



Acts 1:1-11

**“Where Is Jesus Now?
What Do We Do?”**

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“Following Christ from City Center”

ACTS 1:1-11

"WHERE IS JESUS NOW? WHAT ARE WE TO DO?"

Many Overlaps With Lk. 24 (Close Jesus Earthly Ministry)

A. 1:1-3 RETROSPECTIVE PREFACE TO ACTS (//Luke 1:1-4).

Continuity Emphasized

Revelation Of Risen Lord Is Full, Time-Limited

1 In the first book (i.e. Gospel of Luke), O Theophilus, *Lover Of God*, Secondary Preface (Lk. Summary + Acts Plan)

I have dealt with all that **JESUS** began to do and teach **TEACH IN WORD AND DEED**

2 until he was **TAKEN UP**, (Lk. 24:51, 2 Kgs. 2:9-11) **TIME LIMIT TO DO/TEACH**

3 after he had given commandment to the apostles **FULLY TAUGHT**

4 whom he had chosen through **the Holy Spirit** (Lk. 6:12-19). **SPIRIT**

3' To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, **MANY PROOFS**

2' appearing to them during forty days, (2 Baruch 76:1-5) **TIME LIMIT TO INSTRUCTION**

1' and speaking of the kingdom of God. **SPEECH ABOUT KINGDOM**

Disciples Are Fully Instructed, To Be Empowered, Guided

B. 1:4-11 POST-EASTER INSTRUCTION ON TWO RECURRENT DISCIPLESHIP PROBLEMS.

1:1-11// Type = Ancient Assumption Stories + Elijah

1) vv.4-8 Problem Of End-Time Enthusiasm And Religious Nationalism (4 Parts).

Jesus **a) vv.4-5 Jesus Promises The Baptism In The Holy Spirit.** **ACTION OF JESUS (1)**

4 And while staying (i.e. eating) with them, **Trinitarian Action: Jesus/Father/Spirit**

Father he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, **Corporeal Resurrection**

5 but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, **Key To Our Future**

Spirit "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, **Prophecy: [Lk. 3:16, Lk. 24:49], I Cor 12:13**

but before many days you shall be baptized with **the Holy Spirit.**" **Is. 32:15, Joel 2:28-29, God's Engulfing Presence**

b) v.6 Disciples' Question: Evidence of Misunderstanding. **MISUNDERSTANDING (2)**

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, **Issue Is Not Our Nation But World Mission**

Jesus "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" **To Our Beleaguered Nation**

b') vv.7-8 Jesus' Response: Strong Reproof = None Of Your Business!

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons **REPROOF BY RISEN LORD (3)**

Father which the Father has fixed by his own authority. **Mark 13:32, Mt. 24:36, Luke 17:20-37**

No Speculation For Disciples

a') v.8 Jesus Promises The Power Of The Spirit For The Mission. **PROMISE: MISSIONS (4)**

8 **Spirit** But you shall receive power when **the Holy Spirit** shall come upon you; **Mission Power (Holy Spirit/ Pentecost)**

and you shall be my witnesses: **Mission Purpose (His Witnesses. His Story)**

in Jerusalem (i.e. people *like us*: Acts 1:12-8:4), **Mission Scope (People Near and Far)**

and in Judea and Samaria (i.e. people *similar to us* = near neighbors: Acts 8:5-12:25)

and to the end of the earth" (i.e. people *very different from us*: Acts 13:1-28:31). **Outline Of Acts, Jn. 15:26-27**

Whole Narrative Fulfills Prophecy

2) vv.9-11 Problem Of Nostalgia, Passivity, And Quietism (4 Parts).

Type = Ascension Story

Heavenly Rule Begins, Whole Person Assumed

a) v.9 Ascension of the Risen Jesus into the Glory of God.

