



Commissions

Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim the gospel.

LUKE 24:36-49

Military personnel do not debate orders to report for duty or to undertake a mission. They carry out their commission; that's what they signed up to do. Christians also have a commission—a Great Commission. After the resurrection and before ascending again to heaven, Jesus gave His followers their marching orders—to take the good news of salvation to all the world. He wants all people to know Him and how they can be saved through Him.

Do you view your daily activities as a commission, duty, or something else? How do these duties compare to the commission of carrying the gospel to others?

UNDERSTAND THE **CONTEXT**

LUKE 24:36-53

Luke wrote his Gospel to inspire his audience to believe with certainty what they had been taught about Jesus (1:3-4). He wrote to expose the gospel of grace—that both Jews and Gentiles can share in the kingdom of God through faith in Christ.

In this week’s Bible passage, Jesus appeared to His disciples once again. This account follows Jesus’ appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (24:13-32). The two who encountered Jesus on the road returned “that very hour” (v. 33) and excitedly shared with the others the news of their visit with Jesus. As the larger group of disciples met behind closed doors out of fear (John 20:19), Jesus suddenly and unexpectedly stood in their midst (Luke 24:36).

This account of Jesus’ appearance to His followers emphasizes the necessity of His death and resurrection taking place in fulfillment of God’s plan. It also stresses the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and presence with His followers. Moreover, as Jesus commissioned this small band of disciples for a world-wide mission, He promised the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to empower them for such a task.

Salvation comes with a joyous invitation to enter the kingdom of God. As we enter the kingdom, God commissions us to be ambassadors for that kingdom. Therefore, Christians not only are delivered from the darkness of sin but also are sent out to be lights in a dark world. We are saved to be sent. We are cleansed and then commissioned. The great thing is, Jesus does not send us out alone. His presence not only gives us courage but also empowers us for the task.

Read Luke 24:36-49, noting the progression in the story. How did Jesus’ appearance and pointing to Scripture give the disciples’ confidence for their future task?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ASSURES (LUKE 24:36-43)

³⁶ As they were saying these things, he himself stood in their midst. He said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷ But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ “Why are you troubled?” he asked them. “And why do doubts arise in your hearts?” ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself! Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” ⁴⁰ Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ But while they still were amazed and in disbelief because of their joy, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” ⁴² So they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

VERSES 36-37

Can you envision being in the room and hearing the reports of Jesus’ return from the dead? Imagine the uncertainty, doubt, and questions. Even as the momentum of His appearances were stacking up, the idea that Jesus was alive was hard to accept. As the Emmaus disciples returned to Jerusalem and shared with the other Christians their encounter with the risen Christ, Jesus ***stood in their midst***.

In John 20:26 we are given an extra detail, namely, that they were in the room with the doors locked because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. The door was locked, yet Jesus appeared among them. It’s no wonder they were afraid. It makes logical sense that many of them ***thought they were seeing a ghost***. They needed to hear His words, ***Peace to you***. These very words changed the entire mood of the gathering from fear to faith.

VERSES 38-40

Jesus invited them to confirm once and for all that what had been reported was true. His remarks suggest some still doubted, so He allowed them to ***look at*** His ***hands*** and ***feet***, where the scars of His crucifixion remained, and to ***touch*** Him. Ghosts do not have physical bodies. Moreover, His scars would have further solidified His identity. This was the crucified Jesus with the marks of nails in His hands to prove His identity.

**What is the significance of Jesus' being physically resurrected?
How does Him being physically resurrected impact how we view our
own resurrection?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Review Romans 8:11, Philippians 3:21, 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Consider how Jesus' bodily resurrection gives believers hope. How does Jesus' bodily resurrection offer hope for Christians?

VERSES 41-43

The disciples were ***amazed and in disbelief because of their joy.*** This was too good to be true! The next thing Jesus did was ask for something ***to eat.*** The main reason Jesus asked for food wasn't to fulfill His physical hunger but to demonstrate His physical presence. Jesus took the food and ***ate in their presence.***

The meal indicates further that Jesus was not an apparition but a physical being. This was not a mere "spiritual resurrection." Once again, He revealed Himself at a table as fellowship took place over a meal, which continued Luke's theme of Jesus teaching over a meal.

