

Bible Study 2

Acts 1:6-11 – Christ’s Ascension

We pick up where we left off last week. We are in Acts chapter 1 and are reading verses 6-11 which will be the focus for our short study.

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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.” 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. 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 1:6-11).

1. The church assembles in the physical presence of the Lord Jesus for the last time before his ascension: So when they had come together

40 days have passed since Christ’s resurrection. He has appeared to his church on numerous occasions and has been instructing and preparing them for this moment and for their forthcoming mission to the world.

The church at this point comprises only about 120 men and woman. They come together to worship God in and through Jesus Christ their Lord and Saviour. And to listen to his instruction.

And there is an invaluable reminder here that the church are the people of Christ. They are one in him. They gather for worship when and where they can. There ought to be therefore a sense of togetherness and belonging. The church is a people in communion with God and one another rooted and built up in Love. The church is family – God’s family.

2. The church asks the Lord Jesus is he is about to re-establish the Kingdom of Israel: they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Understandably, the church was still thinking in worldly categories. They were thinking of that which was familiar to them. They were looking for the re-establishment of the Kingdom of Israel as it had been in the days of King David and Solomon. That period had marked the zenith of Israel’s political, economic, religious, and cultural history. And they were expecting David’s son, who is David’s Lord, to re-establish and even surpass it.

However, Jesus had said that his kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom, marked by his reign in the hearts and minds of his people. That said, his kingdom will find expression in all spheres, including the religious, political, social, economic, and cultural. His church will, after all, turn the world upside down.

And there are more than strong hints found in the writings of the apostles (see Romans 11) that the Lord Jesus is far from finished with the children of Israel. And

it is noteworthy that we have witnessed the re-establishment of Israel as a nation in our generation.

3. The Lord Jesus answers the church with an admonition of sorts: 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

The scriptures teach that: The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law (Deut.29:29).

The church is called to do God’s revealed will rather than engage in needless speculation. The Lord Jesus has commissioned his church to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptise and teach. They are to go out in faith, hope and love and share the gospel with all. That was highly suggestive that God was not at that point about to restore the fortunes of Israel as a political entity.

Moreover, Jesus had already revealed the coming judgement upon Jerusalem when the Temple would be destroyed. And that prophecy was fulfilled within a generation of its utterance in the year AD70.

Jesus hence reminds the church that such matters are the prerogative and preserve of our Father in heaven. He is sovereign. History is His story.

And again, there is an invaluable lesson for the church here. One that has been sadly overlooked or ignored by countless Christian movements down to the present. For how many cults, sects and movements have been established by charismatic/enigmatic leaders claiming some special insight into the end times which they always claim is now imminent?

Yes, the Lord Jesus says, watch and wait but he also commands his church to worship, work and witness according to his revealed will.

4. The church is to await the anointing of the Spirit in readiness for their mission: 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.”

The ascension would be followed not only by the coronation of Christ at the right hand of the Father as revealed in Daniel 7:13-14 but would be followed by Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit upon the church in readiness for her mission.

The Holy Spirit will empower and equip the church. The Spirit will enlighten and enliven the church for ministry. The Spirit will unite the church universal to Christ her Head. The Spirit in conjunction with the word in scripture and the Word Incarnate will guide and direct the church. The presence of the Spirit makes the church holy – special to God; set apart for a specified purpose.

Therefore, the apostles and other disciples comprising the church here in Acts 1 must patiently wait for this anointing before embarking on their mission. Pentecost, as we shall see, was a historical event, like the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

5. The church must attest to and assert the Lord Jesus' gospel everywhere beginning in Jerusalem: and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The word translated into English as 'witness' here is martyr. And it is worth pointing out that many of those addressed here by the Lord Jesus will be martyred for the faith. For their faith in the ultimate and supreme Martyr, Jesus Christ. Tradition teaches that all the apostles except for John were martyred for the faithfulness to Christ. And John was not exempt from suffering for Christ's cause. It is notable that Jesus instructs his church to proclaim the gospel to all, beginning in Jerusalem where he had been rejected, condemned, and crucified. Such is God's love for sinners. There is forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, restoration, and renewal for all who receive and rest in Christ as presented in the gospel.

It is for Jew and Gentile alike. That is why Paul writes: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom.1:16).

And we shall see how the church followed the trajectory of Christ's word in the Acts of the Apostles, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into the Gentile world with the good news.

6. The church apprehend the Lord Jesus's ascension: 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.

This is the event referred to as The Ascension. Jesus was lifted heavenward out of sight. He entered another, a new, dimension to reign at the Father's side in heaven. The lifting up is symbolic of his heavenward ascent. The cloud is also strongly associated with appearances of God ('theophanies' is the theological term) in the Bible. Hence you may recall the cloud on Mount Sinai and on the Mount of Transfiguration. And the pillar of cloud that led the children of Israel in the Exodus. Or again, think on the 'glory cloud' in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle then the Temple.

Jesus was leaving them physically speaking but would be with his church spiritually. The Holy Spirit unites Christ and his people.

7. Angelic messengers appear to the church and provide an assuring word that anticipates Jesus' return: 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."

Just as two angelic messengers witnessed at Jesus's Tomb to his resurrection, so there are two 'men' clothed in white also at his ascension.

White signifying their holiness as messengers sent by God.

They address the 'men of Galilee' reminding us of the humble origins and background of these men chosen and called by Jesus to be his apostolic witnesses near and far. There is also again a parallel to be seen here with the women of Galilee who first witnessed to the resurrection.

The angelic witnesses indirectly remind the church that they have a commission to keep, that Jesus has physically left them but will return bodily in similar manner as he ascended in the fulness of time. This anticipates the end of this age. Until such time the church must worship, work, and witness as chosen and called. The mission continues.

Questions

- 1) How important do you think the Lord's Jesus' ascension is to the mission of the church?
- 2) How do you think those early Christians felt faced with the magnitude of the task before them in the Great Commission?
- 3) What challenges did they face in communicating Christ's gospel?
- 4) What major challenges face the church today in doing likewise?