Clouds Reveal/Conceal God's Glory

9 And when he had said them, as they were looking on, **Jesus Rules, Spirit Comes, World Mission Begins**

he was **lifted up**, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **Seen, 2 Kgs. 2:9-11**

ACTION OF JESUS (1)

b) v.10a Disciples' Behavior: Evidence of Misunderstanding. **Heaven (4x, Apostrophe)**

10 And while they were gazing *into heaven* as he went, **MISUNDERSTANDING (2)**

Wistful, Defeated Quietism

b') vv.10b-11 Angel's Response: Sarcastic Reproof for Passivity & Nostalgia.

behold, two men (angels) stood by them in white robes, and said, **Dt. 19:15, John 8:17 On 2 Witnesses**

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand *looking up into heaven*?" **REPROOF BY ANGELS (3)**

1:11 As Basis Of Confidence

a') v.11 Return of the Risen Jesus from the Glory of God.

Jesus (Lk. 86x, Acts 68x) Remains Active

11 This **JESUS** who was **TAKEN UP** from you *into heaven*, **PROMISE OF RETURN, END OF MISSION (4)**

will come in the same way as you saw him go *into heaven*." **I Timothy 3:16, I Peter 3:21, Luke 21:27, Dan. 7:13**

A Brief Treatment Of Acts 1:1-11

This is the first thought unit of Luke’s second volume. The terms of inclusion, *Jesus* (v.1 // v.11) and *taken up* (v.2 // v.11) mark the beginning and end of the three paragraphs (vv.1-3, 4-8, 9-11). Like the Roman God Janus who had one face forwards and one backwards, Acts 1:1-11 is review and preview. The review is the secondary preface (vv.1-3) which tightly summarizes Luke’s gospel; the preview is found in 1:8 which outlines of the whole of Acts (1:1-8:4 in Jerusalem, 8:5-12:25 in Judea and Samaria, and 13-28 with Paul’s missionary journeys to the ends of the earth. Note also the repeated use of *Holy Spirit* (vv.3, 5, 8) which ties the first two paragraphs together and the four uses of *heaven* in vv.10-11. Jesus has gone into the invisible part of creation to share the reign and from there he shall return when the Father chooses. In the interim they are to be filled with the same Spirit that empowered Jesus to spread his story and benefits at home (Jerusalem), to near neighbors (Judea, Samaria), to neighbors far and wide (ends of the earth). The kingdom mission continues in his church. The church exits in mission and evangelism.

The first three verses are a secondary preface which highlights historical and theological themes that bridge from Volume 1 (Luke) to Volume 2 (Acts). The surface structure is a 7:1 concentric pattern with the phrase *whom he had chosen through the Holy Spirit* (Luke 6:12-19) at the center in v.2c. That they are fully taught is grounded both in Jesus’ *commandments* (v.2b) and in the *many proofs* of his appearances (v.3a). That the period of revelation is not ongoing is signaled by the parallel time limits: *until he was taken up* (v.2a), *appearing to them during forty days* (v.3b). That there is continuity in Jesus’ words and deeds which now continue in the church is signaled by the two parallel phrases *all that Jesus began to do and teach* (v.1b) // *and speaking of the kingdom of God* (v.3c). The life of Jesus, pre and post-resurrection, is the substance and limit of divine revelation, and by being with him the community of disciples are now thoroughly instructed. The data is now on the hard disks of the church’s living memory, and the multiplicity of witnesses serve to correct one another. But being true witnesses and knowing the tradition are not enough. Kindling, even the best, is not enough for a fire. To the true tradition about Jesus must be added the indwelling flame of the Holy Spirit.

The promise of the Holy Spirit (v.5b//v.8a) is an inclusion for the second paragraph. That Jesus dines with them indicates the transformed physicality of his raised body. His command is that they not leave Jerusalem til they are engulfed in the promised Spirit from the Father. The Trinitarian logic is tight: Jesus commands, the Father promises, the Spirit engulfs. Human initiative will not accomplish the mission. If he has been raised, and they are to be empowered, does this mean they are his army to restore Israel? “Lord, will you *at this time* restore the kingdom *to Israel*?” Jesus reply is blunt, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed his own authority.” The purpose of the infilling is to equip them with the spiritual gifts and virtues they need for global mission in a hostile world. The kingdom is not just for their nation, the Jews, but for all nations. Jesus is wrapped in no nation’s flag.