Jesus' presence would have provided important assurance to the believers in the room. The recent events would have left them startled, but His presence calmed their hearts. Those in the room

could forever vouch for the fact that this post-resurrection appearance was a real encounter with an actual person who had eaten and shown Himself to be alive.

What assurances might a person desire or need to accept the resurrection of Jesus?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion (Matt. 28:9).

OPENS (LUKE 24:44-46)

⁴⁴ He told 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, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day,

VERSE 44

Jesus first gave the disciples assurance that He had indeed risen from the dead. Then He turned their attention to His fulfillment of the Scriptures. The phrase ***while I was still with you*** sounds unusual since He was speaking with them at the time. Jesus was talking about prior to the crucifixion. Luke recorded at least three of those occasions. After Peter acknowledged Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus warned He would be rejected and suffer before rising the third day (Luke 9:21-22). After casting a demon out of a child, Jesus told the disciples He would be betrayed (9:44-45). As Jesus led His followers toward Jerusalem that final time, He described how the prophets wrote in detail about His being mocked, insulted, spit on, flogged, and killed before rising on the third day (18:31-34).

Jesus reminded them once more of what was written about Him *in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms*. Without His death and resurrection, centuries of prophetic utterance would be in vain. More importantly, without His death and resurrection, Jesus' life would have been a lie, and we would remain in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). This threefold designation is shorthand for the entirety of the Old Testament. Jesus was reminding the disciples that His cross and resurrection were part of God's plan for redemptive history, as revealed in the Scriptures.

How do fulfilled prophecies concerning Christ provide us with assurance in the providential plans of God?

VERSES 45-46

It is fascinating to consider how chapter 24 progresses. First, the hearts of the two followers traveling to Emmaus burned within them (vv. 18-29), then their eyes were opened (vv. 30-35), and finally the minds of the larger group, including those two men, were opened (vv. 36-49).

Jesus *opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*. What does that mean? He was making it clear that He is at the center of all the promises of the Old Testament. Since Jesus is the central subject of the Old Testament, its conclusion and fulfillment are found in Him. Christ is the heir and mediator of the promise made to Abraham (Gal. 3:16). Jesus fulfills the Law of Moses as the only righteous one (Rom. 3:20-22; 5:19; 8:3). He is the promised Davidic King who will forever reign on the throne (Acts 13:22-23; Rev. 22:16). Jesus Christ is One the prophets spoke of, promising a new covenant between God and man (Jer. 31:31-34).

How might we explain the difference between hearts burning, eyes being opened, and minds being opened? Do these happen for all believers in the order as they did here?

This threefold reference to the Old Testament outlines the promised Christ. Jesus, the Messiah, was to **suffer** (Ps. 22; 69; Isa. 52:13-53:12) and **rise from the dead the third day** (Ps. 16:8-10; 110:1), and this good news would be **proclaimed** by His disciples to the nations (Isa. 40:3-5; Amos 9:12). When Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, they realized that a crucified and raised Messiah was not an adjustment in God's plan but was God's plan all along.

There need no longer be an obstacle between humanity and God because of sin. As we turn to God through Jesus, the offer of forgiveness is by God's grace, accomplished by the cross. God will cancel the debt of sin that Jesus paid. This has always been God's plan, as Jesus has demonstrated by pointing to the Old Testament. For this reason, believers can know that God has an eternal plan to redeem His creation. God was keeping His word to His people.

SENDS (LUKE 24:47-49)

⁴⁷ and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."

VERSE 47

Now that Jesus had shown His disciples that He suffered and rose from the dead for the salvation of all who will believe, He sent them to proclaim that message to others. They couldn't remain behind closed doors. They must go out to tell others that He is risen and forgiveness is available through Him. This is why He sent them out: to proclaim His name **to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem**.

