

Jesus Gives Gifts of Grace to His Church

Luke 24:36-53

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Sept. 8, 2019

J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings* fantasy trilogy, published an essay in 1938 defending the “goodness of Happy Endings” in . . . [his] stories. To make his point, he coined a new word: *eucaastrophe*. *Eucaastrophe* comes from the word *catastrophe*, which literally means, “to turn down.” He added the prefix “eu”, to *catastrophe* which means “good.” So, *eucaastrophe* means, “the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.”¹ The resurrection of Christ is the *eucaastrophe* of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus.²

Think about it. Jesus’ life had been one of suffering. He is called the *Man of Sorrows* for a reason. Jesus left the comforts of Heaven, which by the way, has far more comforts than we can ever imagine on this earth, and was plunged into a very primitive first century human life. You and I would not last a day in the first century. We are far too soft. We are tenderfoots.

Yet, Jesus left Heaven and lived life on this earth for 33 years. Here is what we need to understand, Jesus lived life on this earth by His faith in God just like we do. He did not allow His divinity to make His human life easier to live. So, when He was scorned and rejected by His own people, He did not turn to His divinity to endure but lived by faith alone in God.

Jesus was immersed in a world of darkness, a world filled with sin and suffering. Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted but He remained sinless. He was betrayed by one of His close friends for thirty pieces of silver. He was unjustly tried and sentenced to death on the cross between two thieves. He was mocked, beaten with a cat-o-nine tails, spit up on, stripped naked in order to humiliate Him, nailed to a cross, stabbed in His heart with a spear to make sure He was dead, and He did all of this in order to pay for the sins of His people. Finally, He was buried in a borrowed tomb because He had no money to purchase a place to be buried.

Jesus’ life might look like the end of a very sad story. You might say it ended in catastrophe. But His suffering and death was not the end. For at the height of the darkness of being buried in a tomb, Jesus was raised back to life after being dead three days. What looked like a *catastrophe* was *eucaastrophe*. Jesus resurrection from the dead suddenly turned a sad ending into a happy story that pierces us with tears of joy.

Here is my point: *After Jesus was raised from the dead, He gave powerful gifts of grace to His church.* In our text, I want to show you five gifts of grace that Jesus gave to His church before He ascended back to Heaven. What seemed like the end of a sad story has become a glorious victory where the Victor gives powerful gifts of grace to His people.

We saw some of these powerful gifts of grace displayed in Jesus’ ministry. When He began His ministry, He began to reverse the curse of sin. For example, Jesus forgave sin, gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and when He raised the dead back to life He was unleashing the power of the gifts of grace

¹ Jason Duesing, *Mere Hope: Life in an Age of Cynicism*, 144-145.

² Ibid.

from the age to come in this broken world. But when Jesus rose from the dead, He opened the flood gates of the grace. So, let's look at these five gifts He gave His church before He ascended to Heaven.

I. Jesus Gave Peace to His Church (vv. 36-43)

"As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,⁴³ and he took it and ate before them."

Verse 36 picks up where we left off last Sunday with the disciples still talking about the confusion over Jesus' resurrection: *was He alive or not?* Cleopas and his friend were talking about how they encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus but it was just too good to be true. Then Cleopas told them how their hearts burned within them as they heard Him teach and then they recognized it was Jesus when they ate together. For a brief moment, their faith had been restored but like many of us, they quickly fell back into doubt and disbelief.

Do you ever do this? Do you ever forget the power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead? Do you sometimes live as if Jesus is not alive? If I am not careful, I will forget. I will let the darkness of this world cause me to live as if Jesus is still dead. I must be reminded of the gospel from God's word every day and sometimes moment by moment.

Verse 36 tells us that while they were talking, Jesus suddenly appeared in the room. Not only were they beginning to doubt again but when Jesus appeared out of thin air, they were startled and frightened. Jesus immediately said, *"Peace to you!"* He had to quickly speak peace to them because in their minds, only a ghost would show up like that.

In vv. 38-40, Jesus immediately confronted their doubts and He showed them His hands and His feet. He told them to touch Him. He wanted them to see where the nails had been driven through His hands and His feet. They had been there and they had seen Him on the cross. They knew He had died and now they needed to realize that the same person who died on the cross was now alive and standing in their presence in the flesh. Jesus had to help His disciples see He was real and that He was alive.

