

The Commission and Ascension Acts 1:6-11 bible-sermons.org January 22, 2016

We continue today with Luke's introduction to the historical account of the early church. Last week's passage contained Jesus' command to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promise of the Father, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, came upon them. I challenged you to be praying for the Lord to fill us afresh with His Spirit, to surrender every aspect of our lives to His direction. In our Wednesday night Bible study a week ago we saw in Psalm 51 how important it is to pray for a willing spirit (Psalm 51:10). We can read in the Word what the Christian life should be, and even hear the Word and the Spirit speak to our hearts, but then we need a willing heart to obey the Spirit of God within those of us who have been born-again.

We pick up in the passage just after the command to wait in Jerusalem. *6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Acts 1:6 What patience the Lord has with us! Like the culture in which they lived, they were longing for the physical kingdom of God, when Christ reigns on the earth. This is what their rabbis taught them. This seemed clear in the Scriptures. The disciples had learned the Suffering Servant Songs had been fulfilled. Jesus had dealt with the sins of the world. What came next in the prophecies was the reign of the Messiah over the whole earth. In their mind that meant something like a second King David. The prophecies even refer to the Messiah as David and the Son of David (Hosea 3:5; Matthew 1:1).

Jesus had taught them there would be a long waiting period. Listen to how this parable in Luke begins. *11 As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.* Luke 19:11 Then Jesus proceeded to tell the parable of the stewards who were entrusted with money to invest. In the parable, the nobleman goes away for a time, is given a kingdom, and then returns as king to see how his servants had handled his funds. The point is that Jesus is leaving for a time and we, his servants, are expected to advance His cause while He is away. A similar parable in Matthew 25 begins by saying the master was going away on a journey and even specifically says that he does not return for a long time (Matthew 25:14, 19). In Mark 13 He told them it would be like the master of house leaving on a journey, and that we should be like the doorkeeper who should watch for his eventual return (Mark 13:32f). In Matthew 25 Jesus described it like a bride waiting for her groom, not knowing when he would eventually come for her. In that parable he comes at midnight and some of those waiting were not prepared, for they were not expecting him to be so late (Matthew 25:6). Numerous times He told them that no one knows the time of His return (Matthew 24:42). He told them only the Father knows when that time would come (Matthew 24:36). With so many explanations, how is it then that they would bring up this question?

Man is always looking for the physical answer to the fallen condition of the world. We look to new leaders, laws, a new environment, new neighbors, anything other than

Commented [PW1]: Psalm 51:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Commented [PW2]: Hosea 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

Commented [PW3]: Matthew 1:1 (ESV)

¹ The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Commented [PW4]: Matthew 25:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

Commented [PW5]: Matthew 25:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Commented [PW6]: Mark 13:32-34 (ESV)

³² "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Commented [PW7]: Matthew 25:6 (ESV)

⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 24:42 (ESV)

⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Commented [PW9]: Matthew 24:36 (ESV)

³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

changing our own heart. The physical kingdom they were asking about is coming, but the kingdom Jesus brought in the hearts of men was already there (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus told them you can't see it come with your eyes because it comes within us. That is the answer to our lack of contentment. **We don't need a change of location or circumstances. We need a change of heart.**

The disciples had been influenced by wrong interpretation. Jesus had tried to correct it numerous times, but they clung to an interpretation that was more comfortable to believe. I would suggest that we are not much different. We hear an interpretation of a passage and cling to it in spite of the context and Scriptures that seem to contradict it. People want me to side with them on different doctrines. They give their arguments and I share what the other side would answer, but rarely is there a listening ear. I'm sorry if I frustrate you by not affirming your interpretation on peripheral issues. If some Scriptures seem to contradict it, I'll wait until it becomes clear or Jesus explains it to us in heaven. We should keep an open mind on those minor issues that tend to divide us.

⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." Acts 1:7 Nor is it for us to know. When someone tells you when Jesus is returning, tell them they are being unscriptural. The church has always expected Jesus return throughout two thousand years of church history. That is a healthy way to live. Today might be our last, so let's do what we know to do and not put it off. We don't know what will happen tomorrow, nor do we need to know (James 4:14). If we needed to know, Jesus would have told us. We can say the time is fixed. God set the day by His own authority. He picked the perfect time. He lives in the eternal now, which means His choice couldn't be better, for all the options are open before Him. Don't worry about it. Just be about our Father's business each day.

What the disciples were asking was about the reign of Jesus upon the earth, the physical kingdom of the Messiah. Jesus didn't deny it was coming; He just said they don't need to know when. Some theologians believe the Millennial Kingdom will be led by the Jews who come to faith in Jesus. Others believe that it is Jew and Gentile who are one in Christ (Ephesians 2:14). Either way, it is a physical kingdom in the future, with Jesus personally reigning from Jerusalem over the kingdoms of this world.

