

February 14, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Acts
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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JESUS WILL COME AGAIN Acts 1:6-11

We live in a culture that, up until the past ten or twenty years, was steeped in religious tradition. In my generation, most people knew something about Jesus and had heard stories that He was going to come back to earth one day. Beliefs or opinions on the topic have been far-ranging, but the essential idea was known.

What is not well known is the wide range of “Christendom” that holds to Christ’s future return, as well as many cults. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches believe that Christ will suddenly appear like a flash of lightening, at which time He will judge sinners. Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists believe Christ will return in judgment. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Christ’s return will be more of a lengthy presence that will end in the Battle of Armageddon. Even Islam teaches that Jesus will return as a sign that Alla is about to judge the world. According to Bahai Faith, the return of Christ is more of a spiritual advancement of human civilization, a kind of personification of progressive revelation.

All that is to say that Christ’s return is not a distinctly Evangelical Christian idea. It seems that a couple of important conclusions are ignored in all of these traditions and beliefs. Why is Christ returning and, if He is returning, how should His followers live?

The key element in these conclusions or questions is that the principle of His return applies to Christ’s followers. When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to return to the Heavenly Father, He had challenged His followers regarding the future. After He ascended out of sight, the divine messengers instructed the disciples that He would return again in the same way. The disappearance of Christ, the

continuing work of Christ in His absence, and His return are all matters of importance to people who know Him, love Him, and desire to serve Him.

The important truth Jesus communicated in this grand event does not answer the question, “When is Jesus coming again?” Rather, the important issue is that while we are on earth and Jesus is not, we are supposed to be serving Him by continuing to be His witnesses. If we really believe that Jesus is coming again, would we not be concerned to do what He told us to do while He is gone?

That is the picture Jesus drew for us in the parables He told about the rich man or the king who went on a journey and left his servants with responsibility. The thrust of those stories is that when the master or king returned, he would ask for an accounting. Jesus said, *“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 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. Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake”* (Mark 13:32-37).

Do you and I live like we believe Jesus’s commission and the angels’ promise in this part of Luke’s account? Are we Christ’s witnesses with an eye on His return?

Important Instruction About the Near Future (vv.6-8).

The chosen representatives had a question about the timing of Christ’s work. So when they had come together, they asked him, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (v.6). It was asked by the gathered apostles. *So when they had come together* (v.6a). This gathering is not a reference to Jesus’s command for the disciples to meet Him in Galilee (Mark 16:7). That was probably the case when Jesus revealed Himself to 500-plus followers (1 Corinthians 15:6).

At this juncture, Jesus had been meeting with the apostles and other disciples in various places and various circumstances for 40 days. Now the time had come for Him to depart and leave the ministry of the gospel to those He had trained. This gathering was on the Mount of Olives toward Bethany. Luke wrote about it in his first account to Theophilus. *Then 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 worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God (Luke 24:50-53).* Also, he gave more information right after this event. *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away (Acts 1:12).*

It was a question about God's promise. *They asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (v.6b).* The "kingdom" was an important part of Jesus's teaching. Immediately after successfully defeating Satan during the intense temptation, He began preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand. He began that teaching in the town where He had grown up. Matthew told how Jesus, *leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."* From that time Jesus began to preach, *saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:13-17).*

That kingdom idea is what the apostles were interested in, that was their question. But they were confused because of their understanding of Old Testament Scriptures. A central theme of the Old Testament prophets was the restoration of the literal, actual kingdom of Israel. They knew that God had promised David an eternal kingdom in which a relative of David would sit on the throne forever. God promised David through His prophet, *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will*

establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

But things didn't work out in a nice, orderly fashion that we humans prefer. In time, the whole nation had undergone God's judgment because of sin and had been scattered to the winds. In spite of that setback, the prophets, God's messengers, had promised that a day was coming when God would bring His people back to the land He had given them by covenant (Isaiah 40-42; Jeremiah 24, 30, 33; Ezekiel 38-48; Daniel 12; Micah 4; Amos 9; Zechariah 12; plus dozens more).