Then in v. 41 Luke tells us something that sounds a little strange. It says, *"they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling."* Have you ever *disbelieved for joy?* Of course, you have. You know the experience. If you have ever watched any kind of sports event you have probably seen an amazing play or seen an amazing comeback and your response was, *"I can't believe what just happened. I can't believe they won. That was amazing!"*

This is kind of like the disciples' response except it was on a whole other level because they responded to something that really mattered, Jesus' resurrection, not some sport's event.

They witnessed the catastrophe of the Son of God who was crucified. They knew He was buried in a tomb in which there was no way out even if He did come back to life. There was no way He could move the stone that covered the mouth of the cave from the inside. He would have had to be in perfect health and

incredibly strong. Yet, there He was standing before them. They were beyond stunned. They were speechless. It was a *euclatrophe*.

Imagine the scene, there they were standing in stunned silence. You could have heard a pin drop. Their mouths on the floor and now Jesus asked them, “*Do you have anything to eat?*” Then a disciple goes over to the fire, gets a piece of fish and cautiously hands it to Him. Jesus took it and ate it just to show them that He was not a spirit but was in fact real flesh and blood.

The only truth that would give His disciples peace was if Jesus was really alive. The kind of peace He gave them was *true peace from the age to come*. It was not a peace born of this world but an eternal peace that comes from the throne of the Living God because it was purchased by the death of God’s only Son and secured by the Risen Son of God.

John 14:27-29 recorded Jesus telling His disciples this before He died, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.*”

Jesus’ disciples lost their peace because they forgot Jesus’ words that He would die and be raised to life. Jesus’ resurrection was unbelievable. It was just as hard for them to believe in the resurrection as it is for modern people. Some people think that that Jesus’ resurrection was a story the disciples invented because it was easy for first century people to believe the dead could be raised back to life but that is not the case at all. It was just as difficult for first century people to believe it as it is for modern people.

That was one of the reasons Jesus told them that He would die and be raised before it happened. He wanted them to know He was in control of His own destiny. He was/is sovereign over His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus said *no one takes My life but I lay it down willingly and that I take it back up by My own power*.

Jesus is now True Reality. In fact, Jesus is more real than He ever was. So, when He gives us the gift of His peace it is a peace that does not come from this world. It is an eternal peace that transcends this world and is peace that passes our understanding.

The kind of peace Jesus gives is a peace that when you go to the doctor and He says that the tests have come back and you have cancer or your child has cancer or your parents have cancer, you can grieve, lament, be sad, and yet have peace because you believe that what Jesus says will be, will be.

The kind of peace Jesus gives is a peace that when you are sitting in Infusion taking treatment for cancer or you are sitting with a loved one that is taking treatment the peace of God that passes all understanding is in your heart and in that room with you.

The kind of peace Jesus gives is a peace that when you lose a child to death or miscarriage, you can take your broken, perplexed heart to a God. God does not give verbal platitudes, Facebook posts, or Twitter feeds to you for your peace. Instead, He gives peace that is like a shaft of light from the very throne of God. It pierces the darkness in your heart. Yes . . . you grieve but, in your grief, you have peace that calms the storm because you are resting in the One who went through the storm in order to calm the storm.

The kind of peace Jesus gives is a peace that when you are preparing for marriage and fear grips you about your upcoming marriage because you’re thinking, “*My parents were divorced, I will probably get*

divorced. I don't want to go through a divorce." You can take this kind of anxiety to God. You can look to the One who died for His Bride, the church, for your peace as you enter your marriage.

I do not know what might be robbing you of the peace in your life and causing you to doubt the Risen Savior. Perhaps you are concerned because you are staring at singleness and you don't want to be single. Perhaps you are worried about graduating from college, finding a job, and paying your school loans off. It does not matter what the situation is simply look to Jesus and let Him speak His peace into your heart.

Friends, the fact is, the storms of life will come, they will beat on your life, and the flood waters will rise but your peace will remain when your life is built on the Rock of Christ.

II. Jesus Gave Confidence to His Church (vv. 44-45)

"Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

I love what Jesus did next to address the doubt and confusion in the hearts of His disciples. He pointed them to the word of God. I want you to notice what He didn't say. He didn't say you need to have a stronger faith. He didn't say fast and pray. He didn't say work harder. He didn't say name what you want and claim it. He pointed them back to the word of God. This is where our confidence is anchored.