Notice three things about their commission. First, they would proclaim **repentance**. The word *repent* means a change of mind that results in a change of purpose, attitude, and behavior. It begins with a new view of God and oneself. We understand we have sinned against a Holy God and stand condemned (John 3:18). We desperately need **forgiveness of sins**.

Second, forgiveness would be proclaimed **in his name**. "There is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If Jesus had remained in the tomb, His name would have

been forgotten in the halls of history. He would have been relegated to the legends of dead prophets. Only through Jesus' victory over death and hell could He have a name that makes the forgiveness of sins possible.

Jesus' followers must take the gospel to people of every nation.

Third, this good news is so vital that it must be proclaimed *to all the nations*. The Jews had misunderstood their purpose. They thought God's kingdom was exclusively theirs. In cleansing the temple, Jesus declared that God's house was intended for all people (Isa. 56:7; Mark 11:17). His disciples would start **at Jerusalem**. Salvation would first be offered to the Jews as God's special people and then to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). Jesus' followers must take the gospel to people of every nation (Matt. 28:19-20).

VERSES 48-49

We often wonder how a small band of fragile disciples was able to turn the world upside down. The task's scope and difficulty seems impossible. But God had given them authority and power from above, what Jesus called being **empowered from on high**. The church's task is difficult; special ability is needed to accomplish it. It is not to be carried out in mere human strength.

Though Luke was concluding his Gospel account, we know that the story was just beginning. As God's plan moved forward, the disciples were a major part of its advance. Jesus told these fearful disciples to **stay in the city** of Jerusalem until they were empowered by the Spirit, a promise that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13).

This promise and this power is for us today as well. We are witnesses in a different sense than these original disciples. They testified to what they saw; we bear witness to their testimony and to our experience with Christ through salvation. But the commission remains the same.

How does this passage give us courage to fulfill the responsibility of sharing Jesus with others?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can be assured of Jesus' physical resurrection.
- Believers can know that God has an eternal plan to redeem His creation.
- Believers are sent to tell all people about the forgiveness found in Jesus.

**What are some ways you can assure people of Jesus' resurrection?
Who do you know who could use some assurance?**

Reflect on Luke 24:48, focusing on the role you play in God's redemptive plan. Consider how each word relates to you. Memorize this verse.

As a group, identify practical ways that you can help your church in taking the gospel to the nations. What actions need to be taken in the next week to help this happen?

PRAYER NEEDS

The Practice of Roman Crucifixion



By R. D. Fowler

Crucifixion was the most cruel, abominable, inhumane form of execution man ever conceived. By design, crucifixion inflicted on the condemned person the harshest and greatest amount of suffering imaginable—prior to his death. It also exposed the person to the greatest possible degree of indignity after his death.

History

The precursor to crucifixion was impalement. The Greek word translated “cross” in the New Testament, *stauros*, originally referred to a pointed wooden stake or pole firmly fixed in the ground. Walls of these stakes formed protective palisade fortifications around settlements. Eastern countries, particularly Assyria, developed the practice of publicly displaying the corpses or heads of criminals, traitors, and enemies on these walls as a means of humiliation and intimidation.¹ This practice led to people using the stakes themselves as a means of torture and execution—by impaling offenders on the stake and leaving them to die.

History does not indicate when impalement ceased and crucifixion began, but historians generally agree that crucifixion

began among the Persians.² The Romans likely adopted it from the Carthaginians.³ Many ancient texts refer to both impalement and crucifixion but often fail to distinguish between the two and provide little descriptive detail of crucifixion.

The Greeks and Romans used crucifixion well before the time of Christ. Alexander the Great used it in the fourth century BC. As early as 250 BC the Romans were crucifying those they considered deserving. The ancient Romans generally thought of crucifixion as “the slave’s punishment.” Over time, however, the Romans used it for slaves, thieves, insurgents, and enemies of the Empire in general.

By the first century AD, Rome used crucifixion extensively in the pacification of Judea. Romans also used it throughout the Empire as a means of maintaining order and suppressing insurrection. While crucifixion was primarily limited to non-citizens, Roman citizens were not totally free from its terrible shadow. In certain cases, particularly treason, Caesar would issue an edict allowing authorities to crucify even Roman citizens.

