

# OpenTheo

## December 31st: Song of Songs 8 & Luke 24:13-53

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Love is as strong as death. The appearance on the road to Emmaus.

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## Transcript

Song of Songs, Chapter 8. O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate.

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I awakened you.

There your mother was in labor with you. There she who bore you was in labor. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave.

His flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers.

Then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace. Solomon had a vineyard in Beelhaemon. He let out the vineyard keepers.

Each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, my very own, is before me. You, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit, two hundred.

O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice, let me hear it. Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices. From the end of chapter seven until the end of the book, here in Song of Songs, chapter eight, it mirrors the first couple of chapters in chiasmic structure, bookending all of the material between.

The woman's invitation to the man in chapter seven, verses 12 to 14, mirrored the invitation that he gave to her in chapter two, verses 10 to 14. Chapter two ended with the refrain, my beloved is mine, and I am his, and the concluding passages of the book open with the same refrain. In chapter eight, we return to elements of chapter one, verse one, to two, verse seven, albeit in mirrored order.

Verses three to four here repeat the refrains of chapter two, verses six to seven. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

As Richard Davidson observes, there are several key terms and elements from chapter one and the beginning of the book here, which recur in chapter eight in largely reverse order. An apple tree, the terms love and house, a structure that's built with cedar, my breasts, silver, make haste, companions, keeper or keep, my own vineyard, and finally and fittingly, Solomon. Collectively, these connecting threads tightly bind the opening of the book with its closing and make a strong case for the unity of the text.

The speeches of this section, like those of the beginning of the book, are generally shorter. It is also here that some of the greatest themes of the song emerge into clearest view. The chapter opens with a surprising wish, the woman expressing her desire that the man was like her brother from earliest infancy, the two of them bound together by the nursing body of her mother.

If he were such a brother, she could express the childlike affection of a sister to him in public with kisses without attracting public disapproval. Much as we see in the man's expression, my sister, my bride, the wish of the woman here exhibits a desire to express

her love for him in an even more public form without social censure. While many take this as evidence that their love is a secret, forbidden love, Daniel Estes differs.

Rather, he argues, the issue was that public displays of intimacy between a husband and a wife were not socially approved, whereas male and female relatives could enjoy non-erotic expressions of familial affection, as we see when Jacob kisses Rachel upon first meeting her in Genesis chapter 29, verse 11. While adopting a similar reading to Estes in this respect, Tremper Longman also sees evidence here that their love is still secret rather than that of a married couple. The woman might want the secure union and kinship characteristic of siblings in a more formal and public bond between the two.

While I have spoken of the bride and the bridegroom at many points, the exact character of the relationship between the couple is never entirely clear, even if we might feel that the weight of the evidence pushes in a particular direction. We might here reflect upon the similarities between the relationship between the lovers in the song in this respect and the relationship between Christ and his church. Throughout the song, the bride's beloved is coming near to her and then slipping out of her grasp or vanishing.

Full consummation of their union seems to be deferred in various ways. While they have moments of profoundest intimacy, we still seem to fall short of a completely consummated and realized relationship. And the song ends on a note of desire and expectancy that awaits but does not yet receive fulfillment.

In our desire to know where the couple stand relative to each other, we are also hampered by the dreamlike character of much of the song and the ways in which past, present and future, imagination and reality, desire and its realization are routinely tangled together and easily confused. Perhaps we should imagine a cultural situation akin to that in the ill-fated relationship between Samson and his wife, where they were married but not yet cohabiting. The appearing and the vanishing of the lover resulting from this.

However we understand the situation between the couple, considering the ways that the song routinely celebrates the chastity of the bride and the fidelity of the bridegroom, its pervasive ethos is clearly one deeply congruent with the underlying values of marriage. In speaking of her desire that he was like a brother to her, the bride imagines a situation where they had shared her mother's breaths as infants. In chapter three, verse four, the woman had declared, "Scarcely had I passed them "when I found him whom my soul loves.