Confidence does NOT come from a mystical experience that is disconnected from the person and work of Christ. Listen to me carefully. I am not saying Christianity does not have a mystical component to it. It does. Christianity is definitely mystical in that the Holy Spirit takes the word of God and applies it to the hearts of His people and something supernatural happens. Our spirits are strengthened, our hearts are encouraged, and those of us who lack confidence in the word of God all of the sudden become confident in God and it is all done by His Holy Spirit. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that our minds are opened up to understand the word of God. He made us get it. The light bulb has come on.

What I want you to see is that the mystical element of the Christian faith is not abstract mysticism. It is verifiably anchored in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross as established by word of God. So, it is a good thing to pray and ask God to open your mind to His word and to help you understand it. But, remember this, what you understand must be consistent with Scripture's revelation of itself. Scripture interprets Scripture. You do not have the final word on the interpretation of a passage just because you have peace or a burning heart. Peace comes from understanding the gospel as it is presented from Genesis to Revelation not from taking a verse out of context and claiming it as "your truth" or a "word from God" disconnected from the doctrine. Scripture must interpret Scripture. This is where your confidence in Jesus' resurrection comes from.

Let me make one more application in regard to confidence in the resurrection of Jesus and apply it to evangelism. When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, apologetics has its place in helping us evangelize. There are verifiable facts and truths about the word of God that help some people but apologetics never converted a single soul. Confidence in God's word is not strengthened by apologetics. Confidence is strengthened when the Spirit of God that takes the word of God and makes us willing to believe that the resurrection is true and order our lives accordingly. It is the Spirit of God that gives us confidence in the word of God so, what this means is that you must be in the word of God.

So, if you want to help someone believe in the resurrection of the Son of God it will not be done by a mystical, apologetic, experience disconnected from the revelation of the gospel nor will it be done by the

exclusive use of apologetics bring them to faith in Christ. We must take skeptics to the word of God. We must pray and ask God to open their hearts and minds to the word of God. We must listen to them and help them process real questions but we must ask God to open their hearts. Why? Because they must be born again in order to believe. The Spirit of God must open their eyes, ears, mind, and heart and this is what we call regeneration. We can lead a person to the free-Living Water of Jesus but only the Spirit of God can make them thirsty enough to drink. It is the word of God that will do the work as you witness. This leads me to my third point.

III. Jesus Commissioned His Church (vv. 46-48)

"[Jesus] said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,'⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.'"

Now Jesus takes the message of the Gospel and gives His church a mission. One of the amazing attributes of Luke's writings is that he told us about Risen King's Great Commission to His church and His ascension twice. He told us at the end of his Gospel and at the beginning of the book of Acts. He does this in order to connect the two books he wrote. Acts is really part two of his Gospel account.

But notice what Jesus said as He moved from Old Testament prophesy to the Great Commission. He grounded the Great Commission in the Old Testament and showed that the Christ must suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day and then this Gospel must be preached. Through the person and work of Christ, forgiveness of sin has finally been achieved and it is received when sinners turn from their sin and to Jesus Christ as their only hope.

But He wanted them to understand that the gospel is not simply a message of hope for the Jews but it is for the whole world. It is for the nations. Preaching must begin in Jerusalem and go around the world.

In v. 48, Jesus said, *"You are witnesses of these things."* The Greek word for *witness* meant that they were *eye witnesses* to the fulfillment of the Scripture. They had seen Jesus live a perfectly sinless life, suffer and die on the cross, and now they had seen Him rise from the dead. He had put their doubts to rest by filling their hearts and filled them with His peace. He had given them confidence in the word of God, and now He had commissioned His very young church to take the Gospel to the nations.

They were eye witnesses of the Word of God Incarnate fulfilling *the word of God written*. They saw Son of God go into the Garden of Gethsemane and drink the cup of God's wrath on the cross in order to restore our relationship with God that was broken in the Garden of Eden. Jesus suffered the curse of sin in the Garden so that we may return to the blessing of the presence of God in the Garden.

Church, there is only one-way men and women can be right with God. They must hear the message of the gospel and turn away from their sin of unbelief and to Jesus Christ by faith as their only hope for salvation.

