

The Resurrection Appearances of Jesus:

Part 7, The Ascension the Final Appearance, Empowering the Marginalized

Introduction:

Acts 1:3-11 narrates the pivotal moment of Jesus' ascension into heaven. This is the last appearance of the Risen Lord. It marks the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry and serves as a profound message of hope and empowerment, particularly for marginalized and oppressed peoples. In this Bible study, we will delve into the significance of the ascension as the last earthly appearance of Jesus, its message for believers, and its relevance to contemporary audiences facing similar challenges.

I. Context and Importance:

Acts is the second volume of Luke's two-part work, which also includes the Gospel of Luke. Written by Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, Acts serves as a historical account of the early Christian church and the spread of the gospel.

Acts 1:3-11 provides the final interaction between Jesus and his disciples before his ascension. It is a moment of transition, where Jesus commissions his followers to continue his mission.

This event signifies Jesus' return to heaven, affirming his divinity and completing his earthly ministry. It also marks the beginning of the disciples' role as witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

For people of the African Diaspora who were enslaved in America, the ascension offers assurance that Jesus, who experienced suffering and injustice himself, reigns supreme and understands our struggles intimately.

No wonder the song “**Soon And Very Soon**” is such a favorite with so many. It is a reminder that no matter what challenges we experience, our hope is rooted in Jesus because He has prepared a place for His own to be with Him.

The Scriptures ACTS 1:3-11

³ After his suffering^[a] he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ While staying^[b] with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[c] the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set 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, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The Lesson

II. Acts 1:3

"After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

1. A Closer look

"After his suffering": This phrase refers to Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. Jesus' suffering, which culminates in his victory over death.

"He presented himself to them": These appearances served to confirm the reality of his resurrection and to strengthen the faith of his followers.

"Gave many convincing proofs that he was alive": Jesus provided tangible evidence of his resurrection. These proofs affirmed the physical reality of Jesus' resurrection and dispelled doubts.

"He appeared to them over a period of forty days": This period symbolizes completeness and preparation, reminiscent of other significant forty-day periods in Scripture (e.g., Moses' time on Mount Sinai, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness).

"Spoke about the kingdom of God": During these forty days, Jesus continued to instruct his disciples about the kingdom of God. This underscores the central theme of Jesus' ministry and the continuity between his earthly teachings and post-resurrection instructions.

2. Questions

Verse 3 raises a critical question regarding Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and their significance for the disciples' understanding of his identity and mission.

How do believers understand the significance of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, and what implications do they have for their faith and mission?

The implications are Faith and Mission: We are called to respond to the tension with faith in the reality of Jesus' resurrection and the promise of his return. This involves trusting in the truth of Jesus' words and the reliability of his promises, even when we may not fully understand or comprehend them. We must be committed to the mission of proclaiming the gospel and advancing the kingdom of God.

III. Acts 1:4

"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.'"

1. A Closer look

"On one occasion, while he was eating with them": This detail emphasizes the intimacy and familiarity of Jesus' interaction with his disciples. It suggests a casual setting, possibly in a home, where Jesus shares a meal with his followers.

"Do not leave Jerusalem": This command is significant, as it sets the stage for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which will occur in Jerusalem.

'Wait for the gift my Father promised': Jesus refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he has previously mentioned (Luke 24:49).

Spirit in the early church. This continuity provides a foundation for the disciples' understanding and expectation of what is to come.

2. Questions

Acts 1:4 encourages believers to trust in God's timing and provision. Like the disciples, we are called to wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promises in our lives, knowing that God is faithful to his word. However, it can be difficult waiting for God to move when we are challenged by the vagaries of life. (ie, when sickness or disease is present. When needs are great but provision is low.)

The command to wait in Jerusalem reminds Christians of the importance of being rooted and grounded in prayer and fellowship with other believers. It is in times of waiting and preparation that God often prepares us for the tasks he has appointed for us.

Verse 4 raises a critical question:

How do you wait? What helps you wait in moments of distress?

Patience: We are called to respond to the tension with patience and trust in God's timing. This involves recognizing that the timing of God's promises is often not immediate or according to our own timetable, but is ultimately for our good and his glory.

Readiness: Our response should also involve readiness to respond obediently to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This includes being willing to step out in faith, to be used by God for his purposes, and to be bold witnesses for Christ in the power of the Spirit.

IV. Acts 1:5

"For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

1. A Closer look

"For John baptized with water": Jesus contrasts the baptism performed by John the Baptist with the baptism that the disciples will soon experience. John's baptism was a ritual of repentance, symbolizing the forgiveness of sins and preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

"But in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit": Jesus foretells the coming of a new baptism, one that will involve the Holy Spirit. This baptism is distinct from John's baptism in that it signifies not only repentance but also empowerment for mission and service in the kingdom of God.

"In a few days": Indicates the imminence of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Whereas John's baptism prepared individuals for the coming of the Messiah, the baptism of the Holy Spirit empowers believers for active participation in the mission of the kingdom of God.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit signifies a deeper experience of God's presence and power in the life of the believer. It involves being immersed or saturated with the Spirit, resulting in transformation, empowerment, and enablement for ministry.

