Luke 24:44-53 He said to them, “These are my words, which I spoke to 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.”

45Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46He said to them, “This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things. 49Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” 50He led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. 52So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen.

The words before us form the account of Luke as it pertains to the last 40 days of Jesus in this world. I put it that way for a specific reason. Jesus rose from the dead and then for the next 40 days he made appearance after appearance to various and many people. It is clear those appearances were done to help people grasp that Jesus had risen from the dead and was truly and physically alive. What is also true is Jesus spent those forty days teaching and instructing his disciples. Then we are told that Jesus “ascended” into heaven to take his rightful seat at the “right hand of God.” In just those actions there is lots and lots to be discussed.

For instance, we speak of Jesus’ “ascending into heaven.” In truth heaven is neither up nor down. Heaven is the spiritual dwelling place of God, a realm or sphere of existence quite beyond what we know and grasp as our physical world. God permeates our world. God is all around and through and in and above and beyond our world. We speak of Jesus “ascending” for two reasons. First, we speak that way because the position of Jesus is clearly a promotion, a step up from this world. Actually, Jesus has been placed into the ultimate position of power and authority. God the Father has placed everything…everything into the capable and loving hands of Jesus. Ascending is a part of the exaltation of Jesus, the fact that Jesus once again has his full power and authority, glory and honor as the Lord our God, ruler over all things.

Second, we speak of “ascending” because literally, from the disciples’ viewpoint, Jesus “went up.” He rose off of the ground, lifted up into the air and clouds and then disappeared in the clouds. It could have been done any way God wanted it. Jesus could have just “faded” away, slowly disappeared as he was speaking with the disciples. Jesus could have just suddenly disappeared as he was teaching. It could have happened anyway God wanted. God chose to do it this way because of the visual lesson it gave. That visual lesson had a tremendous impact.

I say that because you can see or grasp the visual lesson even in the words of our text today. Here is Jesus “ascending”, which means, and I think the disciples knew this, that Jesus would no longer be a physical presence for them in this world. Jesus made it clear, even by the promises of the Holy Spirit to come, that the relationship between him and the disciples was now radically and forever changed. It would continue to be, but it would be a reality in a spiritual way. Let that sink in! I just said it would be a reality in a spiritual way which totally flies in the face of our understanding and grasp of “what is reality.” Yet the disciples got this truth. Do you see how that is revealed?

It is revealed in the simple line of verse 52. It says, **“So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”** Jesus has just gone to heaven. In the plainest of language, Jesus has left this world, left the disciples and their physical world, left them just as surely as the people who die in this world leave us. Yet there is no grief. There is no despair and sadness, wailing and weeping at this moment. What we find is the exact opposite. They burst out into worship and praise, glory and adoration of Jesus. The disciples are filled with joy, actually the text says, **“Great joy.”** They are ecstatic that Jesus has gone. They are filled with utter happiness that Jesus has left them. Let that sink in. Jesus has departed forever and they are completely at peace, more than that, they are filled with great joy.

Because they understand. They understand that Jesus is God and Lord. They understand that Jesus has paid for our sins, atoned for our souls, and opened the gates of heaven by the simple fact of faith. Jesus has changed everything for them. So much so that from this point on the disciples not only fearlessly but relentlessly go into the world and share Jesus. They tell everyone about Jesus and his gift of eternal life and salvation. They can’t keep their mouths shut. Even when confronted with their own deaths and martyrdom they can’t keep quiet. Because they understand. They get the message of Jesus, the message of God for the world and beyond.

What is that message? That’s what I like about how Matthew, Mark and Luke conclude their gospels. They conclude not by giving us every last detail of those forty day or by speaking of everything that transpired during this period. What they do is give us the point, the gist, the purpose of what Jesus is all about. And they do that, by and large, by summarizing what Jesus himself taught them. Our theme for today will be: **THIS IS WHAT IS WRITTEN.**

So what does Luke consider to be the most important thing for you and me to know when it comes to Jesus? Look how Luke summarizes 40 days of lessons from Jesus. He writes: **“He [Jesus] said to them, ‘These are my words, which I spoke to 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.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, ‘This is what is written and so it must be; The 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 from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”**

So, as Jesus is preparing his disciples for the “ascension,” his leaving them that will fill them with great joy, how does Jesus direct them? Plain and simple, if we boil all down, we see that Jesus directs his disciples and thus us, to the Word, the written, truthful, eternal, trustworthy Word of God. That Word will provide all truth, all information and all guidance.

Look how Jesus directs. He begins by telling them how he had always directed them to the Word: **“These are my words, which I spoke while I was still with you.”** Jesus is telling them, “I directed you to the Word of God. I directed you to grasp that the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms were about me. They showed what must be. They showed what would be.” As the Son of God in this world, Jesus directed and guided his disciples in the Word. He reminds them of that fact so that now, they can grasp that this Word, the revelation of God is trustworthy and true from beginning to end.

Need I remind all of you of how this was shown to be true? It is shown by the very life and ministry of Jesus. His conception, birth, birth place, the destruction of lives and mothers’ weeping, and even his coming out of Egypt and his being a Nazarene were foretold and fulfilled in Jesus. And then came his ministry and all the miracles. Foretold, pointed to as the signs that the reality of God’s redemption was upon them. But then came the biggest part. **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scripture. He said to them, ‘This is what is written and so it must be:”** Everything the Scripture says “must be.” It is going to happen. It must happen because if it doesn’t then it is not God’s Word and the truth.