The only way men, women, boys, and girls will hear this message is if we take the gospel to them. The gospel must be proclaimed in our living rooms and kitchens. When we drive in our cars, when we go to work. On the campuses of Ames, Ballard, Gilbert, and Nevada. At Iowa State and DMAAC. The gospel must move into our neighborhoods with backyard cookouts and neighborhood Bible studies. We must talk about the gospel in the hardware stores, grocery stores, and restaurants. We must see men and women raised up to plant churches in Iowa, the U.S., and overseas.

Now you may push back and say, “Well, I am not an eye witness to Jesus resurrection. How can I have that kind of peace and confidence and therefore be commissioned.” Jesus told His disciples and in particular, Thomas, who doubted Jesus, in John 20:29, *“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* Friends, the eyes of faith see Jesus and from that faith, the church is commissioned.

IV. Jesus Gave Power to His Church (v. 49)

“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

After Jesus commissioned His disciples, He commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until they have been given the promised Holy Spirit. They were not to go out and begin evangelizing in their own strength. They were to wait for the Spirit of God to come upon in power.

Just to be clear, their waiting on the Holy Spirit, that came on the *Day of Pentecost*, does not mean when you become a Christian that sometime later that you will receive the Holy Spirit as a *“second blessing.”*

What we will learn as we study Acts in Foundations this Fall that there are some passages of Scripture that are descriptive of what happened and some are prescriptive as to what we should do. This passage of waiting on the Holy Spirit is descriptive.

When you get saved you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. It is the Spirit of God that converted you. There is no *second blessing* except that you will be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Power flies in tandem with the gospel. Romans 1:16 says, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* The gospel is the power of God because the Spirit of God empowers the message of the gospel and the church as they proclaim the gospel. The gospel is a supernatural message. It is more than mere words.

That is why the Spirit of God can take the message of the gospel and create a church by the simple proclaiming of the word of God. It is the word of God, the message of the gospel that creates the people of God that form a church. The Spirit of Power has been moving in the hearts of the people of God since the Great Commission was given to plant churches all over the world.

Churches are not business franchises. They are supernatural institutions filled with God’s people who cling to the message of a Savior who was crucified for their sin and rose from the dead on the third day and is alive in Heaven at this moment. God’s people who believe this message are commissioned by Jesus to proclaim this good news that all sinners who repent and believe the gospel will be saved. Those who are born again gather in churches to worship the Risen Lord Jesus and are ambassadors of King Jesus.

V. Jesus Blessed His Church (vv. 50-53)

Verses 50-51: *“And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.*

⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

The scene of Jesus’ ascension into Heaven has changed dramatically since vv. 36-42. Luke does not give us the time frame. The other gospels tell us that Jesus did not ascend to the Father immediately after His resurrection. So, obviously there is a time period here that Luke did not give us but that was not his goal. His goal is the message of the gospel.

Never the less, now Jesus has taken His disciples to Bethany and He has perhaps taken them to the very spot on Mount of Olives where only six weeks earlier He had sweat drops of blood during His temptation and passion. They remember seeing the powers of Hell poured out on the Son of God but now, at the very place where Jesus endured the curse of sin, Jesus poured out the blessing of God on His disciples. The blessing of Jesus was giving His disciples Himself.

Verse 51 says that *he blessed them and departed physically* but before He departed Matthew's Gospel says that Jesus told His church, "*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Jesus was not leaving them alone, He would be with them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are never alone if you belong to Jesus. Church we are never alone in this world. It may seem like the powers of Hell are being poured out on the people of God in this world but Jesus has won the victory and we are never alone in this world and He will make sure we make it to the next.

Verses 52-53: "*And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.*"

These two verses are a continual theme for the church in the book of Acts. This is what we do every Sunday, we worship Jesus for all He has done and He fills us with joy as we return to our place of ministry and mission. Whether that be in our homes, dorm rooms, living rooms, classrooms, and places of work, we worship Jesus and are filled with joy over and over.

It is the Lord's Supper that regularly reminds us of the eucatastrophe of the resurrection of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is a joyful celebration of the sudden happy turn in Redemption's story whereby we are reminded that Jesus is alive. It is this truth that pierces our hearts and bring tears of joy and deep abiding worship of the Savior.