Crucifixion took place in public areas outside the city walls—where the bodies were

clearly visible. Crucifixion thus punished offenders and intimidated one’s enemies. Bodies on crosses were a common sight in the first century AD. The excessive usage along with its barbaric nature and the religious idea of being cursed made crucifixion particularly offensive to the Jews (see Deut. 21:22-23).

Method

Martin Hengel, professor of New Testament and early Judaism, explained, “crucifixion was a punishment in which the caprice and sadism of the executioners was given full rein.”⁴ Scourging was the first brutal act related to crucifixion. Roman citizens, though, were exempt from this part of the punishment. The condemned person was stripped of clothing, tied to a post, and beaten with the dreaded Roman flagellum, a whip consisting of leather straps embedded with metal, bone, or rock. Scourging was designed to shred flesh, in some cases exposing both bones and internal organs. Roman law, unlike Jewish law, set no limits on the number of lashes a person could receive. The severity of the scourging was completely at the discretion of the person administering it. In some cases, the scourging caused

death; in others, it expedited death. In most cases, though, the scourging merely increased the agony the condemned person experienced on the cross.

Following scourging, the condemned person was clothed and then forced to carry the horizontal beam (Latin, *patibulum*) to the crucifixion site.⁵ Typically the Romans hung a sign around the criminal's neck, specifying his offense. At the crucifixion site the person was again stripped of their clothing and placed on the cross. The sign was then placed on the cross. Scripture does not mention Jesus wearing the sign Pilate made; however, custom dictated that He likely did.

Upon arrival at the site, the authorities would secure the person to the cross using ropes, nails—or both. We know Jesus was nailed to His cross. At this point in the process, details vary about how the actual crucifixion took place. Some believe the person was secured to the cross as it lay on the ground; the entire cross was then lifted up and dropped into a hole prepared for it. Others suggest the vertical beam (the *stipes*) was already in the ground; soldiers attached the person to the *patibulum* and hoisted both up the

vertical beam.

After death, bodies were, as a rule, left on the cross to be exposed to the elements and to decay. We know from Scripture this was not the case with Jesus.

This barbaric punishment method continued until the fourth century. Emperor Constantine, who had converted to Christianity, abolished crucifixion during the later years of his reign. While many details are unclear, one detail is indisputable; crucifixion brought extreme suffering. The tremendous loss of blood, the excruciating pain from the nails, the stretched position, and the exposure to the elements all contributed to extreme suffering prior to death.⁶

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1. The Philistines did this with King Saul's body (1 Sam. 31:8-15).
2. See D. G. Burke, "Cross" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 828.
3. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 23. Many consider Hengel's book to be the most authoritative on the subject.
4. *Ibid.*, 25.
5. Images often depict Jesus carrying the entire cross; however, the weight of both beams would have been close to 300 pounds, making this highly unlikely. The cross beam itself was quite heavy; carrying it would have been difficult, especially for someone who had been scourged (see Matt. 27:32).
6. For a more detailed description of crucifixion, including a medical explanation of Jesus' suffering and death, see William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* vol. 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986):1455-63.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**

JOB; ECCLESIASTES

- Session 1* **Faith Tested** • Job 1:8-22
- Session 2* **Hope Defined** • Job 14:1-14
- Session 3* **Redemption Found** • Job 19:19-29
- Session 4* **Wisdom Gained** • Job 28:12-28
- Session 5* **Justice Sought** • Job 36:8-23
- Session 6* **Power Displayed** • Job 40:1-14
- Session 7* **Dependence Declared** • Job 42:1-11
- Session 8* **What's the Use?** • Ecclesiastes 2:12-26
- Session 9* **What Time Is It?** • Ecclesiastes 3:1-15
- Session 10* **Why Listen?** • Ecclesiastes 4:13-5:7
- Session 11* **Where Is the Balance?** • Ecclesiastes 7:11-22
- Session 12* **Facing Death?** • Ecclesiastes 9:1-10
- Session 13* **What Is Life About?** • Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

JOB/EE