"I held him and would not let him go "until I had brought him into my mother's house "and into the chamber of her who conceived me." The prominence and the place enjoyed by the figures of the mothers of the lovers in the song is strange to many hearers and certainly invites closer attention. Throughout the song to this point, breasts have been associated with erotic pleasures, yet now we see them connected with the

nursing of infants. In the comparison of the bond between lovers, as the man grazes among the lilies of the cleft mountains of the woman, and the bond between siblings who feed at their mother's breasts, a number of things might come into view.

The woman's breasts are in both cases a site and source of union, as is her body more generally. The erotic and unitive meaning of the body is connected with the procreative meaning of the body. The infant child enjoys a one-flesh union with his mother, initially in the womb, but later experienced at the breast, a one-flesh union that provides the natural basis for other familial bonds.

The lovers also know a one-flesh union with each other, as the bride opens her walled garden to the bridegroom and he delights in its fruits. In the desire to share the mother and to bring him to the house of her mother, there is some sort of wish to bring things full circle, not in a reversion to a past childhood, but in the recognition of a rebirth. In love, there is a reopening to the world in the play of a new childhood.

A man leaves his father and his mother and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This break is also a sort of return to the body of the woman, so that a new one-flesh bond could be formed in the place of the old one. Her lover might not have shared with her at her mother's breasts, but he returns with her to her mother's house, where he can drink the spiced wine and the juice of her pomegranate that she offers.

The promise of a return to the innocence and play of childhood is one that can require a corresponding death in the loving surrender or gift of oneself. There is no place for the emotional and other prophylactics that people employ to frustrate the inherent reality of sexual union here. In chapter three, verse six, we read, What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant? After the repeated refrains of verses three and four, a similar question is asked in verse five.

Here we see that the ones coming up from the wilderness are the couple together. We should probably imagine the scene of Solomon's palanquin again, but with the bride leaning upon her bridegroom within it, the people of the city gathering to see the approaching royal spectacle. Just as the bride returned to her mother, there is a return to the mother of the bridegroom and to earlier infancy here under the apple tree.

Once again, there is a sort of rebirth. In the same place where he first came into the world, the love that promises his rebirth was awakened. Perhaps the awakening under the apple tree resolves the theme of the repeated refrain that makes its final appearance in the preceding verse of not stirring or awakening love until it pleases.

Now the bride is fully ready, the sleeping bridegroom can finally be awoken and their union can be fully realized. Peter Lighthouse suggests a connection with Adam's deep sleep during the time of Eve's building here. Having connected love to birth and rebirth,

verses six and seven, the only really directly didactic verses of the song, speak of love's connection with death, emphasizing a lesson that must be drawn from the song as a whole.

The bride calls for the bridegroom to place her like a seal or mark of ownership and identity upon his heart and arm. With such a seal on his heart, his heart would be utterly committed to her and could not betray that commitment without betraying itself. As she was placed like a seal on his arm, his strength would thereafter have to be exercised for her.

As a great power, love is compared to, contrasted with and opposed to that of death. Throughout the song, the lovers have been awakened by and called back by the love of each other. Love has brought them a sort of rebirth.

As a power and as a force, love is the match of death. It is enduring and unyielding. It is fierce in its intensity, its strength being compared to the very flame of the Lord.

Jealousy is an integral part of true love. A jealous love is in the words of the hymn, a love that will not let me go. Such a love cannot be overcome.

Even the great forces of chaos arrayed against it. The mighty waters of the abyssal deep could not drown it. Love cannot be bought.

No price can be put upon it. At this point, the song is making claims about reality itself, claims about reality that are witnessed to in the vows of lovers. In such vows, they promise always to love each other, never to let each other go, never to permit anything to come in the way of their love.

In this, we hear a yearning for something transcendent, something that ultimately finds its grounds in God himself. Once again, the love of the lovers in the song constantly gestures towards something greater, ultimately the love of the Lord for his people, a love that reached down to the very pit of Sheol and brought his people back up. The concluding verses of this chapter and of the song more generally can be confusing.

