

*He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

*<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

*<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:44-53)*

### Everything Must Be Fulfilled

Are you a big planner? For instance, when you go on vacation, how detailed are your plans? My father-in-law likes to nail down every possible detail, while I'm much more of a "big picture" guy. I like have some "must see" and "must do" things picked out. But I'm OK with leaving some decisions until we get there. Now, when it comes to vacations, there's probably room for both philosophies. But there are things in life where planning is essential. If you're going to have surgery, the doctor should have a careful plan in mind. When the military heads overseas to help out with some natural disaster, they plan where they're going to land and what they're going to try to accomplish, in as much detail as they can. Those plans matter, because getting them wrong can mean life or death. Leaving some part of the plan undone can mean that someone doesn't make it home. Jesus talks to us tonight about God's plan. Of course, it was far more important than any vacation plan. It was his plan to get us to heaven. Ascension is a holiday that focuses on where God's plan was going and how successful it has to be. There simply is no room for failure. As Jesus says to us this evening, when it comes to God's plan, **everything must be fulfilled.**

#### I.

Jesus spoke the words in the first part of our text on the night of the first Easter, which was exactly as long before his ascension as our Easter celebration was before tonight – forty days. The disciples' grief had just turned to joy. Jesus was alive. It wasn't just a rumor. They were seeing him with their own eyes. Jesus made a point that tied together everything that had already happened and everything that God still planned to do. He said that **everything must be fulfilled. That's why he came.**

On that night, Jesus actually had to prove to them that he was physically alive. When they saw him, they thought he was a ghost. So Jesus let them touch him and he ate something in their presence to show that he had a real, physical body. While they were looking on in amazement, he said, **"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."** "Right here, right now, you're seeing what I kept telling you was going to happen." Again and again, Jesus had told them that he was going to die and rise in Jerusalem. He emphasizes that this is exactly what the plan was.

And they had the plan. It was written in the Old Testament. Today, we often divide the books of the Old Testament into historical and poetic and prophetic books. The Jews used a different system. They usually divided the Old Testament into the books of Moses, the prophets and the writings, which began with the psalms. What Jesus was saying here was that the whole Old Testament was the word of God. It spoke about him and because it was the word of God, it had to come true. God's power stands behind it and it cannot fail. But he was also saying that God decided what to put into that word. God had revealed his plan there.

The plan had to come true, because that was the only way for us to reach eternal life. Jesus went to spell out it: **"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."** Do you see the two parts to God's plan? Part one was the life and death and life again of Jesus. Before God set the plan in motion, Jesus was in heaven. He was the Son of God and the co-ruler of the universe. But once God's plan reached the point of fulfillment, he entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and took on human flesh

for us. He always was God. But he became one of us so that he could live and die in our place. The plan was for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and die there. But the plan did not end with his death. On that very Easter, his soul returned to his body and he rose from the dead.

That plan was recorded in the Old Testament. It was not a secret plan. It was the one plan of salvation for all people and only by trusting in Christ does anyone reach heaven. So God told his Old Testament people the plan. Jesus spent three years telling his disciples the plan. And then he set part two of the plan in motion: repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in Jesus' name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

That's the part of the plan that we're living today. God promised part two in the Old Testament. Numerous Old Testament passages promise that the Gentiles will come to faith in Christ. One of my favorites is in Isaiah where God tells his Son that it's too small a thing for him just to save Israel. He promised to make him a light for the nations and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. God always planned for the gospel to go out into the world. On the first Easter, Jesus made those disciples eye witnesses that the plan was going forward, just as God had promised. He opened their minds so that they could understand all that they Holy Spirit had said in the Old Testament. And he showed them his risen body. He let them touch it and proved it was real and then he promised them the power of the Holy Spirit so they could go out and fulfill part two.

We are here tonight because both parts of that plan must be fulfilled. God will not stop until the gospel has gone forth into all the world. Jesus' ascension promises us that. It promises us that he is working through that message to bring in all those who are elected to faith. He's working to give us hope in a world where so much darkness reigns. He's working to enable us to trust when so many people today simply don't believe that God answers prayers or in any real way works in our lives. He's working to give us peace when we are tormented by our own sin and guilt. He's working to reach out to all nations with the gospel of life.

