

Text: Luke 24:44-53 (HCSB) Ascension. **May 25, 2017.**

What do you say when you are leaving? What if you know you are not coming back for at least a couple thousand years? What would you say then? How would you want to be remembered? What would you leave behind in your farewell speech? It's the time of year when many valedictorians will make their farewell speeches. My son is one of them. Sorry, proud dad moment. Some speeches are sappy. Some are silly. Few have substance. Few change souls. I honestly can't remember what the valedictorians said at my high school or college graduations. But I'll never forget what Jesus said in his farewell speech.

A big part of remembering Jesus' farewell speech is this: he wrote it down. He didn't only speak it. And allow it to be lost. Jesus wrote his farewell speech down, in black and white, in the best-selling book of all time. Notice the four times Jesus refers to his Words in this farewell speech. "These are my words that I spoke." And this indicates not just chit chat, but a solemn, memorable declaration. "Everything written about me." It's been in black and white for thousands of years already. "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." The Scriptures, the writings, what is written down. "This is what is written." Literally, this stands written. It was written in the past. It still is written today and it will stand written for all time. Jesus didn't just leave. Jesus left behind his Word, the Scriptures, the writings. They stand written.

And let's go back to look at one of those phrases. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. Jesus opened the minds of the disciples. The disciples did not open their minds. The disciples did not open their hearts. They were naturally hardened and naturally stupid like the rest of us. On their own all they did was argue about who was the greatest. For them to understand, it took an act of God. Jesus opened their minds. Jesus gave them the understanding to put it all together. It took Jesus and Jesus pointed them back to the Scriptures to open their minds.

Jesus gave them understanding to see what was written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Let's take a quick look. The law of Moses, Deuteronomy chapter 18. God promised, "I will raise up a prophet like Moses from among your brothers. You must listen to him!" Sounds like Jesus. The Prophets. Where do we start? How about Isaiah 53, "He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed." Sound like Jesus? The Psalms. How about number 16? "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Sounds like Jesus again. The whole Old Testament is one big arrow pointing to Jesus. This stands written. The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day. No ifs, ands, or buts. Jesus really didn't have anything new to say in his farewell speech. Jesus just pointed at the words of the prophets that stood written.

And here's what the disciples were to do with this message. "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name." Repentance is one of those big, Bible words with an even bigger meaning. Repentance is being sorry for your sins, trusting in Jesus for forgiveness and changing your sinful ways. Notice what is preached. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins. First, God has to show us our sins. First, we have to be crushed by the guilt of our sins. Did you groan, even for one second, about having to come to church tonight? Then repent. See how horrible that groan sounds to God. Did you call someone a name on the playground today, but you got away with it because the teacher didn't hear? At least you think you got away with it, until now. Is that guilt crushing you? Do you not need to hear about guilt, because you feel it every time you come home, the children you've neglected, the spouse you've been short with, the spouse who isn't there and you can't stop thinking, "It's my fault"? Has your guilt got you down?

God has a purpose for that guilt that gets you down: to raise you up! To give you forgiveness! God has a good purpose for crushing. To cure! God has a good reason for repentance. God has a goal of this repentance: forgiveness. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins is preached. God points out your sins to point you to Jesus. Jesus' farewell speech says, "I want one thing preached: repentance, for one purpose, the forgiveness of sins, to one group of people, all the nations."

All the nations. That obviously includes you. Jesus wants you to hear this message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus wants you to be crushed and cured, repented and raised up. Look at Christ. He was crushed and then cured. He was dead and then raised. He ascended into heaven and so you will ascend into heaven. Christ was made low, to be lifted up. Repentance makes you low, so God can lift you up. This message of repentance for forgiveness of sins will be preached in Christ's name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Why Jerusalem? Maybe it was a practical thing. The disciples were in Jerusalem. Jesus' farewell speech told them, "Start where you're at." Not a bad idea. Tell your next door neighbor about Jesus and then maybe we can talk about people in Africa. If I don't

care about my neighbor whom I can see every day, why care about people in Africa I can't see? Maybe Jesus was telling them to begin preaching in the city where his suffering, death and resurrection had happened. There were probably people in Jerusalem who were in the crowds that yelled, "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday and, "Crucify!" on Good Friday. These are the people who had heard the stories of a tomb being empty. The disciples could speak with conviction. These aren't just stories. We saw him. We touched him. We ate with him. He gave many convincing proofs he was alive! Maybe Jerusalem has just always been a special city to God. Of all the cities in the world, God chose Jerusalem as the city to place his name, the city where countless lambs were offered in the Old Testament and where the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was offered once and for all.

So Jesus gave them marching orders: preach to all nations. He gave them the message: repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He gave the commencement location: Jerusalem. He backed all this up with a wonderful promise: I am sending you what my Father promised. This was the Holy Spirit. This Spirit really gave them power. After the Holy Spirit, they started preaching. The good news of Jesus spread like literal wildfire, spread faster than a viral video. Three thousand in one day, as we'll hear in ten days. Five thousand, ten thousand, how many millions since and how many billions today?

Man, these guys had to be fired up. Marching orders, message, commencement location, promise. And then a command. Wait. Stay in the city. Sit down and don't go anywhere. Seriously? Wait? Come on, Jesus! We're pumped. We're juiced. We want to get at this. Wait? The wait was only ten days. The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. We'll celebrate that a week from Sunday, even a week from today if you can't wait that long. But those ten days had to be ten eternities for them.

Well, you know what they say, "The trick to patience is finding something to do in the meantime." Jesus ascended. The disciples waited. But look at what they found to do in the meantime. They were continually in the temple complex praising God. They went where you would expect to find Christians. They waited at church. They weren't sad Jesus left. They were filled with joy. We don't see tears after this farewell speech. We see worship and joy. Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. They put it all together that it was for their good that Jesus ascended. He ascended to fill everything in every way. He ascended on high to prove the final defeat of all his enemies. A guy who rose to die isn't much of a champion. He ascended to prepare a mansion in heaven for each one of them, and us. He ascended to blaze the path to heaven, so that I will go where Christ has gone. He ascended to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit really helped them put it all together. The Holy Spirit really made them bold to preach the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The disciples worshiped Jesus after his ascension, because Jesus helped them put it all together. The Ascension was for their good.

And the Ascension is for our good. What a wonderful reaction the disciples had to the Ascension. They worshiped. They witnessed. That simple. They worshiped. They witnessed. What's our reaction to the Ascension? We worship. We witness. We worship Jesus. It should never be a surprise to find Christians in worship. It should be a surprise to find Christians not in worship. We witness. Now this isn't going to be some closing guilt trip, where pastor lays into you for not inviting to church every person in line behind you at the grocery store. But is there one neighbor in your Jerusalem who lives alone and is hurting, and maybe just wants someone to listen? What a witness you can be! Jesus ascended to put you in that neighborhood to be Jesus to that person. Is there one friend at school who wonders why you waste your Sunday mornings and now even a Thursday night? Tell them, "I'm hearing about Jesus. He's the best." Worship and witness. That's what Jesus wants us to do. Worship and witness. That's our reaction to Jesus' farewell speech. Worship and witness. Amen.