

## Luke 24

So we've all had those things in our lives that come along and change everything forever. For example, you might get married, and now you have to think about two people rather than just one. You might have children, and your sleep-filled nights are gone and your social calendar shredded. What's something in your life that's done that? For me and Ben, in 2004 we had to move to Queensland for Ben's work. Not only was the geographical shift hard to deal with – figuring out where everything is and how to get places – but we had to find a new church, find new friends, and pretty much learn a new culture.

Now, these are all pretty significant. But let's think bigger. I'm talking about the big game-changers that completely alter the way the whole world works. Like the invention of the printing press meant people could write their own books, and let ideas spread more and more freely, like those of the Reformation. Gunpowder production let even peasants to arm themselves in the French Revolution, and let colonial powers conquer and control huge areas of the globe. The growth of democracy following the American War of Independence now means that even here everyone can have a say about how the country is run.

But let's think bigger. I'm talking about something that's so much bigger, so much more profound that it changes things on the most fundamental level of our existence. This is what I'm talking about:

*“Do not leave Jerusalem,” Jesus says, “but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” [Acts 1.4-5]*

Oh, it's the Holy Spirit. Is that all? He's the one that sort of encourages us and helps us to be good Christians, right? Oh, but there's so much more to it that I don't think we often appreciate. So let me explain how his coming actually really revolutionises things.

This is an example of your typical pagan temple – well, the ruins of one – built by the Romans in the Decapolis region where Jesus taught. See, for your average person at the time of Jesus, the gods were pretty limited in where they

could operate. Often a city would have its own patron god, the one that takes special care of the city and the surrounding areas, but also you could borrow the power of another god. This town wanted to have Artemis on their side, so they built her a temple so she could now operate there.

This same idea was also somewhat true of Judaism. God had made it clear through the prophets that he wasn't bound to a particular area like other gods, but if you wanted to meet God and worship him fully – participate in the festivals and offer sacrifices for your sin – you went to the Temple in Jerusalem. This was where God had chosen to dwell with his people and interact with them, and thus Israel and the Temple stood like a light in a dark place: people would be drawn to it, they would come to Jerusalem if they wanted to follow God. The temple is at the heart of worship. This is one reason why the disciples returned there at the very end of Luke.

And when we hear the disciples say: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” we can kind of get an understanding of what they were looking for. This wasn't simply a political thing where they wanted to be rid of the Romans. They were looking for that final day when God will rescue his people and everyone will flock to Jerusalem to worship.

Of course Jesus sets them straight, but notice what he says: *“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Here's the clincher. Here's the game-changer. The disciples are asking Jesus, “What are you going to do?” But Jesus says, “No, no, what are you going to do.” This totally revolutionises all worship. It revolutionises how we interact with God. It's not about you sitting there while Jesus does stuff around you, and you go ooh and ah. It's not about you waiting for people to come to God. Now the responsibility is yours. You go to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. You preach them the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. You go. You. We can't think that people should just walk into a church if they want to hear the gospel. That's not how things work any more. See, the Holy Spirit isn't just a sort of spiritual helper for us. He is God

with us and in us, making himself known to the world. We are now where God has chosen to dwell. Now we are the place where people meet God.

Just think about that for a second. We are the place where people meet God. I don't know about you, but that kind of freaks me out a bit. I don't know if I can handle such a massive responsibility. I'm so full of sin and weakness, there's no way I could possibly be able to be God's messenger to the world.

But that's where I'm wrong. I'm not full of sin and weakness. Not any more. Let me explain what I mean.

Let's look back at Luke 24, because what we have here is really remarkable: here Jesus says to his disciples, *"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 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."* And he gives further proof that he is alive by essentially standing there hungry while their jaws are still on the floor. Luke is really hammering his message here in no uncertain terms: Jesus is alive. He is really and truly alive. Do you want some proof? Here's some proof! And here's some more proof! Don't worry, I've got buckets more where that came from.