That is not the kingdom Jesus taught about. He preached the Good News about the heavenly kingdom, the spiritual kingdom. The current kingdom is where Christ reigns supreme in the hearts of His people whom the Father has drawn to the King, Jesus (John 6:44,65). That means that we modern Christians are indeed a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28).*

But God's promise to restore the actual kingdom of Israel waits. "When as they had been instructed by the space of three whole years, they betray no less ignorance than if they had heard never a word. There are as many errors in this question as words." (John Calvin)

A close look at the disciples' question reveals that the verb, the noun, the adverb of the sentence all indicate how confused the disciples were about the kingdom Jesus preached. Their confusion is evident in their question: *"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (v.6b).* The verb is *restore*, which action was not part of the Father's plan regarding the actual, physical kingdom of Israel yet. The noun *Israel* refers to the actual, physical kingdom in the land of ancient Israel, which again was not the Father's plan at the moment. The adverbial clause *at this time* reveals that the apostles expected an immediate restoration of the physical kingdom by the King. Those who had been taught about the kingdom of heaven by the King himself were still totally confused across the board about the nature of the King's work.

Jesus corrected His followers' confusion with a twofold answer. He told them not to worry about the Father's timing. *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed*

by his own authority” (v.7). What is so hard to understand about the instruction, *It is not for you to know times or seasons?* Had not Jesus taught within the context of His return, “*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only*” (Matthew 24:36).

Jesus’s teaching was clear enough. But the disciples didn’t let it impact them. Neither do a lot of folks still. Still people who claim to love and follow Jesus ignore His warning. Remember Harold Camping who predicted that Christ would return in 1994. Oh wait, that was May 21, 2011. Oops no, it was October 21, 2011. Of course Christ did not adjust the divine schedule to meet Camping’s approval. Actually, well-known date-setting began in 500 with Hippolytus, a Christian theologian in Rome, who based his prediction on the measurements of the ark. There was a rash of predictions in the twentieth century with many of them coming from Hebert W. Armstrong who just couldn’t get it right predicting dates like 1935, 1945, 1972 and 1975.

Even the late Jerry Falwell got in on the act saying in 1999 that Christ would come within 10 years. Or maybe he meant that he personally would see Christ within 10 years which was true because he died in 2007. Sun Yung Moon’s followers were convinced he was the Christ who already returned back in 1932.

We, too, should not be occupied with such trivial pursuit. God, the Blessed Controller of all things, has already fixed the *times and seasons*. These are the same two words we saw in 1 Thessalonians 5:1. Times (*chronos*) refers to periods or spans of times. Seasons (*kairos*) speaks of the characteristics of the various spans of times. God has already fixed permanently what will happen when. He already has determined what the days leading up to Christ’s return will be like. Then why do we get so upset by current events?

Jesus taught that it is not our duty to decide when He will return. At the same time, He taught that His representatives needed to expect to receive power to witness. “*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*” (v.8).

Do not try to predict and do not expect what you contrive in your finite human wisdom. Rather, anticipate the supernatural, Holy

Spirit power that will enable you to do what Christ desires for you to do. Consider that before Jesus began His public ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven is at hand, He was empowered by God the Holy Spirit. *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him* (Matthew 3:16).

Our Lord makes it clear in the statement of our text that the work He intends for His followers to do is witnessing. He also made it clear that effective witnessing will require supernatural power. Therefore, verse eight is the central verse of the book about being Christ’s witnesses. In chapters 1-7, we read about the apostles’ witnessing in Jerusalem. In chapters 8-11, the theme is witnessing in Judea and Samaria. In chapters 12-28, the witnessing reaches out toward the end of the earth.

Therefore, we should not be surprised to find the word “witness” showing up twenty times in this book. For example, very early on, as the disciples were choosing Judas’s replacement, they determined that he had to be *a witness to his [Christ’s] resurrection* (Acts 1:22). In his first sermon, Peter preached, “*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses*” (Acts 2:32). Again Peter preached in his second sermon, “*The Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses*” (Acts 3:15).

A witness is one who gives testimony to what he or she saw, experienced. To witness is to testify regarding truth or facts especially in a legal sense. The Greek word in our text is *martus* which is the root for the related word *marturion*. Obviously, that Greek word gives us the English word martyr. That meaning was attached to the Greek word during the Maccabean age because the Jews in that day were often executed based on their testimony of God. So, too, that definition fits well for the apostles who were all literally martyred – except John. They testified to the reality that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), and that testimony cost them their lives.

The big question we are forced to ask at this point is, “Are you a witness to the truth?” Do you know a relationship with the person God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit? Or do you know a lot of Bible facts? Kent Hughes conclude, “To be a witness we must

have *logos* – the Word of Christ, *ethos* – the inner reality of what we proclaim, and *pathos* – passion.” (Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word*, “Acts,” Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Publishers, 1996, 17.)