Many commentators imagine that the brothers of the bride are speaking at this point. While they were mentioned back in chapter one, they've had no speaking role, so it seems strange for them to enter the conversation at this point. Perhaps the voice here is that of the daughters of Jerusalem preparing a young sister in the years before she's of marriageable age.

Many have thought that the little sister is the bride herself. Exum helpfully recognizes that there seem to be parallels between verses eight to 10 and verses 11 and 12. In both cases, there are two stories that seem to be irrelevant concerning the little sister and concerning Solomon's vineyard.

In both cases, there's a contrast being set up. Verses eight and nine seem to speak of both the ornamentation and the defense of the little sister. The little sister has to be prepared to attract good suitors and repel bad ones.

The image of a wall with ornamented battlements and a gloriously cedar panel door is fitting in the context. Once again, picking up a military imagery that has been applied to the bride, she likens herself to a mighty wall with her breasts like great towers. Yet continuing the imagery of the glorious fortified city, she has surrendered and opened up to the bridegroom.

She's found peace in his eyes. Verses 11 and 12 are also difficult to understand. Again, it's unclear who is the speaker here.

Back in chapter one, verse six, the woman said of herself, my mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. There and other points in the song, the vineyard seems to represent the woman herself.

Our interpretation of these verses will depend in part upon whether we think that the lover of the song is Solomon himself or whether, for instance, the lover occasionally masquerades as Solomon and that here a contrast with Solomon is being drawn. Many have connected the thousand here with Solomon's 300 wives and 700 concubines. The point being that Solomon is welcome to his thousand women because the speaker has or is the one vineyard that really matters.

No amount of gold could buy that. Following this interpretation, Robert Jensen writes, if we read the poem theologically, then it is the Lord who scorns Solomon as the lover does in the overt poem, and then Solomon is devoted from glory. Solomon becomes in the allegory a mere harem-keeping lord of this world, fit to be rebuked by the one faithful lord.

Perhaps indeed Solomon is allegorically the lord of this world. And two Israels appear, Israel as harem for the powers and principalities of this world, and Israel indissolubly and uniquely united to the one lord. Lightheart raises another possibility, writing, if the temple is the vineyard though, then the contrast is between the singular house belonging to Jerusalem or to Yahweh and the thousand vineyards that Solomon supports for the benefit of his thousand wives.

We might also see a contrast here between different forms of owning. Solomon has immense wealth and possessions, yet he cannot control them himself. He has to let out his vineyard to keepers.

However, the vineyard of the woman is truly her own and her own to give to another person who can enjoy it fully for himself. Such a possession is one that even the greatest king cannot aspire beyond. In verse 13, the bridegroom addresses the bride wanting to

hear her voice with other friends who are eagerly listening for her.

Her response in verse 14, the last verse of the book, is very similar to chapter two, verse 17. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains. In the book's end, there are still some sense of absence, an open-endedness to desire.

As Exum observes, the book opens in medias res and it concludes without closure. At the end, love is still longing for completion. There's also some sort of ambivalence to this verse, both a calling back and ascending away.

The church has long recognized in this an analogy to its relationship to Christ. We know according to the teaching of John's gospel that it is good that Christ went away, and yet we long for his return. Themes from the book of Song of Songs pervade the book of Revelation.

The book begins with a vision of the glorious heavenly bridegroom, and from that wasif, we move to the end where there is the revelation of the glorious bride, a wedding feast, and the consummation of all. And yet at the end of the book of Revelation, there is also a similar note of expectation. With the promises of the rich fruits of the garden city in the background, the fruits of the bride of the church, the book and the Bible as a whole ends with this note of longing.

He who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming soon, amen. Come Lord Jesus. Is the book of Song of Songs about Christ and the church, or is it about human sexual love? Yes, both of these things.