You and I have that good news. Jesus lives, so we are going to live forever. Jesus lives, so all our sin is wiped away and we are forgiven. Jesus lives, and he guides us in a life of serving him. Jesus lives, and he guards us and cares for us and brings us home. All that is the plan God conceived of before he ever said, "Let there be light." And that plan cannot be stopped.

## II.

That's really the point that ties the two parts of our reading together. It begins on Easter evening. But the last few verses jump forward more than a month, to the day of Jesus' ascension. Here, Luke gives us just a very brief description of that event. In the reading from Acts, he tells it in much more detail. But it was the same event. Jesus led his disciples out of Jerusalem and then he physically rose up into the air and was covered by a cloud. He disappeared from physical sight. **Everything planned must be fulfilled. That's why Jesus left.**

Why didn't he stay? His disciples clearly thought that he might. And wouldn't he be a better preacher and teacher than guys like me? Wouldn't he be a better pastor than even your most favorite pastor ever? Of course he would. But thinking like that shows that we aren't looking at it the way God did. First of all, Jesus is your pastor and teacher. Whatever good I or any teacher here at Peace ever does comes through the gospel we teach and preach. Jesus promises that whenever anyone shares his gospel message, he is working. So the truth is, you don't have a real difference in the power. Jesus cares for you through the ministry, just as if he were the one who stood up here or in the classrooms of our schools or in our missions.

But God chose to do that work through simple, humble things like preaching and teaching because his plan was for repentance and forgiveness to be proclaimed throughout the world. The Church is not supposed to be about entertainment or about power or influence in our society. Our mission is to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins. We don't win arguments. We testify that all of us are sinners. We all deserve God's punishment in hell forever. We call all people to confess their guilt before God. And we announce the grace of God to all of them. Jesus died. Jesus rose. We are free! Jesus ascended into heaven to work through that proclamation. When he returns, we're going to see his glory and power with our own eyes. But until that day comes, God chooses to make it all about faith, all about trusting what he says. We don't offer proof. We offer the gospel and we let the power of God work in hearts and convince unbelievers to believe. God gives us faith.

But Jesus did give us witnesses. Those eleven men who gathered that day waited until the day of Pentecost and then they went out and proclaimed Christ to the world they knew. God inspired some of them to write what they heard and he gave us the New Testament to go with the Old so we will always have his witnesses to what really happened. That testimony is true. We carry it with us wherever we go. We carry

Jesus with us, wherever we go. Our Lord is seated at the right hand of God. He ascended to rule over all things for our good. But because he is the Son of God, he is also with us always, to the very end of the age. The ruler of heaven and earth will never leave us or forsake us.

He went to heaven to prepare a place of us. Soon, he will return and take us to be with him. That's what the angels promised. When the disciples were standing there, staring up into heaven, amazed at what Jesus had just done, two angels appeared and promised that this same Jesus would return just as they had seen him go. When the time is right, the whole world will look up and see our Savior coming. Until that day, we are his witnesses. We teach. We preach. We share. We confess. The Holy Spirit works through our message to bring in all those God has chosen to believe. That is his plan for the whole world. And that is his plan for you and me. At just the right moment, God brought that testimony to us. For some of us, it happened so long ago we don't even remember it. If you're like me, you don't remember what it was like to be an unbeliever. But for some of us, that good news about Christ is a more recent event. You can remember the day God brought that gospel to you and the person he used to bring it. You can remember the change he made and you give glory to God for it.

However and whenever it came to you, God chose you before the world began. God sent his Son at just the right moment to live and die and rise again so that your sins are gone. God sent someone – a mother who sang, “Jesus loves me” and read Bible stories to you, a pastor who baptized you, a friend who told you what Jesus had done – and God reached into your heart and made you his. He gave you faith. Now, you are part of God's great movement that is sweeping the world with the good news. You are his witnesses. He speaks through you. And in his time and in his way, he will work through you and me and bring that message to all nations. All his elect will come to faith. And then Jesus will fulfill the last step of God's plan and return to judge the world. And we will live with him in joy forever. That's part of God's plan too. All that God planned must be fulfilled. Trust in him to make happen. Amen.