2. Questions

Verse 5 raises a critical question regarding the relationship between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

What is the relationship between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit, and what implications does this have for believers today?

Is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit a one time event or an ongoing experience?

The tension lies in the disciples' anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the role of baptism in this process.

Our response to this tension involves several aspects:

Understanding: We must seek to understand the biblical teaching on the relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit. This involves recognizing that while baptism is a symbolic act of identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, it is the reception of the Holy Spirit that brings about spiritual regeneration and empowerment for Christian living.

Dependency: we are dependent on the Holy Spirit for spiritual life and power. This involves acknowledging that it is not through ritualistic acts like baptism alone that we receive the Holy Spirit, but through faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit in our hearts.

Just as the disciples waited in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise, Christians are called to wait expectantly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives and communities. This waiting involves prayer, obedience, and readiness to receive all that God desires to give.

V. Acts 1:6**

"So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'"

1. A Closer look

"'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'"

The question reveals their understanding of the Messiah's role in bringing about the restoration of Israel's kingdom. They are expecting Jesus to establish a political kingdom that will overthrow Roman oppression and restore Israel's sovereignty.

The ("at this time"), indicating their desire for clarity regarding when the restoration of the kingdom will occur. They are looking for confirmation of their expectations and hopes for the future.

The disciples' question reflects their ongoing struggle to grasp the full implications of Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the nature of his kingdom. They are still influenced by prevailing Jewish expectations of a Messiah who will deliver Israel from foreign oppression and establish a glorious reign.

2. Questions

Verse 6 raises a critical question regarding the disciples' understanding of the nature and timing of God's kingdom.

The relevant question is: **How do believers understand the nature and timing of God's kingdom, and what implications does this understanding have for their mission and purpose?**

Do we focus too much on God's plan for Israel?

What should be our actions regarding Israel?

How do our expectations align with those of Jesus?

Is Jesus only concerned about heaven and the beyond?

- The disciples' question reminds Christians of the importance of discerning God's timing and purposes in our lives.

While the disciples may be looking for signs of the imminent restoration of Israel's kingdom, Jesus emphasizes the broader scope of God's kingdom and their role in spreading the gospel to all nations.

Like the disciples, we are called to shift our focus away from speculative questions about the future and towards faithful obedience to Jesus' command to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

VI. Acts 1:7**

"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'"

1. A Closer look

"It is not for you to know the times or dates": Jesus acknowledges that the specifics of God's timing and plans are beyond the disciples' comprehension. God is sovereign and does not report to us.

"The Father has set by his own authority": The timing of future events, including the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, is determined solely by the authority of God the Father.

By redirecting the disciples' focus away from speculative questions about the future and towards their present mission of bearing witness to the gospel (Acts 1:8), Jesus emphasizes the importance of faithful obedience and trust in God's guidance.

2. Questions

How much do we need to know before we trust God completely. WE sing God said it, that settles it. Do we believe this?

Acts 1:7 encourages believers to cultivate humility and trust in God's timing and providence. It reminds us that while we may desire to know the specifics of the future, but such knowledge ultimately lies beyond our grasp.

Verse 7 raises a critical question regarding human understanding of God's timing and sovereignty.

The relevant question prompted by this verse is: **How do believers reconcile their desire for knowledge of God's timing with their trust in his sovereignty and wisdom?**

Why is God's timing not for our knowledge? What is the danger? For us?

Our response to this tension involves several aspects:

- 1. Humility:** We must approach the question of God's timing with humility, recognizing our finite understanding and limited perspective. This involves acknowledging that God's ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- 2. Trust:** Our trust is in God's sovereignty and wisdom. While we may desire knowledge or certainty about the future, we are called to trust in God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises in his own time and according to his own purposes.
- 3. Faithfulness:** We are called to respond to the tension by remaining faithful in our obedience to God's commands and our commitment to his kingdom work. Rather than becoming preoccupied with speculative questions about the future,

we are to focus on living faithfully in the present, seeking to fulfill God's will and advance his purposes in the world.

VIII. Acts 1:8**

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1. A Closer look

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you": Jesus assures the disciples that they will receive divine empowerment through the Holy Spirit. This power is not of human origin but comes from God himself.

"And you will be my witnesses": The purpose, the reason for the disciples' empowerment is to enable them to bear witness to Jesus and his gospel. They are to testify to who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he continues to do in the world.

"In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth": Jesus declares it is a worldwide mission.

The central role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers for mission and ministry. The power promised by Jesus is not merely for personal edification or spiritual experiences but for the purpose of effective witness and service.

The phrase "you will be my witnesses" highlights the identity and calling of believers as representatives of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. The disciples are commissioned to take the message of Jesus' salvation to all people, regardless of geographical, cultural, or ethnic boundaries.

2. Questions

Verse 8 raises a critical question.

How should we prepare ourselves to be His witnesses?

Are the old ways still valid?

Like the disciples, Christians are called to be bold and faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ in all areas of life. This entails not only proclaiming the gospel with our words but also living lives that reflect the love, grace, and truth of Jesus to those around us.

In summary, our response involves preparation, engagement, boldness, and persistence in fulfilling our role as empowered witnesses for Jesus Christ. We must prepare ourselves to receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through prayer, surrender, and openness to his work in our lives. This involves acknowledging our dependence on God and our need for his power to fulfill the mission he has given us. The task of bearing witness to Jesus Christ is not always easy, but we are called to remain steadfast in our commitment to the mission and to trust in God's faithfulness to empower and sustain us.

IX. Acts 1:9**

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

1. A Closer look

"He was taken up before their very eyes": The ascension of Jesus occurs visibly and in the presence of his disciples. This emphasizes the reality and significance of the event, ensuring that the disciples bear witness to it firsthand.

"A cloud hid him from their sight": The ascension is obscured from view by a cloud, symbolizing the divine presence and glory surrounding Jesus' departure. This echoes similar imagery from the Old Testament, where clouds often signify the presence of God (e.g., Exodus 13:21-22).

Acts 1:9 portrays the ascension of Jesus as a real and tangible event that occurred in the presence of his disciples. It underscores the physicality of Jesus' departure and his transition to a heavenly realm.

It marks the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of his exalted reign at the right hand of God the Father. It signifies his victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness, as well as his authority over all creation.

2. Questions

Verse 9 raises a critical question

How do believers understand and respond to Jesus' ascension, and what implications does it have for their faith and mission?

While Jesus has assured them of the coming of the Holy Spirit and his eventual return, they are left grappling with the immediate reality of his absence and the implications of his departure for their own lives and ministry.

Our response should be characterized by faith in the promises of Jesus regarding his continued presence and authority. Despite his physical absence, Jesus remains actively involved in the lives of believers through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and his ongoing work of intercession and mediation on their behalf.

Hope: His ascension is not the end of the story but rather the prelude to his triumphant return in glory, when he will establish his kingdom in its fullness and usher in the consummation of God's purposes for creation.

Mission: As his disciples, we are called to continue his work of proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and advancing the kingdom of God in the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and guided by Jesus' teachings and example.

X. **Acts 1:10****

"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them."

1. **A Closer look**

"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going": The disciples are described as gazing intently into the sky as Jesus ascends into heaven.

"When suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them": Angels,

The appearance of the two men in white robes serves as a reminder of the ongoing presence and guidance of angels in the lives of believers. It reassures us of God's care and protection, even in times of uncertainty or transition.

The disciples' upward gaze serves as a metaphor for our spiritual posture as Christians, directing our attention and hope towards the heavenly realm where Jesus reigns.

2. Questions

Verse 10 raises a critical

How should believers respond to significant spiritual events or encounters without becoming fixated on the past or losing sight of their mission?

Do we ever become fixated on other things? (I.e. color of carpet rather than the ministries. The comfort of those present rather than the reaching those not present, Things important to those our age or groups rather than things those we need to reach might be interested in?)

1. Awareness: We must be aware of the tendency to become fixated on extraordinary spiritual experiences or encounters to the detriment of our ongoing mission and purpose. And non primary issues and concerns. .

2. Alignment We need to align our posture and focus with the commission and instructions given to us by Jesus.

XI. **Acts 1:11****

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1. A Closer look

"Why do you stand here looking into the sky?": The angels inquiry suggests a gentle rebuke or reminder to the disciples to shift their focus from the physical departure of Jesus to the task at hand.

"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back":** The angels reassure that Jesus will return.

"In the same way you have seen him go into heaven": This suggests a visible, bodily return of Jesus in glory, consistent with the manner in which he departed.

The question posed by the angels challenges us to consider how we are living in light of Jesus' promised return. It prompts reflection on whether we are actively engaged in fulfilling his mission and prepared for his coming kingdom.

2. Questions

Verse 11 creates a critical question. The tension lies in the disciples' lingering gaze into the sky, indicating a potential fixation on the past event of Jesus' ascension rather than an active engagement with the future hope of his return.

The relevant question prompted by this verse is:

How should believers balance their remembrance of Jesus' past actions with their anticipation of his future coming?

While it is natural to reflect on significant past events, the angels' question challenges the disciples—and by extension, all believers—to shift their focus from the past to the future, from what has already happened to what is yet to come.

In what ways do we stand idly watching a waiting for Jesus?

This anticipation and instruction set the stage for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which occurs in Acts 2.

Summary:

In Acts 1:3-11, we witness a momentous event. Jesus anticipates the birth of the church, and entrusts them with the continuation of His mission.

As we look ahead to the future of the church, Acts 2 emerges as a pivotal event, marking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the early Christian community. We are reminded of the glorious hope that awaits us: the return of Christ, as prophesied in Acts 1:11. This promise of His imminent return serves as a source of anticipation and encouragement for the church, fueling our resolve to faithfully proclaim the gospel and advance the kingdom of God until the day of His triumphant coming.

Therefore, let us take heart in the assurance of Jesus' victory, the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of His glorious return. With steadfast faith and unwavering hope, let us press forward in our mission, confident that the future of the church is secure in the hands of our risen Savior.