In the meantime, here is what we should be doing. *⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* Acts 1:8 This is the Acts version of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15) with one important addition. We need the Holy Spirit to live as a witness of the saving power of Jesus. We cannot do what Jesus has asked us to do without the power of His life in us. He told us that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Stop worrying about when He will return and start living as a witness of the transforming power of His life in you in your setting, whether at work, retirement, vacation, or ministry. Show people what it would be like if Jesus was doing what you are presently doing.

Commented [PW10]: Luke 17:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,
²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Commented [PW11]: James 4:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Commented [PW12]: Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Commented [PW13]: Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Commented [PW14]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Commented [PW15]: John 15:5 (ESV)

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

“Witness” is the Greek word from which we get our word “martyr.” That is because those who faithfully witnessed Jesus to others often were died for their faith. Faith puts us at odds with the culture, with co-workers, and even with family (Matthew 10:34-36). We just finished Hebrews in which the church was trying to hide their witness to avoid persecution. It’s a temptation we face in a much less threatening way.

Notice that Jesus said, “...you will be *my* witnesses”. We belong to Him. We have no right to promote ourselves or push for our own advancement. We promote Jesus by how we live, our priorities, our words, our responses, our compassion, and our love, all empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Verse eight is a summary of the book of Acts. It begins with the witness in Jerusalem and Judea and moves on to Samaria and then goes to the ends of the earth. The Isaiah prophecies declared that Jesus would be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus earthly ministry never left Israel, but Jesus is now alive and well in His body, the church. It is through the church that Jesus becomes a light to the world. In fact, Jesus emphasized that His return would not come until the good news of His salvation would be spread throughout the whole world (Matthew 24:14).

At first, the Apostles were somewhat reluctant to leave Jerusalem. It was a deacon, Philip, who actually was the first to take the second step and go to Samaria (Acts 8:5-6). When he did, he was met with incredible success, so much so that he had to ask the apostles to come and help. Persecution finally drove the apostles out of Jerusalem and started them on their missionary journeys. If we won’t obey God, He will help us obey or raise up someone else, even one who was an enemy like Saul who became Paul and spread the gospel to Asia Minor and Rome. The apostles did witness, bringing the light of Christ to the nations, and almost all of them were martyred.

You are probably familiar with Matthew and Mark’s version of the Great Commission. John records it in his own inspired way. ²¹ *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* John 20:21 Just as Jesus came to do the will of the Father in living as a witness of the Father and dying for our sins, so we are now sent to live as witnesses of Jesus, sharing that message of mercy and forgiveness He offers. Jesus was sent to do the will of the Father. We are sent to do His will too. He was sent not to condemn but to save. That is our mission as well (John 3:17). We lay our lives at His feet just as Jesus laid His life down to do the will of the Father. Desire to hear His instructions and obey with willing hearts!

Last week I spoke on the controversy of the different interpretations of what it means to be baptized in the Spirit. Let me just say that if you are constantly struggling with the same sin and failing, call out to God for the power of the Spirit to be a witness. We all have weaknesses. We will not be free of temptation in this life. The world, the flesh, and the devil don’t give up. But if you find your life is producing more fruit of the flesh than fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:17-24), ask God to fill you with His Spirit, to take over every part of your life. Let go of anything that you have been clinging to that

Commented [PW16]: Matthew 10:34-36 (ESV)

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

³⁶ And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.

Commented [PW17]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Commented [PW18]: Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Commented [PW19]: Acts 8:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

Commented [PW20]: John 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Commented [PW21]: Galatians 5:17-24 (ESV)

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

keeps you from surrendering completely to Him (Hebrews 12:1). Lay your life at His feet and ask to be filled, and don't give up asking until that power fills your life.

My first experience with this was when I was 16. A group of teenage boys was sitting in the living room of my parents' home trying to understand why we didn't express more of the fruits of the Spirit. We stopped and prayed and asked God to show us. Well, I know my words won't do justice to what happened, but the best I can describe it that we felt Jesus walked into the room. We were overwhelmed, shed a lot of tears, prayed for one another and left changed. I stumbled along without any real discipleship. In my enthusiasm to serve God I ended up in a cult. But when I let go of my way and asked again for God to have mercy on me and fill me afresh, He faithfully did. It was a different experience, more like His voice in my spirit, but the effect was the same, a renewed passion to let God have every part of my life and be His witness. It doesn't mean an end to the struggle with the old nature, but the power is there to deny the flesh and yield to the Spirit. If you are seeking to be filled with that power, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, don't let go until He blesses you (Genesis 32:26). He wants to give you the Spirit but our hearts must be open to letting Him reign.

