

Where it is Written, Luke 24:44-53

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Introduction

When people ask “What is the Covenant Church?” the best answer depends on what they already know. Some just need to be told that we are Christians, that we worship Jesus Christ as God. Some need to know we are Protestant. Some need to know we are evangelical, a loaded term these days. For the Covenant, evangelical means *people of good news*; the gospel of God’s love in Jesus Christ fills us with love for people, not hate, and with joy rather than anger. I heard how a United Methodist bishop once described Covenant people by saying, “They’re evangelicals, but they’re nice.” The answers get deeper. In the Covenant we affirm that the Bible is the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. One Covenant founder, a Swedish scholar named Paul Waldenström, put the question, “Where is it written?” as the test of doctrine.

We submit our doctrines to the Bible rather than to any confession or creed. In Luke 24 Jesus taught *a way of reading the Bible* that has been true for the whole Church ever since. We affirm the doctrine *that the Bible reveals God’s saving plan through Jesus Christ*, because that is what Christ himself taught his apostles. He showed them where *it is* written.

We read the Bible to be shown Jesus Christ: His mind, his will, the very heart of God.

Let us pray: Lord God, you have raised Jesus Christ to your throne and you are bringing all things into submission to him. As he pleads for us before you, open our hearts to receive your mercy and power, that we may be strengthened in faith and inspired for mission. Amen.

1. Opening the Mind

Verse 45 tells us that Jesus opened the minds of his followers, “so that they could

understand the scriptures,” that is, the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets of the Old Testament. But Luke does not list these scripture references for us. Are we left to dig them out, each reader on our own? Not at all. In fact, from chapter one Luke quotes the Old Testament, and that reflects the training the Apostles had received from Jesus himself. In Acts, the sequel to Luke by the same author, we are shown how the apostles first preached the Hebrew scriptures. In the same way the other gospels, all the New Testament letters, and Revelation, are steeped in the images, promises, and direct quotes of the Old Testament.

There are three tools that can help you grasp the breadth and depth of the presence of Old Testament texts in the New. First, is the Bible itself. Find a translation of the Bible with Study Notes, and then read it, not as a chore to check off a list, but as time spent with Jesus, learning from him directly. The more you read the more you will discern that each testament of the Bible explains the other in the light of Christ. Second, Church practice can help you see how many key Old Testament texts are understood in the light of Christ. The three-year lectionary of Bible readings puts together texts from both testaments that connect to each other. The lectionary is printed in the back of the blue Covenant hymnal, and many are found for free online. These are tools for your devotion to open your mind to the things of God.

Third, read in prayer. When Jesus opens the minds of his followers, it is because they are with Jesus and expect to learn from him. That should be our attitude. We do not have the same physical connection, because now Jesus is in heaven, but our connection is just as close, in the Spirit. When you sit down to the Bible, or attend a Sunday School or small group study, pray that Jesus would open your mind to teach you.

2. Christ to Suffer, to Rise, to Forgive

Luke does not leave any loose ends. Verse 46, **“Jesus told them, “This is what is**

written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.” When we come to the Bible, what Jesus would have us learn is not up to us to decide for ourselves. The Christian faith does not float around on the balloons of fads and opinions; it is anchored in the words of scripture, the very word of God. Jesus showed the apostles that what he has done and what has happened to him fulfills the plan of God revealed through the faith of Israel; its law and history, its hymns and poetry, and its prophecies that testify both to hope and to conscience.