We might also add that it is about politics, the relationship between the king and the people, and other issues besides those. In Ephesians chapter five, verses 31 and 32, the apostle Paul wrote, Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

From the very beginning, marriage always gestured towards something beyond it, towards some transcendent truth that we see in Christ and his relationship with his people. The Song of Songs introduces us to a way of seeing the world, a way of seeing the relationship between man and wife that points towards something transcendent without ever ceasing to be itself. In books such as the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, the promise of this vision is taken up and made more explicit.

The church, as it has seen its bridegroom Christ within this text of Song of Songs, has not been seeing a mirage. Christ is really here. But the promise of the book goes beyond that.

The promise of the book is as we learn to see the world more generally in this way, we

will be able to see glimpses of Christ in the church, in our own relationships too. A question to consider, where else in scripture would you go to to make the case that love is a cosmic power? Luke chapter 24, verses 13 to 53. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding 'with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them named Cleopas answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem 'who does not know the things 'that have happened there in these days?' And he said to them, "What things?' And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, 'a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word 'before God and all the people, 'and how our chief priests and rulers 'delivered him up to be condemned to death 'and crucified him. 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. 'Yes, and besides all this, 'it is now the third day since these things happened.

"Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. 'They were at the tomb early in the morning, 'and when they did not find his body, 'they came back saying that they had even seen 'a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 'Some of those who were with us went to the tomb 'and found it just as the women had said, 'but him they did not see.

"And he said to them, "O foolish ones, 'and slow of heart to believe all 'that the prophets have spoken. 'Was it not necessary that the Christ 'should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, 'he interpreted to them in all the scriptures 'the things concerning himself. 'So they drew near to the village to which they were going.

"He acted as if he were going farther. 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening, 'and the day is now far spent.' 'So he went in to stay with them. 'When he was at table with them, 'he took the bread and blessed and broke it 'and gave it to them.

"And their eyes were opened and they recognized him, 'and he vanished from their sight. 'They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us 'while he talked to us on the road, 'while he opened to us the scriptures?' 'And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. 'And they found the eleven 'and those who were with them gathered together saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.' 'Then they told what had happened on the road 'and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

"As they were talking about these things, 'Jesus himself stood among them and said to



them, "Peace to you." "But they were startled and frightened "and thought they saw a spirit. "And he said to them, "Why are you troubled? "And why do doubts arise in your hearts? "See my hands and my feet, "that it is I myself. "Touch me and see, "'for a spirit does not have flesh and bones "as you see that I have.'" "And when he had said this, "he showed them his hands and his feet.

"And while they still disbelieved for joy "and were marveling, "he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" "They gave him a piece of broiled fish "and he took it and ate before them. "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.'" "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures "and said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer "and on the third day rise from the dead "and that repentance for the forgiveness of sin "should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, "beginning from Jerusalem. "You are witnesses of these things.

"And behold, I am sending the promise of my father upon you, "but stay in the city "until you are clothed with power from on high.'" "And he led them out as far as Bethany "and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. "While he blessed them, he parted from them "and was carried up into heaven. "And they worshipped him "and returned to Jerusalem with great joy "and were continually in the temple, blessing God." In Luke chapter 24, we encounter two people traveling from Jerusalem, returning from the feast, having lost Jesus three days ago, not realizing that Jesus had to be about his father's business.

Of course, we've heard a version of this story before, back in chapter two, verses 41 to 50. Jesus feigns complete ignorance of the events that have just occurred. As this prompts them to share the events, he will reveal that they are the ones who are unaware of what has happened.

The restraining of their eyes is associated with their slowness to believe, much as the restraining of Zachariah's mouth. Jesus declares himself in all of the scriptures, from the Pentateuch to the prophets, and they still don't recognize him. Jesus finally reveals himself in the act of taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing the bread.

In the ritual of the supper. The story of the road to Emmaus takes a liturgical shape then. The word is opened up, and then Christ is recognized in the sacrament.

The pattern here is the pattern of Christian worship. Christ draws near to us on the first day of the week. He opens the scripture to us.

