. Only when clothed with that Spirit would Jesus send forth the church into the world with the message of the Gospel!

Reflect: Give thanks for the sovereign power of the Spirit of God, sent from God's right hand by the ascended Lord Jesus, with these words of our Confession of Faith:

“The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; **but wholly upon God** (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” (WCF Ch 1:4)

“We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture ... yet ... our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is **from the inward work of the Holy Spirit** bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” (WCF Ch 1:5)

“The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, **can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.**” (WCF Ch 1:10)

Fri/Sat/Sun: read Luke 24:50-53: We now come to the most glorious accomplishment of Jesus' whole ministry... His bodily ascension to the right hand of God the Father in Luke 24:50-53. I do not mean that the earlier steps in Christ's saving work are somehow less glorious. From the birth of Christ to His death and resurrection, there are unique and glorious revelations of the power and glory of God in each deed, miracle and word of our Savior.

But had not Jesus ascended to Heaven, there would have been no vindication of Jesus as our triumphant Savior! In His ascension, Christ led Sin, Satan and Death as His captives into heaven (Ephesians 4:8). Even more important for us as sinners whose only hope is in blood-forgiveness, had Christ not ascended there would have been no sprinkling of blood in the heavenly holy of holies for our forgiveness. Let us therefore end this week's notes by rejoicing with the disciples in Luke 24:52 in all that Jesus accomplished in ascending to God's right hand on our behalf.

The final thing to notice is Jesus' posture as He ascends. His hands are raised in blessing. This reminds us that Jesus ascended to continue His priestly office of blessing His church through His continuous intercession for us. Just as He prayed for Peter, that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), so He prays for each member of His body in order that Satan would be defeated in His efforts to discredit and destroy our faith.

Meditate and Pray: "Lord Jesus, please lift your hands right now and pray with exact words and profound compassion for us in our particular needs and defend us from the temptations we face. Thank you that you "live to intercede for us" in this way (Hebrews 7:25). Amen."

For Further Reflection: Consider these facts about Christ's heavenly intercession for us:

- 1) Jesus intercedes for us by asking the Father to send the **Holy Spirit** in all His blessed effects on believers: "He lives forever to send the Holy Spirit unto his disciples. Without this constant effect of the present mediatory life of Christ the being of the church would fail, it could not subsist one moment. For hereon depends, 1. All saving light to understand the word of God... 2. All habitual grace, whereby the souls of the elect are quickened and regenerated; 3. All supplies of actual grace; which the whole church hath from him every moment, and without which it could yield no obedience unto God; 4. All spiritual gifts... 5. All comfort and consolation..." (John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. V, p. 536).
- 2) Jesus intercedes for us in our **sufferings**: "The Father always hears him; and we have not a deliverance from trouble, a recovering of health, ease of pain, freedom from any evil that ever laid hold upon us, but it is given us on the intercession of Jesus Christ" (John Owen, *Works*, Vol. 2 p. 145).
- 3) In respect of our continual need for **access** that we can never merit or maintain in our own strength: "Are not the saints on earth, being sinful, unfit to come into the presence of the King? Yes; but the glorious Advocate introduces them, procuring them access by His interest in the court; 'For through him we have an access, by one Spirit, unto the Father' (Ephesians 2:18)." (Fisher's commentary on the Westminster Shorter Cat. Q & A 59).

PRAYER FOR THE LORD'S DAY: "Thank you for the wisdom of your Holy Spirit, sent from your right hand, Father, through the merit and at the request of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Savior. Thank you that you know when to send the Spirit as a wind of the new creation (John 3:8) or a wind-storm of fire to give courage and ability to your church to preach your Word (Acts 2:2). Thank you also, that by the wind of your Spirit, you bring holy earthquakes to produce reverent fear in your people, and to engender in them a fear of sin, and a sense of need for your grace (Exodus 19:16-20). Thank you also for the *gentleness* of your Spirit, coming to us in our despondency as a still, small voice, able to ask the probing questions that we need to consider (1 Kings 19:12-13). What a privilege for us to have the richest of worship experiences, worshipping you as One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen."