

The Kingdom in the Margins

What Jesus Taught in the Days We Cannot See

ACTS 1:3 · THE GREAT COMMISSION · HOW BROKEN MEN BECAME APOSTLES

Acts 1:3 (ESV)

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

What Was Happening in the Days We Cannot See?

We have reached the part where the record goes quiet. The locked rooms and the lakeside fire belong to the first two weeks. The Ascension belongs to Day 40. Between those fixed points is a stretch of time that the Gospels do not narrate in sequence and Acts summarises in a single sentence.

Luke, who was characteristically precise about everything else, tells us only this: Jesus was *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. One phrase. One compressed summary of what must have been dozens of hours of teaching across four to five weeks. An entire curriculum reduced to a subtitle.

We cannot reconstruct the exact words. But we can ask: what did these men need to understand that they did not yet understand? And what did they clearly understand by Pentecost that they had not understood before? The distance between those two points tells us what the teaching must have covered.

“The forty days were not a gentle pastoral interlude. They were a theological revolution conducted in private, by a risen teacher who had all the time he needed and men who were finally ready to listen.”

Before and After: The Distance Between Two States of Understanding

The most revealing clue about what Jesus taught in the forty days is the contrast between the disciples at the beginning of the period and the same men six weeks later at Pentecost. It is a transformation so complete that it requires something to explain it.

Before the Forty Days

After Pentecost

Hiding behind locked doors, afraid (John 20:19)	Standing in the Temple courts, publicly declaring the resurrection to thousands (Acts 2:14)
Confused: “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel” — past tense (Luke 24:21)	Proclaiming with certainty: “God has made him both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36)
Unable to understand how the cross could be consistent with messianic claims (Luke 24:25)	Interpreting the cross as the centrepiece of God’s plan, foretold in Scripture (Acts 2:23)
Still expecting an immediate political restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6)	Understanding the mission as reaching “the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)
Reading the Old Testament as a national story of Israel’s history and hope	Reading the OT as a unified narrative pointing to Jesus, citing Psalms, Isaiah, Joel fluently
Grieving and directionless: “I am going fishing” (John 21:3)	Devoted continually to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer (Acts 2:42)

This is not the change produced by a good night's sleep. This is the change produced by a systematic curriculum delivered by the best teacher who ever lived, to the people he trusted most, in the weeks between his resurrection and his departure.

The Three Things Luke Tells Us Jesus Did — Acts 1:1–8

Luke was a physician — trained to observe and record precisely. When he compresses weeks of teaching into a few verses, he is giving us headlines, not padding. Each element he selects is central.

Acts 1:3 — The Content

Speaking about the Kingdom of God

Jesus spent forty days teaching how the cross and resurrection had changed everything they understood about the Kingdom. It had come — not as political liberation, but as a cosmic reclamation of all creation. The King had died and risen. His reign had begun.

Acts 1:4 — The Command

Wait for the Promise of the Father

He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the Holy Spirit. The John 20 breathing was a personal pledge; the Pentecost event would be a public, international launch of the mission. You cannot use a tool you have not been taught to use.

Acts 1:6–8 — The Redirection

Not ‘when’ but ‘what will you do’

Their last question revealed what forty days had not yet resolved: when would Israel be restored? Jesus redirected from timeline to mission. Not a political programme but a geographical commission: Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria → the ends of the earth.

Reconstructing the Curriculum: What the Forty Days Must Have Covered

We can work backward from what the disciples preached at Pentecost — because what they preached reveals what they had been taught. The first sermons in Acts are theologically structured and scripturally grounded. Someone taught these men how to read the Scriptures. That someone was Jesus.

I *How to Read the Old Testament*

Luke 24:44–45: He “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” The Greek word *dianoigō* — the same used for the stone rolled away from the tomb. He did not give them a new Bible; he unlocked the one they already had. Every text they had memorised since childhood suddenly pointed somewhere they had never seen. The key to reading Scripture was not scholarship. It was the resurrection.

II *Why the Cross Was Necessary*

Luke 24:25–26: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer?” The word “necessary” — *edei* — is crucial. Not accidental, but divinely ordained. The disciples needed to understand that the cross was not a deviation from the plan. It was the plan. God had been writing toward it since Genesis 3:15.

III *What the Kingdom Actually Is*

The disciples' confusion — political liberation vs. spiritual reign — required sustained theological education. Jesus had to show them that the Kingdom was not an alternative to the cross but its result. The King had died and risen. His reign was real and present. But it spread through witnesses and service rather than armies and conquest.