The third paragraph addresses a second post-resurrection error- nostalgia and passivity. As Jesus vanishes into the presence of God signified in a cloud that reveals and conceals, they look upward. One can almost hear their thoughts, “Now that Jesus is gone, the good days are over, and what are we to do?” Two angels ask a critical question reminding them of where the mission started, “*Men of Galilee*, why do you stand looking up into heaven.” The day of his return is the end of their mission. They are not to look up to heaven but forward to Jesus’ promise of the Spirit and the ensuing mission. The future is his.

WHERE IS JESUS NOW? WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

*“It is not for you to know the times or seasons
which the Father has fixed by his own authority.”*

Jesus squelches end-time speculation.

ACTS 1 : 7

When Jesus ascended to heaven after his mission on earth, the angels asked, “Did you accomplish your task?”

“Yes, all is finished.”

“We have a second question,” said the angels. “Has the whole world heard of you?”

“No,” he said, “not yet.”

“Then what is your plan?”

Jesus said, “I have left twelve men and some other followers to carry the message to the whole world.”

The angels looked down to the earth, then back at the Lord, “What’s Plan B?”¹

There is no Plan B. The church as a community of worship and witness is the God-ordained means for drawing people to Jesus Christ and into the healing force field of the kingdom of God. We are a missions outpost, a training center, a divine transformation process that takes people as we find them and by the alchemy of God’s grace transforms them into credible witnesses to the power and kindness of Jesus Christ. We are not a waiting room for heaven; we are not a religious club; we are not the society for the preservation of the way things used to be in old Greenwood; we are not a memorial club for a dead hero; we are not a place to hide from the big, bad world; we are agents of a foreign government alerting this rebellious world of its

¹ Michael Green, editor, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 178.

rightful ruler. We are agents of the kingdom, dropped behind enemy lines to announce, “Jesus is the world’s rightful ruler. Have your entrusted your life to him as a loyal subject?” There is no Plan B. Jesus Christ has puts all his eggs in one basket, and it’s labeled *church*. He trusts us more than we do one another!

Which leads me to a series of questions. If not us, who? If not here, where? If not today, when? This church has, since 1858, had a God-given mandate to be a living witnesses to the love and power of Jesus Christ in this place, to call people to trust in him and not their own schemes of self-salvation.² We are a people with a purpose. We live under the reign of the risen, ascended, and exalted Lord for the sake of his mission starting at our front door. Someone has said the church is the world’s only institution exists for those who *are not* its members. D.T. Niles said, “The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.”

If you see the church primarily as a *religious institution*, you will relate to it as you do to other institutions, perhaps with benign respect- glad that it’s there when needed, or perhaps with cynicism and scorn because it’s not perfect. If you see the church as a *voluntary organization*, you will relate to it as you do other voluntary organizations: a little time, a little dues, some committee work, a good civic spirit, doing my part. But if, as Jesus and the apostles did, you see the church as a *missionary society at worship*, receiving directions from its heavenly commander for another week of operations in the field where the victories and the casualties are frighteningly real, you can no longer be casual about what the church means in your life. It is God’s pipeline of life to the world, a living sacrament, a visible reminder of Jesus Christ, an outpost of God’s new thing. To be part of the mission, every person should two questions: 1) What spiritual gifts are given me for the sake of the mission? and 2) How am I presently using them for the glory of God? If you can’t answer those two questions, you are not part of the army, only the audience.