I want us to test the weight of this anchor with examples. Here are five Old Testament texts that explain who Jesus Christ is and what he came to do, all of them written centuries before he was born, all of them quoted or referred to in the New Testament:

First, in the Law: Sacrificial blood was a seal of salvation from death. This is described in Exodus 12 in the story of the first Passover, and centuries later during observances of the Passover holiday Jesus Christ was put to death, shedding his blood to save sinners from death. Second, in the Psalms: Psalm 22 describes what happens to a crucified person. The second part of the Psalm is the vindication and victory of that sufferer. In Matthew 27 verse 46, Jesus quotes Psalm 22 verse 1. Other parts are quoted in John 19. Third, in the prophets: The closing verses of Isaiah 52 and all of Isaiah 53 describe a servant whose suffering for the sins of many people leads to his own death, and then to his triumph and exaltation. This is quoted in Acts 8 starting in verse 26. Fourth, also the prophets: Look to Daniel chapters 7, 9, and 12. These introduce the term “Son of Man” in the way that Jesus used it of himself. We find the angel Gabriel, who appears again in Luke 1. The resurrection at the end of history is described, with terms and images we find again in the Book of Revelation.

Fifth, also the prophets: Jesus states that his own return to life on the third day or after three days is shown in the Old Testament. The clue is found in Matthew 12 starting in verse 38,

where Jesus refers to the story of Jonah. After three days in the belly of a sea creature, the prophet Jonah emerged to preach judgment and repentance to the Gentiles. All of this together, Jesus states, was to be a sign repeated in the sight of the scribes and Pharisees.

3. The Gospel to be Preached

That Jesus showed his apostles where he can found in the Hebrew scriptures, is seen in the way the apostles faithfully wove those references into their early preaching, the letters they wrote, and the gospel accounts. The Jonah reference brings us to the promise that Jesus stated in Luke 24 verse 47, a promise that Jesus also couches in the Old Testament, which is, that **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** So here are three more Old Testament references.

The global reach of God's promises is described in the law, in Genesis 12 in which the offspring of Abraham will become a blessing to all nations. We also find this promise in Psalm 22, again, starting in verse 27: **All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.** Then Verse 31, **They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!**

In the prophets we turn to Isaiah 55 and the first part of chapter 56, which describe the inclusion of Gentiles into the promises of God. Isaiah 55 describes the specific basis for this relationship between God and all people; repentance and forgiveness.

So we read in verses five through seven: ⁵ **Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.”** ⁶ **Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.** ⁷ **Let the wicked forsake their ways and the**

unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

The gospel message, preached to the ends of the world and to the end of time, calls people to repent and to enter into the covenant of the forgiveness of sins. This gospel was prophesied, and this gospel was fulfilled, and its power is sustaining across thousands of years because the author of this great salvation is Jesus Christ, who reigns in heaven.

Yet the effort is made, in generation after generation, to alter the gospel, to change its demands, to cut it loose from faith in that same God of Israel before whom angels cover themselves in shame crying, **Holy, Holy, Holy**. The world wants its churches to offer up a feel-good God, remade in the image of a Santa Claus revealed to them in a Macy's Parade or a *Coca Cola* commercial. Many churches, even whole denominations, have complied, cutting themselves from their anchors in Biblical faith in order to be steered by the balloons of fad and opinion – a lot of hot air.

Faithful Bible study and worship does not produce new doctrine. The gospel of repentance and forgiveness does not change. Some think, in error, that 500 years ago the Reformation started because Martin Luther began something new. No: he recovered what had always been true, that the church was God's vessel to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins. That truth had been obscured by centuries of cultural practice and superstitions that the Bible neither commanded nor condoned. It is now our kindred Protestants who threaten to obscure this truth by adopting worldly customs and philosophies at the expense of the call to sinners who repent. We must celebrate the Reformation not because something happened 500 years ago, but because every generation must be presented with the truth, the good news.

Conclusion

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that those who repent and enter into the Covenant of the forgiveness of sins will inherit the eternal Kingdom and Glory of God. This gospel is anchored in the nation and faith of Israel; in its laws given by Moses, in its hymns and prayers recorded by the Psalmists, and in its sermons of promise and justice delivered by the prophets. We believe it because Jesus Christ taught it, showing his followers that the Old Testament bore witness to him, and proving it by rising from the dead.

When it is read in the way Jesus taught it to be read, the Bible is the perfect rule for faith. We read the Bible to be shown Jesus Christ, his mind, his will, the very heart of God. As we call sinners to repentance and forgiveness, we live out God's heart to our world. Amen.