IV *The Mission and Its Scope*

Matthew 28:19: “All nations.” Acts 1:8: “To the ends of the earth.” These phrases represented a theological earthquake for men whose entire religious inheritance was structured around the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. Jesus spent weeks showing them in the Scriptures — from Genesis 12:3, from Isaiah 42:6 — that this had always been the plan.

V *Forgiveness and the New Covenant*

Luke 24:47: Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. What the disciples had experienced personally — the unearned, complete, covenant-backed forgiveness of God — was the message they were being sent to announce. Not a moral improvement programme. A declaration: the debt is paid, the door is open, forgiveness is available to anyone who turns.

VI *Their Own Identity*

John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The disciples were being reconstructed not just theologically but personally. They had failed. They had hidden, denied, fled. The forty days were a restoration process. Jesus was rebuilding broken men into the foundation stones of the Church — not because they were worthy, but because that is how the Kingdom works.

The Key Verse of the Forty Days: “He Opened Their Minds”

Of all the things Luke records Jesus doing in the post-resurrection period, the statement in Luke 24:45 may be the most important and the most overlooked.

διανοίξεν
Dianoixen · "He Opened" · Luke 24:45

Three openings: eyes, hearts, minds

The Greek dianoixen appears three times in Luke 24. In verse 31: "their eyes were opened and they recognised him." In verse 32: "did not our hearts burn while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And in verse 45: "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Luke is tracking a progressive illumination — from physical recognition, to emotional resonance, to intellectual understanding. When Jesus opened their nous (mind), he was not just adding new information — he was restructuring the categories themselves. The same word is used in Acts 16:14 when God "opened" Lydia's heart to respond to Paul's preaching. The capacity to understand Scripture is a gift given by the risen Christ, continued by his Spirit.

The disciples had the same Scriptures before and after the resurrection. They had read them every Sabbath since childhood. But they had not understood them — not in the way that became possible after Jesus opened their minds. The resurrection was not just a historical event. It was a hermeneutical key. The Bible looked different on the other side of Easter morning.

The Great Commission: Read Carefully — Matthew 28:18–20

Matthew 28:17 records something honest: "When they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted." Even at the Great Commission, in the presence of the risen Christ, some were still not completely settled. Jesus did not address the doubters. He addressed all of them together.

πᾶσα ἐξουσία
Pasa exousia

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

Not raw power but the right to exercise power. Jesus was not saying "I have religious influence." He was saying "everything that exists is now under my jurisdiction." The commission flows from this claim: the mission of the Church is authorised by the sovereignty of the risen King.

μαθητεύσατε
Matheteusate

"Make disciples of all nations."

The only imperative — the only actual command — in the Greek sentence. "Go" and "baptising" and "teaching" are participles — the manner of the command, not commands themselves. The one thing being commanded is the making of disciples: mathetes, learners, people shaped by ongoing relationship with the living Christ.

παντα τα εθνη Panta ta ethnē

“All nations” — all peoples, every language group, every tribe.

For men whose religious world was organised around the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles, this was a complete revolution. Abraham had been told “in you all the nations shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The commission was not inventing something new; it was finally fulfilling something ancient.

εγω μεθ υμων Egō meth' hūmōn

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Greek egō is emphatic — “I myself, I personally.” Not “you will have resources” but “I am with you.” Pasantas hēmeras — literally “all the days” — every individual day, without exception. The commission could not be more ambitious. The promise could not be more intimate.

How Broken Men Became the Foundation of the Church

The forty days were not just a theology seminar. They were a formation process — the slow, sustained work of rebuilding frightened, shamed, confused, grieving people into the men and women who would turn the world upside down. Think about who these people were at the start of the forty days. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Thomas had refused to believe the testimony of ten friends. James had never believed at all.

“This is the raw material from which the Church was built. Not the impressive, the bold, the theologically prepared. The broken, the cowardly, the confused — the ones who most needed forty days of sustained resurrection presence before they could open their mouths in public.”

The Pattern: Presence first. Healing second. Task third.

Before Jesus gave the disciples their mission in John 20:21, he gave them peace twice and showed them his wounds. Before the Great Commission, he spent weeks with them. He did not send broken people on a mission without spending time healing the break. The Church was not launched from strength. It was launched from restored weakness.

Small Beginnings as the Method of the Kingdom

Jesus chose not to appear publicly in Jerusalem after the resurrection. He appeared to small groups in private. He chose eleven men as the foundation of a movement that would reach billions. The mustard seed. The yeast in the dough. The kingdom of God always begins below the threshold of what the world considers significant.