And please, do not mistake your pastor for the commander. That’s blasphemy. Jesus is and remains the head of his church. We might want to start leaving an empty seat at every Council meeting as a visible reminder. Pastor Phil is the training and logistics officer assigned to this unit for a few years. Not to coddle you, through there are times when comfort is appropriate. Not as a religious hired hand. Not to make you happy, though along the way there will be times of joy. His man job is to help

² Harry R. Mays, *This History of Main Street United Methodist Church* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1992).

you rediscover the rich resources for problem solving and holy living that lie within the Bible and our Christian tradition. Your present pastor- and whoever comes next- is here to train you and lead you deeply into the continuing mission of Jesus Christ, first by example, then by preaching and teaching.

A Brief Look Back (vv.1-3)

John Howard Griffin was a white man who believed he could never understand the plight of African-Americans unless he became like one. So in 1959, he darkened his skin with medication, sun lamps, and stains, and traveled through the South. His book *Black Like Me* helped whites better understand the humiliation and discrimination faced daily by people of color.³ Griffin took a risk. He laid aside privilege to hide out on the underside.

That is just what God the Son did. He came down and looked at life through the eyes of a Galilean Jewish working stiff named Jesus of Nazareth. God knows by experience all the indignities of being human in a fallen world where evil is real, where leaders are often violent, even to being strung up naked as a political criminal.

Before the incarnation, God the Son- the second member of the Trinity- existed from eternity in fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And since the resurrection, ascension, and taking his seat at the Father’s right hand, God the Son has been restored to that glory he enjoyed before being sent by the Father and planted by the Spirit in Mary’s virginal womb. It was one long journey:

down from glory,
down into Mary’s womb,
down into human flesh,
down into the weak helplessness of being a newborn,
down into the language and customs of a particular culture,
down into three decades of Nazareth obscurity,
down to the Jordan to be baptized by John,
down into the desert to be tempted by Satan,
down to the seaside to call his first disciples,
down into the pain and misery of his people,
down into their ignorance about his Father and his ways,

³ “To Illustrate: Incarnation,” *Leadership*, Spring 1996, 68.

down to Jerusalem,
down into betrayal,
down into jail,
down onto a cross, immersed in pain and shame,
down into death,
down from the cross,
down into Joseph’s new tomb,
down into the realm of the dead, as low down as you can go.

Then, in that low place, Life found him and reversed it all. He went:

up out of death,
up into the Father’s presence,
up before the angels,
up upon the throne of Co-regency where he now reigns.

So what is Jesus doing now? Plenty, according to Scripture. Praying for his church, directing angels, ruling over the cosmos, bringing all powers under his rule, receiving the prayers and praises of the saints above and the church on earth; welcoming home those who have died in the Lord. He is pouring out his Spirit on the church across the globe, judging and correcting his church, calling his people to study Scripture and welcome a great harvest. Oh, and one more thing. He’s looking forward to coming back and welcoming his bride- the church- to the great wedding banquet as the kickoff party for the kingdom of God.

The life of Jesus within time is but one segment of the larger career of the God the Son, and if you do not include what came before, what came after, and what is yet to come, you misread the big picture of what God is doing. It’s so much bigger than just getting your sins forgiven and a punched ticket to the afterlife. History is not meaningless; it’s headed somewhere, and we know where that is, if not *the when* or *the how long*. History is headed towards a collision with a Holy God who will vindicate his Son Jesus before every human being who ever lived. All history is being bent by God’s providence towards the vindication of Jesus. Every knee will bow. Some by choice, but every tongue will confess that he is Lord.⁴ Our privilege as his people is to know and announce it ahead of time. We are about the holy business of inviting people into a future life that begins now.

⁴ Philippians 2:9-10.