He makes himself known in the breaking of bread, and then sends us forth with joyful tidings. The moment that their eyes are opened to him, he disappears from their sight. The eyes of the disciples open upon his absence, but now it's an absence filled with life,

hope, and promise.

Their hearts burned within them upon the road, and the fire in their hearts might be in anticipation of the fire of Pentecost. The opening of the eyes of the disciples is reminiscent of the opening of the eyes of Adam and Eve at the fall, but on this occasion it's blessed. There is a threefold opening in this chapter.

The opening of the tomb, the opening of the scriptures, and the opening of the eyes, and all of these are related. Before the risen Christ revealed himself, the scriptures were a closed letter, and the perception of the disciples was limited. As Christ opened the tomb, he also opened closed eyes to perceive his presence and his purpose throughout the events that had occurred.

He opened the Old Testament scriptures, revealing his presence on every page. The resurrection transforms our reading of the Old Testament. Luke has been enacting this fact throughout his gospel.

Texts whose meaning appeared closed are suddenly opened up to reveal a greater person within them. As our eyes are opened to see the risen Christ, we suddenly recognize the identity of the one who has been traveling and speaking to us all along in the words of the Old Testament, words concerning himself. Jesus the Lord is the mysterious traveler who has been with Israel all the way throughout his journey.

He is the one who appeared in the burning bush. He is the one who appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre. He is the one who appeared to Moses on the mountain.

He is the one who appeared to Isaiah in the temple vision. As Christ opens up the scriptures, the story of the Exodus is seen to be about him. The story of the creation is seen to be about him.

The story of David is seen to be about him. The whole of the Old Testament is Christian scripture. And the story of Emmaus follows a pattern seen in two other Lukean stories, the story of Saul the persecutor on the road to Damascus, and the story of the Ethiopian eunuch.

In both of these stories, we have the movement of a journey. We have the opening of understanding in an encounter with Christ. And then we have a movement to the celebration of a sacrament, in those cases, baptism.

Jesus' body is glorified and it's not like a normal body. It can move from place to place. It can evade recognition.

It masters both space and other people's perception. But it's still very much a body. It can be handled and it can eat.

Much of the gospel of Luke has been about meals, about eating practices, about dinner companions, about who belongs at the table. And it's thoroughly appropriate that the fact of the resurrection should be made known through a food ritual and through an act of eating. Following 1 Corinthians 11, our understanding of the Lord's Supper is often focused narrowly upon the context of the Last Supper and the relationship with Jesus' death.

However, the Lord's Supper is also based on the events in which the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples in the very breaking of bread that we celebrate. As we celebrate the supper, we are enjoying the reality of the joyful resurrection meals as we perform the breaking bread ritual through which Jesus made known his presence to his disciples. The fact that Jesus eats fish when he appears to his disciples demonstrates his resurrection body, but it also might have some symbolic import.

Animals symbolize people. God only ate five animals for most of the Old Testament. Cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves, and pigeons.

Perhaps we could see some symbol of the inclusion of Gentiles here, although I wouldn't put much weight on it. Jesus declares to his disciples, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. He's there, but he's no longer there in the same way.

He is about to depart and speaks as if that departure had already been accomplished. He explains how the entire scriptures, the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, or the writings, had to be fulfilled in his suffering and resurrection from the dead. But it's not just in Christ's death and resurrection that these things are fulfilled.

They're also fulfilled in the ministry of the church that follows. The Old Testament narrative crackles with anticipation of Christ, and Christ opens our eyes to understand the Old Testament text. There is an event of illumination going in both directions.

The scripture enables us truly to see the Christ, and the Christ enables us truly to see the scriptures. Christ brings light to the entire preceding narrative while also being in direct continuity with it. Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament.

However, the Old Testament is also the key to understanding Jesus. Jesus is like the match, and the Old Testament is like the striking surface. Bring the two together and light and fire results.