What We Usually Miss: Five Depths in the Forgotten Weeks

1. The forty days were the first systematic Christian theology — taught by Jesus himself

Every theology ever written — Paul’s letters, John’s Gospel, the creeds, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Barth — is downstream of what Jesus taught in those forty days. The categories these men used in the early sermons of Acts were received, from the risen Christ, in the weeks we cannot see. The whole of Christian theology is an extended commentary on a curriculum that was never written down.

2. The disciples’ persistent confusion at the end of forty days is a comfort, not an embarrassment

They still asked “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” on the last day. This is not a story about their slowness. It is a story about how deeply formation goes, and how long it takes. What finally changed it was not more information. It was the coming of the Spirit, and then the experience of living the mission. Formation is a lifelong project. The disciples are not an embarrassment; they are a mirror.

3. The Great Commission begins with authority, not with a call to effort

“All authority has been given to me — therefore go.” Most preachers treat this as a preamble. But it is the commission’s entire foundation. The disciples were not sent because they were capable. They were being invited to participate in something that was already happening, backed by the total authority of a risen King.

4. The resurrection is a hermeneutical key, not just a historical event

Luke 24:45: Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” For anyone who has genuinely encountered the risen Christ, the world reorganises. What seemed random becomes purposeful. What seemed conclusive becomes provisional. What seemed like an ending becomes a beginning.

5. “To the end of the age” is addressed to every generation

Matthew 28:20 was not addressed only to the eleven on the mountain. The promise extended to the end of the age — which means it extends to now. The same Jesus who walked with the disciples through the forty days is the same one who says to every follower in every century: I am with you. All the days. To the end. He is still teaching. He is still opening minds. He is still with us.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1 *Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” — the same texts they had read all their lives suddenly looked completely different. Has there been a moment when a familiar passage opened in a new way? What changed, and what produced the change?*

Luke 24:45 · Psalm 119:18 · 1 Corinthians 2:10

2 *The disciples spent forty days learning from the risen Jesus and still asked the wrong question on the last day. What is the “wrong question” you keep returning to — shaped more by cultural inheritance than by Scripture? What would it look like for Jesus to redirect you from “when” to “what will you do while it is arriving”?*

Acts 1:6–8 · Isaiah 55:8–9 · Romans 12:2

3

The Great Commission begins: “All authority has been given to me — therefore go.” Is there a calling in your life you have been hesitating in because you don’t feel adequate? How does the “therefore” of Matthew 28:18–19 change the equation?

Matthew 28:18–19 · 2 Corinthians 12:9 · Philippians 4:13

4

Jesus taught that the cross was “necessary” — edei, divinely ordained, part of the plan. Is there something in your life you are still reading as a tragedy, a derailment? What would it mean to ask the risen Christ to show you how it fits?

Luke 24:26 · Romans 8:28 · Genesis 50:20

5

The disciples who received the commission were the same people who had failed, fled, doubted, and denied. Jesus did not wait for better people. Are you waiting to be more qualified before you consider yourself available?

Matthew 28:17 · 1 Corinthians 1:27–28 · 2 Corinthians 4:7

6

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” What difference does it make to your actual daily experience — not as a theological proposition but as a lived reality — that the risen Christ has promised his personal presence with you, all the days, without exception?

Matthew 28:20 · Hebrews 13:5 · John 14:18

Dig Deeper

Acts 1:1–8 — Luke’s Summary

The entirety of Luke’s theological précis of the forty days: proof of life, kingdom teaching, the Spirit promise, and the redirected commission — all in eight verses that deserve more attention than they usually receive.

Luke 24:44–49 — The Hermeneutical Key

The passage where Jesus opens the disciples’ minds to understand Scripture, defines the three-part Hebrew canon (Law, Prophets, Psalms), and connects the cross, resurrection, and universal mission as a single necessary fulfillment.

Acts 2:14–41 — Peter’s Pentecost Sermon

Read backwards as the evidence for what Jesus taught in the forty days: the Old Testament citations (Joel, Psalms 16, 110), the Christological framework, the call to repentance — all taught to Peter by the risen Christ in the unseen weeks.

Matthew 28:16–20 — Read in Greek if Possible

The grammatical structure — one imperative (make disciples), two participles (going, baptising, teaching), one foundation claim (all authority), one promise (I am with you) — is clearer in the Greek than in most English translations.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20 · The Great Commission · A Mountain in Galilee

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