It's a magnificent encouragement for us, the assurance of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, victorious over death and sin, ushering in a new age of reconciliation and life for everyone who believes in him. Not only this, before he ascends to heaven to sit in glorious authority, he promises the power of the Holy Spirit to his witnesses to go into the world to preach his message of repentance and salvation. It is the resurrection reality that makes all this possible.

So why do we stop here? Why do we get stuck at the cross? We can get into a headspace that dwells on our sin, thinking about all the wrongs that we have done, how we have failed God, how we have failed other people, how we can never do anything worthwhile for God because of our sheer worthlessness, our inherent weakness, the huge gravity of our sin. We can end up in a holding pattern where we never attempt anything for God, we never actually live for God because we can't get past this point.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that it's not valuable to think about Jesus' sacrifice to pay for our sins. I'm not saying we shouldn't acknowledge our slip-ups as we try to walk closer with God. We are humans after all; it's what we do. What has been done for us and where we have come from shapes who are now and how it is we move along our future path. But we can't stay at the cross. Jesus didn't stay there, so neither should we. As a Charles Wesley hymn says, *"Made like him, like him we rise. Ours the cross, the grave, the skies."* The cross is not our final destination, but only the beginning of a transformed life as a Christian, sharing in Christ's resurrection and ascension power, his triumphant victory over sin and death.

Now we are no longer weak – weakness does not define us since we've been clothed with power from on high. Now we are no longer full of sin – sin does not define us since it has been nailed to the cross, dealt with once and for all, and we are risen as new people. Now we don't need to worry about living up to the responsibility of being the place where people meet God – we are now defined as the people of God with the person of God, the Holy Spirit living within us. So God is inevitably who people will meet. They might not like it. But their choice about whether they follow Jesus or not is their problem; giving them the opportunity to make that choice is our problem.

So if we're going to be setting forth, powered by the fire of the Holy Spirit like our chap in the slides here, what can we actually do? Well, first we need to understand the natural relationship that flows here. Being a Christian means being filled with the Holy Spirit. And being filled with the Holy Spirit means being witnesses to the truth of who Christ is and what he has done. So we can't get away with thinking "I can't" when we really mean "I won't". We can and we must: it's our reason for being as Christians. You can't hide your light under a bowl, as someone famous once said.

That means we're going to have to be prepared, because people are going to ask us about God as well. "So you're a Christian," they might say. "What's that all about?" or, "So how come you're a Christian?" We really have to have something better up our sleeves than, "Um, well, I, yeah, so, you know, I guess it's just, um, yeah." So here's a couple of good ideas.

First off, write out your testimony: basically, how you became a Christian and how it's changed your life. This might be an exciting story, or it might be fairly tame, depending what your life has been like, but that doesn't matter. It's your story, and that's what people want to hear. Just try and get it under five minutes so it doesn't end up being long-winded. Then test it out maybe in your Bible study group to see how it goes before you unleash it on an unsuspecting public.

Second, grab a few resources. One of the best is in fact real oldie but a goody – memorise a creed. Whether you want to go for the longer Nicene Creed or the shorter Apostles Creed, what you've got is a really neat summary of what we as Christians believe. So if someone does ask you, "What's all this Christianity about anyway?" you have an answer right there at your fingertips.

Plus, you also might like to grab an evangelism tool like Two Ways to Live. Even if you don't go through it with someone to explain to them how they can become a Christian – although that would be awesome – just getting to grips with it yourself will help you to be able to tell people about Christianity in a way that's logical and easy to understand. You could even do a short course with your Bible study group like Just Start Talking, which I know the church has a copy of if you want to borrow it, to equip you even further.

Finally, don't be worried. Don't be afraid. People will argue with us, treat us differently, even be mean to us. But have courage. Have boldness. Have love. We have been blessed in order to bless others, saved in order to see others saved. We have the power of the ascended Christ right within us, so we can go out into the world in full assurance of his resurrection, and confidence of the strength of the Holy Spirit. Remember we are no longer weak or full of sin. We are strong. We are saved. We are God's unstoppable force in the world.