

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

July 19-25, 2020

Sermon Series: Writing a Comeback Story

Week Two: "Wait! It Gets Better!"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

O God, prepare us, through the active presence of Your Spirit, to come before You worthily, and to ask of You rightly. Enlighten our understanding, purify our every desire, awaken our wills to obedience to Your Word, and direct this time of study to the glory of Your name, for the enduring good of us Your children. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

As we return to worship in person, it's not a question of whether the church has survived the several months, but rather, how strong God has made us in our time apart.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds us that in God, nothing is hopeless. There is always a good ending to any story written with Christ at the center.

Sunday Scripture Reading: Luke 24:36-49 (A group member should read the passages aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

Who was having a conversation when Jesus suddenly appeared among them? You will need to look back to the previous story to find out. (24:36; 24:13; 24:33)

What did the disciples think they were seeing? (24:37)

How does Jesus first provide evidence that they were wrong about what they thought they were seeing? (24:38-40)

What does Jesus do next to provide evidence of His bodily nature? (24:41-43)

What part of Jesus' teaching does He remind the disciples about? (24:44)

How do the disciples come to understand the Scriptures? (24:45)

What do the Scriptures say will happen to the Christ, according to Jesus? (24:46)

What will be preached after these things happen, and to whom? (24:47)

How are the disciples involved in all this? (24:48)

What are Jesus' final promise and command? (24:49)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We probably wonder why Jesus decided to come and go in such supernatural ways after the resurrection!

We might also wonder why the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost – was belief in ghosts common at that time? And, how is a resurrected body the same, or different, in appearance than a ghost?

We might even wonder if the resurrected Jesus was actually hungry, or just wanted to demonstrate that He had a body by eating fish!

We probably wonder if Jesus asked them to look at His hands and feet because they still showed the scars of crucifixion, even though Luke doesn't say they do (like John does in his Gospel).

We might wonder if the disciples' minds were "closed" before the resurrection, since it says Jesus "opened their minds." What did they understand after Jesus talked to them now, that they didn't before?

We probably also wonder if there is a specific place in the Old Testament where these prophecies about the Christ that Jesus refers to are written.

We might wonder what, exactly, "the Father has promised."

Finally, we might wonder why it was so important to Jesus that the disciples stay in the city until receiving power from God.

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Acts 1:1; Acts 1:6-11; Luke 10:5; Luke 2:14; Luke 7:50; Luke 19:38; Judges 6:23; Exodus 19:16; Luke 24:5; 1 Samuel 28:13-14; John 20:20-27; 2 Samuel 5:1

Remember that Luke wrote not only the Gospel of Luke, but also the book of Acts. Take a look at Acts 1:1 – Luke writes that "in my former book" (referring to the Gospel of Luke), "I wrote about all that Jesus

began to do and teach.” Luke brings his “former book” to a close first, with this story of a final appearance of Jesus to His disciples, and second, with the story of Jesus’ ascension, which Luke will describe more fully in Acts 1:6-11. In sharing this final resurrection appearance story, Luke also provides a smooth transition into the book of Acts where we see the disciples, who Jesus calls “witnesses of these things” in Luke 24:48, being “clothed with power,” as Jesus describes the coming of the Holy Spirit in Luke 24:49. In this way, Luke demonstrates how the disciples become the successors of Jesus’ prophetic teaching – the story he will tell in the book of Acts.

Jesus’ first words in this appearance to the disciples are “Peace be with you.” This is a very traditional Jewish greeting - “Shalom.” But it is also fascinating to realize that Jesus enters the room in the same way He had taught the disciples to enter houses they would visit during their evangelism! In Luke 10:5, Jesus tells them, “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house,’” and now, when Jesus first enters the upper room to bring the gathered disciples the good news of His resurrection, He models this behavior, by saying “Peace to you”! We should also note that throughout his Gospel, Luke has portrayed Jesus as the bringer of peace – see 2:14, 7:50, and 19:38, for example. The greeting “Shalom,” or “Peace,” also has a long Biblical history of being spoken by God to alleviate fears after someone has an encounter with God that has resulted in fear (see Judges 6:23, where God says to Gideon, “Peace! Do not be afraid!”)