The apostles possessed all three. Consider the passion of Peter as he preached at Pentecost. He was pretty serious about what he witnessed. As was Stephen. He was so passionate about what he knew in Jesus that it got him stoned. And Paul telling the gospel to Governors Felix and Festus was full of passion. So have been multitudes of our Lord’s witnesses. When George Whitefield was getting the people of Edinburgh out of their beds at five o’clock in the morning to hear his preaching, a man on his way to the church met David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic. Surprised at seeing him on his way to hear Whitefield preach, the man said, “I thought you did not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t. But Whitefield does.”

Before moving on, let’s take just a moment to consider how the two promises fit our lives. First, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*” The Holy Spirit “comes upon” everyone who confesses sin, embraces Christ’s finished work of atonement by faith. That work of regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. He does not cleanse us and leave us but continues to indwell us. If we have not received God the Holy Spirit, we have not been born again.

Second, “*And you will be My witnesses.*” Jesus did not say, “You must be My witnesses,” but “you will be.” This is not a command, an imperative verb. It is a future tense, middle voice, indicative that simply states how things will be in response to the previous statement. That is, “you will receive the Holy Spirit” and “witnessing will be the result.” That should make the person who does not in some way testify to the person of Christ wonder what is wrong in him or her.

Important Instruction About the Distant Future (vv.6-8).

A shocking context. Jesus had just explained what was going to happen to the apostles in the near future, and suddenly King Jesus disappeared into the sky. *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 (v.9). That would be pretty impacting.

Jesus had been appearing and disappearing repeatedly for forty days. Now He had disappeared for good until He comes again. He isn’t going to reappear on earth until He comes to establish the actual, physical kingdom. Even at the rapture He will remain in the clouds of the air (1 Thessalonians 4.17).

His disappearance pictured how we will disappear into the air in a glorified body that is able to be transported to a celestial place called heaven . . . the throne room of God the Father. We know where Jesus in His glorified body went, and we know the way (John 14:5). Now Christ is busily engaged in a ceaseless prayer ministry, interceding for us, pleading for us on the basis of His blood (Hebrews 7:25). We love to sing about the work Christ is doing now in a song written by Bob Kauflin, while the words were penned by Charitie Bancroft over 150 years ago.

Before the Throne of God Above

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest, whose name is Love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart

— Bob Kauflin (words by Charitie Bancroft, 1863)

In our text, we need to notice the emphasis of the words “up,” “sky,” “clouds” (vv.9-11). Because of statements like this, we often picture heaven as being “up in the sky.” But in any given 24-hour period, “up” is a continually changing direction. To that end, we cannot say where or what heaven is. But we can say with assurance that it is where God sits in majestic glory on His throne, from where He controls all things.

Another shocking experience was when two white-robed men appeared as suddenly as Jesus had disappeared. *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes (v.10).* Divine messengers like these were pretty busy

during Jesus's last days on earth. One came to the Garden of Gethsemane to strengthen Jesus. Two of them were at the tomb. And now two more show up to explain Jesus's disappearance.

That they were dressed in white robes indicates that they came from the pure, sinless presence of God. Divine messengers like this, but looking quite different, continue to minister to us at times we don't even know in ways we don't know. Speaking of angels, the writer to the Hebrew Christians penned, "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*" (*Hebrews 1:14*).

The passage ends with a comforting promise. The white-robed men asked a strange question. They said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?*" (*v.11a*). Why not? Jesus with whom they had lived for three years, Jesus who had been dead but was alive, Jesus who they depended on completely disappeared. Having given final instructions and promises, Jesus lifted up His hands to bless the apostles and was caught up into the clouds. That would cause His friends to stand looking slack-jawed.

The white-robed men gave a wonderful promise. "*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven*" (*v.11b*). That Jesus is coming again is good news indeed. And more good news is the important detail the angels gave. Jesus is coming in the same way He left. That has to mean that He is coming in the sky, in the clouds. That description matches the instruction about Christ coming to snatch away the saints in the *parousia* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). That description also matches the instruction concerning Christ coming in judgment to establish the actual, earthly, promised kingdom in which He rules (Matthew 24:30).

The man Jesus who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again has returned to God the Father. As He promised, He sent us God the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter. But the Holy Spirit does more than comfort us. He empowers us to be what our Savior desires for us to be and do what He desires for us to do. What Jesus desires for us to be and do is the matter of witnessing. In all we say or do, we are to give testimony to the person and work of Christ our King. If we really believe He is coming again, we will be quite motivated to depend on the Holy Spirit to empower us to be what we are.