Without the Old Testament, we would not truly recognize Jesus. And without Jesus, we cannot truly recognize the meaning of the Old Testament. We should consider the way that Luke is using the scripture.

He isn't primarily presenting us with direct prediction and fulfillment, but rather with the way that Christ both clarifies and brings to resolution the themes of the Old Testament. The whole world of the scripture comes into focus in Christ. Once we see Christ, the rest

makes new sense.

He is David's greater son, who must suffer like his father. This is one of the reasons why the Psalms are especially prominent in Luke's understanding. The Psalms present us with the voice of the suffering Davidic king.

Luke is also drawing heavily upon the background of Isaiah, especially chapters 40 to 66. The suffering Messiah of the Psalms is also the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy. He is also the spirit anointed one who brings the acceptable year of the Lord and brings ministry to the Gentiles.

The church and its ministry also figure into the picture. Its witness to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem, is an essential part of the picture anticipated by the Old Testament. The second volume of Luke's writings, the Book of Acts, is also a book that fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

Such themes of fulfillment are very important in the ministry of the early church, not least in places like Peter's sermon in Acts chapter two on the day of Pentecost. Christ is the one who will send the spirit, the promise of the Father. We should note the explicit presence of all of the persons of the Trinity here.

The spirit is the one sent. The spirit is the promise of the Father, and the spirit is sent by the Son. The spirit is power from on high, power for ministry and mission.

It's a power that is the power of Christ himself. They are instructed that they must wait in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place from which the word of the Lord will go out.

We could perhaps think of Jesus as a new Elijah here. His ascension and there being clothed with power from on high are two sides of the same coin, just as Elijah's ascension was Elisha's Pentecost, so it is for Jesus and his disciples. This might also be the third of three instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples towards the end of his ministry, the first being to find the cult that's tied up and to bring it to Jesus for his triumphal entry, the second to find the man carrying the water pitcher in the town, and then this as the third, to wait in Jerusalem until the spirit comes upon them from on high.

These might be related to the three signs that are given to Saul at the beginning of the kingdom, a message concerning his father's donkeys that they have been found, encountering men bearing goats, bread, and wine, and then meeting with prophets coming down from the high place, at which time the spirit of the Lord will rush upon him and he will become a new man. This is what happens with the disciples. As the story of the signs given to Saul were the beginning of the first kingdom of Israel, these signs are the beginning of a new kingdom, and just as Saul was prepared by the spirit coming upon him, so they will be prepared for rule as the spirit comes upon them.

Jesus leads his disciples out of the city to Bethany, and there he blesses them. Bethany

was the site where Christ's triumphal entry had originated, and he departs then as he is blessing them. His blessing of his disciples might make us think of Jesus as a priest at this point as well.

He is taken up into heaven to God's right hand to act and to intercede on their behalf. Luke has already alluded to Daniel chapter seven, verses 13 to 14, the son of man coming on the clouds. This is the son of man ascending into heaven on the cloud, where he will rule at God's right hand until all his enemies are put under his feet.

The ascension is a departure, but it is also a new arrival. It's a new triumphal entry. Furthermore, it returns us to the themes at the beginning of the book.

The book began with people praying at the temple as Zachariah went in at the time of incense. Jesus ascends to God's presence like the incense and blesses his disciples as the priest would bless the crowd outside. We might also recall the shepherds.

The shepherds are described having seen the sign of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, and the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. Luke chapter two, verse 20. The disciples might also be compared to Anna, who was constantly in prayer in the temple.

So a book that began with rejoicing, with the temple, with prayer and blessing, and with the theme of the spirit ends where it began. But as it arrives at the point where it started once more, we notice that everything has changed. This sets things up for the book of Acts.

In the book of Acts, the story of the ascension is largely repeated. The story of the ascension both closes the story of Christ's earthly ministry, and it also bursts out into the ministry of the church as it leads into the story of Pentecost. A question to consider, can you think of some examples in the Gospel of Luke where Luke exemplifies the form of reading scripture that Jesus here teaches?