This is especially notable given the fact that the disciples’ response is one of being “startled” and “frightened.” The same Greek words are used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when the people encounter God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16) and when the women first encounter the empty tomb (Luke 24:5). This time, though, Luke says the reason for their fear is that they think they are seeing a ghost! Belief in ghosts was common in ancient times, and it was commonly believed that ghosts had the appearance of human beings (see 1 Samuel 28:13-14, for example). It was also widely believed that people could not be “touched” by ghosts – physical touch could be used as reassurance that someone was NOT a ghost, and there are ancient Greek stories of the return of people who had been long missing and assumed dead who reach out to touch people to prove they are not dead! This is why Jesus asks the disciples to touch Him – Jesus has a resurrected, physical body that can be touched – He is “flesh and bones”!

It is interesting that Luke does not make specific mention of the scars on Jesus’ hands and feet the way John does in his telling of a resurrection appearance to the disciples (see John 20:20-27). Perhaps this is implied in Luke when Jesus tells the disciples to look at his hands and feet, or perhaps, the invitation to see and to touch Jesus’ hands and feet serve only to demonstrate the physical reality of Jesus’ body, without necessarily implying the visible marks of crucifixion, since Luke doesn’t mention them specifically. It is also interesting that the phrase Jesus uses, “flesh and bones” was a common Jewish idiom that expressed not only the idea of being human in general, but also of having close kinship relations (see 2 Samuel 5:1, where the tribes of Israel tell King David, “we are your own flesh and bones” [although some translations put this in the modern idiom “flesh and blood,” the Hebrew and Greek are “flesh and bone”]). In effect, Jesus is saying, “Look closely – I’m still one of you”! He even invites them to share a meal with Him, as they had done so many times in the past. Jesus is emphasizing the reality of His presence with the disciples, a presence that is simultaneously the same, and yet vastly different, from His previous presence among them. This is not merely a resuscitation, but a resurrection. In the previous story, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus was not recognized by two of His followers, and He is able

to appear suddenly in their midst – clearly not something a resuscitated human could do! And yet, Jesus emphasizes His physicality – his resurrected body does indeed have physical form!

As the story comes to a conclusion, it moves to the theme of prophecy and its fulfillment. Jesus proclaims that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (that is, our entire Old Testament) must be fulfilled. In saying this, the resurrected Jesus affirms at least three things – first, the Old Testament does speak of Jesus; second, His ministry, death, and resurrection are all “necessary;” and third, the completion of these “necessary” events somehow “fulfill” the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures. Through His teaching, Jesus empowers the disciples to see these truths.

Think for a moment about how, then, this story sets the stage for the church’s future experience of Jesus. From now on, Jesus’ disciples will experience His presence most intimately through the sharing of a fellowship meal (Holy Communion), as they read the Scriptures that speak of Him (the Old Testament), and as they remember the words He spoke (later recorded in the New Testament). It is Jesus Himself who “opens the minds” of His disciples to enable them to interpret Scripture properly. And this is a prerequisite if His followers are to do what Jesus asks them to do next – to go into the world as “witnesses of these things,” preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations. Jesus’ final words in Luke’s Gospel are the promise of “power from on high” that will empower this kind of preaching. Even though Jesus ascends into heaven, even though He is no longer present among His disciples in the same way, He is still accessible to them through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This gift, too, is a promise full of Old Testament imagery and meaning. Joshua inherited the Spirit of the Lord from Moses and was able to lead the people into the Promised Land even though Moses could not (Deuteronomy 34:9). Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of the Spirit, and when Elijah ascended into heaven, Elisha took on his mantle and immediately performed even greater acts than his predecessor (2 Kings 2:14-22). Jesus promises His followers that they, too, will inherit the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to do “even greater things” than He Himself did (John 14:12). Luke’s follow-up in the book of Acts shows Jesus’ followers doing exactly that – and that is our legacy. The promise of the Holy Spirit extends to us as well.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

Are there places in your life where you need the peace that Jesus is offering?

Where do you feel the presence of Jesus most fully – in Holy Communion, in studying His word, or in fellowship with other followers? Are you spiritually attuned to sensing His presence in other places?

Do you have a personal sense of being sent into the world as a “witness of these things”?

How is the reality of being “clothed with power from on high” being experienced in your life?

Are there things you can point to in your own life that you would claim can only be attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit?

How can the hope of the resurrection help you to be a source of hope for others who are walking in darkness?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, remind us today of the great hope of eternal life which You have set before us. We feel within our hearts a longing for the light that shines in the darkness – a longing for You. We give You thanks for the gift of Jesus and for the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be Your witnesses. We pray that You would be our light today and always. Amen.