Do you see the thing that Jesus points to as the real important “This must happen?” It is his suffering and his resurrection from the dead. That is the culmination, the heart and core, the pivoting point for all of this. It must be. Because if it is not, then again, God’s Word is false and we, truthfully, don’t have a clue about God, the things of God or even if there is a God to begin with. It must be.

If you have noticed, I have really been emphasizing that lately, the absolute and utter importance of the Passion and then the resurrection of Jesus. That’s because of what is going on in the liberal churches of the world. What they are teaching is gaining more and more of a foothold. Many simply teach that Jesus was a great teacher, a guy with unique and worthy ideas about life and death. To them Jesus is nothing more than a moral megaphone to help us get a grip on this world and make it a better place for all to live. You know these churches because they are the ones who basic message is “love, it is all about love.” If we could all just love properly, we could get along, the world will be a great place and heaven will be achieved. Pay attention to what they teach about Jesus’ dying. Somehow they pass it all off as a tragic accident, a convergence of bad karma that got Jesus killed but that’s okay because Jesus was just teaching us it is okay to sacrifice yourself for your principles. And as far as the resurrection their message is only one of a spiritual awakening, a spiritual hope of goodness and new life in love.

Jesus is a whole lot more adamant than that. He tells us these things **“must be.”** These weren’t unfortunate accidents. They are fulfillments of God’s plan. Because his death was done to atone for the sins of the world. Jesus on the cross was serving as the substitutionary sacrifice that allows God the Father to administer his holy and perfectly just righteousness against sin on Jesus. Simply put, Jesus died damnation for us. He paid our debt of sin and then Jesus rose from the dead as the proof positive that all of this is a fact, a foretold, revealed, planned out, God driven and given fact that deals with the eternal future of our souls. Take any of this away, downplay any of this, alter what the real lesson is and you abandon and cast out all that Jesus and the Bible is about. You gut the Christian faith. You don’t have God, his truth, his love or his anything. You got nothing without Jesus and sacrificial death, without Jesus and his actual and true physical and eternal return to life. And again, please note that Jesus is adamant about it.

Jesus is the one who points all of this out. For that matter, Jesus directs his disciples and all believers to the scope of his Word. And Jesus makes it clear that because God’s Word is true, because all of these things had to be and were, that then the disciples and all believers had a job. The job to preach.

Note what is being preached as a result of this suffering and rising from the dead of Jesus! **“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.”** This phrase that Jesus uses is only a puzzle if you don’t have the rest of God’s Word to guide you. There are those out there who will suggest that we don’t really know what this repentance and forgiveness is all about. Follow the example of Jesus with his disciples. Go to the Word, because when you read the rest of God’s Word, when you have studied what the Holy Spirit is going to cause the disciples of Jesus to record and write it is clear what is meant by “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.” God’s has a message for you and the message is clear.

The first part of the message is one of “turn your mind around.” There is sin and sin is a devastating force in this world. The only way to deal properly with sin is with and through God’s Word. First, you need to acknowledge and recognize the devastation and destruction of sin. 1 John 1:8 boils it down: **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”** Sin is a reality, revealed by God’s Law and it is destroying us, eternally!

God’s Son Jesus came to be the atoning sacrifice for sin. God’s Son Jesus paid for our sins and then rose from the dead so we would know the reality of that payment. In God’s Son Jesus I learn that the forgiveness of sins is mine because of what Jesus did and accomplished! I bear his righteousness. I am clothed with his perfection and only and just because of that, eternal life and salvation are mine. God’s Word tells us about sin, tells us how God resolved the problem of sin and tells us of the forgiveness of sins freely given just because of Jesus. Jesus did it all. Jesus paid the price for me and all the souls of the world when it comes to sin.

Luke is not alone in his conviction of this. Go back to our Epistle reading for today: Ephesians 1:16-23. Here is a section that is the beginning lesson of the absolute marvel and wonder that Jesus is. The Apostle Paul is urging us to “know Christ fully.” Guess what this text tells us is the heart and core of what Jesus is? It says this: **“It is as great as the working of his mighty strength, which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”** Yep, there is that resurrection of Jesus again and coupled with the ascension.

As you grasp what Jesus has done, what is the only viable reaction? I submit it is “great joy.” That’s the reaction of the disciples to all that Jesus was about. Even when he leaves them, there is great joy because this message of eternal life and salvation will go out. The disciple know the awesome wonder of Jesus as Lord and Savior, the total reality and truth of God’s Holy Word. All of this because of Jesus. Truthfully, I just don’t think this message of repentance and forgiveness of sins can be grasped without our very lives, our hearts, being changed by Jesus. We become different in faith. There is peace and joy found in Jesus. It is a peace and joy declared and founded on God’s eternal Word. It is what is written!

From this point on were the disciples holy and perfect? Nope. Once I come to faith, am I holy and perfect in my life here on earth? Nope! What is different is that I am forgiven in Jesus. What is different is that I no longer love sin and desire it, I fight against it. I lose that battle all the time, but Jesus is there to help me. I get back to his Word. I hear the truth of sin. I know the answer is Jesus. It is what is written. It is what is true. It is what fills me with “great joy.” Jesus has won the victory and Jesus is now in charge for my sake and yours. Amen.