



In His Words

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We're looking at Jesus's instructions for mission at the end of each Gospel. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus challenges us to consider what really matters with his body, his words, and his mission.

My Body

In this chapter, we drop down in a flurry of resurrection appearances. Jesus has appeared to the women at the tomb, to Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus, and here, Jesus suddenly appears to the Eleven apostles in a locked room full of his disciples. They can't believe their eyes. When Jesus appears to his closest friends, they think he's a ghost. Doubts, Jesus says, arise in their hearts. The word is ascend. When confronted with a risen Christ, what climbs the ladder of the soul, governs their beliefs? Doubt. Perhaps you can identify? Resurrection is a difficult thing to believe because we've never seen it. We say things like, if God would appear in front of me, then I'd believe. If he showed up and spoke to me, then I'd give, sacrifice, serve, really commit. We make the mistake that seeing is believing. That's clearly not the case for them. Why? There's something stronger than sight at work. *Their cultural belief is stronger than reality.* Their mental maps don't correspond with the territory in front of them. There's quite a bit of science around this right now. One expert says the best example of this disjunction between our mental maps and reality is online dating. You read someone's profile, hobbies and interests (the map), then show up for the date (the territory), only to discover the map wasn't a reliable guide to the territory. They're nothing like their profile! The map needs to be adjusted to reflect the *actual* territory. The disciples' mental map only allowed for spirits, not physically resurrected people. The only feature on their maps that allowed for a resurrection was one big resurrection at the end of time (Mk 12:23), not here in the middle of history. *Their cultural belief is stronger than reality;* their mental maps are off. How do our maps need to be adjusted to territory in front of *us*? What cultural beliefs are so strong they discredit reality? In a 2016 survey, Americans were asked if they'd had a mystical experience where they connected to some infinity. 84% said *they had* such an experience *but most said there's a social taboo on speaking about it.* Broad cultural disbelief in affected what they know to be

true. Many of us embrace this bias *against the risen Christ*, refusing to go all out for God's mission. Why? What cultural beliefs do we hold to so tightly they displace reality? One belief is: ***I am what people think of me***. When I was in graduate school and a group of students began talking about how great a book was I hadn't read, I'd occasionally find myself nodding my head in the discussion, even though I hadn't read it. Someone say, you've read so and so right? To which I said, yes, *but I hadn't*. Why lie? I believed, deep down, *I am what people think of me*. And the more you do this, the more you move away from the reality of the resurrection, and you'll find yourself easily hurt by snubs, crushed by critiques. Embracing the cultural myth *you are what people think of you*, keeps you from living in the reality of the resurrection, from embracing what the risen Christ thinks of you. He says, listen I know you better than anyone else, and I *still* died and rose for you. Put your belief in me, and I'll accept you and love you even if you haven't read the book, didn't keep the baby, didn't stay married, didn't nail it morally. Resurrection reality trumps our broken maps. Another cultural belief: ***I am what I accomplish***. If I crush it at work, if I reach this goal, if I succeed, then I'm somebody. If I get my kids to change, if I close this deal, if I can put my past behind me, then I'm somebody. The risen Christ says, no you are not what you've accomplished but what I accomplished—a new creation *in Christ Jesus!* You have an outside source of worth that has broken into this world through what Jesus Christ has accomplished. His resurrection is your resurrection. But, its not enough for him to just be on your map; he's gotta show up in the details of your life, your thoughts, your actions, your money. If you struggle with this, I want you to notice something. When the disciples doubt, Jesus doesn't say What?! Shame on you. No, he says, Peace be with you. Not I told you guys about this like forty times. He's gracious. **But** he also doesn't say, don't worry your life will be fine without embracing me. No, he says *Touch me and see*. You've got to put your hands on him. He says, in effect, *I'm your only shot a peace*. We've got to take our hands off ourselves. Stop saying I am...and listen. He says: "[See my hands and my feet, that \(literally\) I AM](#). It's me. Jesus wants to redraw your mental map *and life* with his body.

My Words

But his body isn't enough. 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” (44). It’s not enough to see my body; you have to hear my words. Why? Because seeing isn’t believing. The principal issue isn’t recognition; it’s *trust*. The biggest question your whole life is this: who will you trust? Whose words will you rely on? Jesus emphasizes *his words* over and over. And so do angels, “Remember how he told you the son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise” And they remembered his words. When his followers are trusting the wrong thing what does Jesus do, what does the angel do? Give them words, promises. Promises to bank on. Something to believe *in*. It’s not enough to touch and see; we have to hear and trust. So Jesus walks Cleopas, his friend, the disciples *through the Scriptures*. All three parts of the Hebrew Bible: Law, Prophets, Writings. And in each of them he shows them something over and over. What is it? *They are all about me*. The word fulfilled is placed at the front of the sentence in Greek. *Jesus* fulfills the Scriptures. We often flip it and make the Bible all about us. What will God do for me? What about my future? What about my family? But Jesus overlays the Scriptures on our mental maps to reveal he’s the point. In *Genesis Abram puts the love of his life on the altar, only to find a ram caught in the thicket to sacrifice instead. In Exodus, Christ is the rock struck in Moses’ place, and life-giving water pours out. In the Psalms, he is the Chief Shepherd who rescues the sheep; the one forsaken in our place. In the Prophets, he is the one by whose stripes we are healed, the seed of a holy stump that flowers into a whole new humanity.* Jesus’s life, death, resurrection. History is a story about Christ, not us. But If we insist on defining ourselves, maintaining broken cultural beliefs, we won’t be defined by the glow of Jesus love. To get on the inside of the resurrection, we have *trust* his words. Seeing isn’t believing; believing is seeing.

My Mission

Jesus gives us his body and his words for what? Not only for ourselves but for the world. He opens their minds to his words so that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations (47). Here is Luke’s unique contribution to Jesus’s mission—an emphasis on the **message**—repentance for the forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed to all nations. Repentance may not be popular but its absolutely essential. It’s saying, Christ I’ve embraced a cultural map that doesn’t admit you into the territory of my life. I renounce that and choose to follow you. It’s confessing I’ve made life into a story



about me, not you. I've believed the wrong words: I am what others think; I am what I accomplish. It's saying to the risen Jesus, will you forgive and redefine me? And its preaching this to others. Jesus says, take it to the **nations**. In Matthew he says make disciples of all nations. This means his mission includes all ethnic groups, all races, all have an equal seat at the table of fellowship with Christ. Jesus's mission isn't white; it's multicolored. He died and rose to take all ethnic groups up into his diverse, multiethnic body. Start by loving your neighbor. Make your mission field more diverse. Consider going to Montreal's Quebecois, or Ireland's Dubliners, or join us in our support of refugees flooding into Turkey, but don't just receive his body and his words and stand there. Go! There are people behind the locked door of *I am what I do; I am what what others think*. And you have the key; you have *the words* to set them free. And the power. Jesus tells his disciples they'll be **clothed with power from on high**. He's citing Isaiah who promises the Holy Spirit will clothe God's people with such power the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the desert a place of justice. Imagine walking through a desert and with each step grass unfurls like a carpet, flowers spring up, trees shoot up bearing fruit. This is you, clothed in the Spirit and walking through this world with *the words and deeds of Jesus*. Will you grasp his body, believe his words, and take his gospel to the nations?!