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. Acts 1:9 Verse twelve tells us they were about a Sabbath days journey from Jerusalem, which is 2000 cubits (cubit = 22 inches) (Acts 1:12). There is a place that distance on Olivet that commemorates this spot. It's a small round building that was first built by the Crusaders without a ceiling so as to signify the ascension. The Muslims took the site and put a domed roof on it. We had a time of worship there on one of our last trips.

Put yourself in the disciples' sandals at that time. They saw their Master crucified and die. It was enormously disappointing. They were shocked to find He had come back to life, even though He told them it would happen (Mark 8:31). He appears at different times over a period of forty days. Now, just outside Jerusalem, where they are told to wait for the promise of the Father, He tells them they will receive power go to the whole world and share the good news. Then He is lifted up! He starts to rise. Clouds gather and carry Him beyond their sight. Ever watch a helium balloon until it went into the clouds? No wonder they just stood there gazing.

Clouds signify the glory of God. They surrounded mount Sinai when God descended on the mountain to deliver the Law to Moses (Deuteronomy 4:11). A cloud led the Jews in the wilderness and settled over the tent of meeting when Moses went to talk with God (Exodus 33:9). When Jesus returns He will come in the clouds (Revelation 1:7). When we ascend we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:10-11 Two angels had to tell them it was time to get to

Commented [PW22]: Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Commented [PW23]: Genesis 32:26 (ESV)

²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Commented [PW24]: Acts 1:12 (ESV)

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Commented [PW25]: Mark 8:31 (ESV)

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Commented [PW26]: Deuteronomy 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.

Commented [PW27]: Exodus 33:9 (ESV)

⁹ When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.

Commented [PW28]: Revelation 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Commented [PW29]: 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

work and do what Jesus had just told them. Some people are so anxious to get to heaven they are standing around staring at the hope. Well, we are to desire His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8), but until that day comes, let's get busy doing what He has told us to do (Ephesians 5:16).

He will return. Every prophecy of the first coming was fulfilled in detail. We'd be foolish to think the prophets only got the details of the first coming right. He will return, and when He does it will be to reign. He'll transform our lowly bodies that they might be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). He'll finish the work He started in us (Philippians 1:6), and we will rule and reign with Him (Revelation 20:6). That's wonderful, so wonderful we can't really imagine how great it will be (1 Corinthians 2:9). Jesus will come for His bride. The trumpet will sound (1Thess 4:16-17) and His wrath will be poured out on those who refuse Him (Matthew 16:27); but those who are in Him will meet Him in the clouds and will be rewarded for their faithfulness (1Corinthians 3:13-15; Luke 6:35; Revelation 11:18; Hebrews 10:35; Matthew 5:12).

What a glorious future awaits us! But right now let's not just stand gazing into heaven. Let's get serious about our calling. **How is Jesus calling you to be His witness?** It certainly includes your family and neighbors by the very way you live and the words you speak. But you were created uniquely and have different gifts and talents. God has taken you through certain experiences to prepare you for what He has for you to do to witness His life to others. Watch for those opportunities. Ask God to make clear to you how you can serve Him. Fill your mind and heart with the Word. Be faithful in prayer and fellowship. That is how we keep ourselves ready for service. And never underestimate those chance encounters, chances to share a word of encouragement. To simply ask how you can pray for someone, or to tell them God loves them, can open a door of opportunity to share more. When you do, you'll find that power to be a witness just flows from you. You'll walk away overjoyed to have participated with God in touching a life.

As we lead up to the Pentecost passage, let us continue to pray that God would fill us with His Holy Spirit. Let Him search your heart of anything that might stand in the way of yielding fully to His life in you.

Questions

- 1 Why were the disciples expecting a physical kingdom?
- 2 Why should they have known better?
- 3 When will we know the time of Jesus' return?
- 4 Give several versions of the Great Commission?
- 5 What is unique in the Acts version?
- 6 What is John's version of the Great Commission?
- 7 Why do we need the power?
- 8 How do we receive the power?
- 9 What are we to do now?
- 10 How is Jesus calling you to be His witness?

Commented [PW30]: 2 Timothy 4:8 (NIV)

⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Commented [PW31]: Ephesians 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Commented [PW32]: Philippians 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Commented [PW33]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW34]: Revelation 20:6 (ESV)

⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Commented [PW35]: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—

Commented [PW36]: Matthew 16:27 (ESV)

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Commented [PW37]: 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Commented [PW38]: Luke 6:35 (ESV)

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Commented [PW39]: Revelation 11:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

Commented [PW40]: Hebrews 10:35 (ESV)

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Commented [PW41]: Matthew 5:12 (ESV)

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.