

**5/16/2021**

**Acts 1:1-11**

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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. 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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

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

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

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

## **Unseen Real**

So like I talked about with the kids a little bit ago, today is Ascension Sunday. Today we celebrate the ascension of Jesus, when our risen Christ ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Our scripture lesson today is the very, very beginning of the book of Acts. And this book is a continuation of one of the 4 gospel accounts of Jesus' life, the Gospel of Luke. And Luke's account of Jesus ends like this: **(Luke 24:50-53)** "When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he

lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” Those are the last sentences of the Gospel of Luke and so when our scripture reading from Acts 1 begins, that is where Luke is jumping off from. And we get this clue in our scripture reading in the very first few sentences that says, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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.” Luke is doing some recap here just like your favorite show on television when it begins with, “Last time on (fill in the show here) and then shows a short recap of what happened last week on the show. Luke is giving us a recap with those first few verses – helping us remember where the last book left off and letting us know that this is just a continuation of the story about Jesus and his disciples.

And this recap includes this very important declaration that Jesus makes to his disciples. Jesus says in [Acts 1:4-5](#), “<sup>4</sup> 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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” While Jesus is gone, the group of believers is meant to wait and watch for this new baptism, this second baptism – not a baptism with water like, but instead a baptism with God’s Holy Spirit. This is the promised gift that God will send once Jesus ascends.

But Jesus’ ascension must come first. Jesus must leave his followers first before God’s promised gift of His holy Spirit can descend upon the believers. When I read this section of scripture what comes to mind is the moment when a mom or dad drops off their child at their first day of kindergarten. As they are trying to tell their little one why they have to leave, they probably say something like, “But if I don’t leave then you won’t be able to make new friends with your classmates. Don’t worry, you’re going to be in good hands with your new teacher.” Perhaps the child is unsure of what to expect and possibly worried about when or if the parent is going to come back, but the promise of new friends and a reliable teacher who they can depend on in times of trouble, the child watches mom or dad leave and trusts that what their parent promised will come to pass.

I imagine the disciples here with Jesus with such a similar feeling to little children on their first day of school without mom or dad. But Jesus reassures his beloved followers that although he must go to be with the Father in Heaven, new and good things are going to happen *and* there will be someone to come who will be their aid in the days to come. In fact, the Greek word that is often used for God's Holy Spirit is the word "paraclete." And paraclete literally means 'called in aid', from para- 'alongside' + klētos 'to call'. God's Holy Spirit is someone who comes alongside us to aid us in times of need or confusion to give us peace and wisdom. And we'll talk more about the Holy Spirit next week on Pentecost Sunday.

But if we keep with this image of a parent and child, just like a parent who must leave their little one at school and head off to work, Jesus ascends to heaven in order that He might do his work from the heavenlies, the work he does as he is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

**Romans 8:34** tells us that work that Jesus is doing. It says, "Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Jesus' work right now is as the enthroned king of the world, sitting at the right hand of God the Father, interceding on our behalf, (or in other

words, praying for us) so that the whole world might come to know the amazing grace and the awesome power of God's love, mercy, and justice. Jesus. Did you know this? That Jesus is away at work and working for us right now at the right hand of God the Father? Isn't that amazing? Like Jesus is actually, physically in the heavens right now. When a little child sees their parent go leave them at their first day of kindergarten and go to work, we know that even though the child can't see them, their parent still exists, right? Something called object permanency is developed in our minds throughout life to help us know that even though we can't see something, it still exists. So it is with Jesus, too! Even though you and I can't see him, he still exists. He is in eternity, a part of existence that is unseen to the human eye, but that is absolutely real. And right now, Jesus, our Lord and Savior who died on the cross and was physically raised from the dead, literally in the heavenlies, with God right now, praying and interceding for us and the world. Jesus is still working for the salvation of the world – still hoping and waiting for everyone to come to God through him. Thank you, Jesus.

Are you needing to remember today that Jesus is interceding for you? For your family? For your workplace? For your neighbor? For your friends? For our town of Waterford? For our nation? Jesus' work is not finished – as

King, seated on the throne in heaven, Jesus wants to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. He wants to see healing and wholeness. He wants to see intimacy with God and love for one another. He wants to see sick and the addicted made well. He wants to see the lonely, the orphaned, the immigrant be taken care of by others. He wants to see the prisoners set free from the bondage that shackles them. Jesus wants you. Jesus wants to claim the world as God's. Jesus is praying for you.

We're going to sing our final hymn in just a moment, and throughout the song, the altar is open. Come up here and kneel or stand in the presence of God and let's ask God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done our lives and in our hearts as it is in heaven. Come and spend some time here picturing Jesus reigning in the heavens and praying for you and our world to return to him.

And after the song is finished, if there is anyone who would like specific prayer, I'll be hanging out up here and offering anointing oil and prayer.

So to begin our time of song and prayer, hear these words from 2 Cor. 4:16-18 as our reminder of the truth: <sup>16</sup> That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. <sup>17</sup> For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!<sup>18</sup> So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.