It is Jesus' earthly life that Luke summarizes in the first three verses of his second volume. Book I was the life of the founder- *The Gospel of Luke*, and Book II the life of the followers- *The Book of Acts*. Such an arrangement was common in the ancient world. First you tell the story of the founder of a philosophical school, then in the second volume the story of his followers.⁵ And when you start Volume II on a separate papyrus scroll, you pause to review what's come before. Verse 1: "In the *first book*, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until he was taken up..." Luke is very careful in his language. The action and teaching of Jesus are not over. Phase I is over; Phase II now begins in the church with the gift of the Spirit. There is continuity between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the church, and *the doing* is as important as *the teaching*.⁶

One of the great things happening today is that God is restoring power ministry to the church. Through cooperation with the Holy Spirit and the gifts the Spirit gives, the church is learning once again about the complementary ministries of healing and deliverance from evil, both of which were major components of Jesus' own ministry.⁷ It is my experience that we can more often act our way into a new way of thinking- a new practical theology- than the reverse. We are to take risks of obedience before we fully understand, and when we do, understanding follows. What Luke packs into these three opening verses is amazing:

the words and deeds of Jesus,
the prayerful selection of the apostles as official witnesses,
the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit for the sake of a global mission,
Jesus' suffering and death,
the forty days of resurrection appearances,

⁵ For examples from the ancient world, see Charles Talbert, *Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 1-6.

⁶ For a critique on the church's over use of doctrine and under use of prayer for healing, see Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1999), Chapter 3, "The Basic Message of Christianity: Jesus Saves," 39-59. Also Alexander Venter, *Doing healing* (Cape Town, SA: Vineyard International Publishing, 2009).

⁷ See Philip Jenkins, *New Christendom* (Oxford: University Press, 2007); for a history of the Pentecostal movement and its leavening of mainline churches through the charismatic movement, see Vinson Synan, *An Eyewitness Remembers The Century Of The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2010).

the continuing teaching of the kingdom of God,
and finally the ascension- which is the formal end of the appearances.

Not only was the inner circle instructed through three years of hearing everything he did, they now- after the resurrection- have an extended period of interaction with the risen Lord who continues to teach them. They are now fully convinced and fully instructed. The data has been downloaded and is secured against corruption by twelve eye-witnesses who are able to correct one another’s memories.⁸ They are now equipped to lead the church under the Lord’s direction. They have met with Jesus and know his stuff. The deposit of Christian revelation is complete, downloaded onto the hard disk of apostolic memory, there to be enlivened and illumined by the Spirit across time. It will be interpreted and unfolded in the mission, but the deposit is now resident within the church’s data banks of twelve official witnesses, which means there are no later, secret or supplemental revelations. So no Book of Mormon with some guy in New York with funny glasses digging up tablets and claiming a new revelation. And no authority for the Koran, teaching that Jesus never died, so he was never raised, so there’s now room for a new prophet to come along six centuries later and put Jesus in his rightful place as only one in a longer line of prophets leading to *the real guy who got the real book dictated to him*. Hello?

Do you see this? Whatever unfolds across time under the label *Christian* must be measured against the apostolic faith as found in Jesus, written in the New Testament and summarized in the great Trinitarian creeds.⁹ And if you are not a student of the Scriptures and the faith, how will you know the truth? The dumbing down of the church is a great crime and leaves peoples gullible and vulnerable.

Some years ago an eager church member- who probably spent too much time with afternoon TV- brought me a book on tape by some of the most popular so-called spiritual writers in the country. It was titled *Handbook For The Soul*.¹⁰ None of the

⁸ The decisive work is Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) which is a whole refutation of skepticism.

⁹ “United Methodists share a common heritage with Christians of every age and nation. This heritage is *grounded in the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ* (ital. ad.), which is the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching” (*BOD 2012*, 45-46).

¹⁰ Richard Carlson and Benjamin Shield, editors (Los Angeles, CA: Time Warner AudioBooks, 1995).

writers are Christians, so far as I could tell. Most were psychologists. Some of it was OK. But a bunch of it is New Age hogwash, Mormon angelology and Hindu reincarnation teaching, served up to a gullible American public which has lost its ability to discriminate between classical Christian cookery and toxic waste.

If anyone tells you that the purpose of the spiritual path is to discover your own godhood and that all the great religions teach the same thing, then you know it's toxic, now matter how attractively packaged. The only person who can say all religions teach the same thing is the one who have never seriously studied any of them. Sometimes I feel like a parent of a two-year old. "Don't eat that. I know it looks good, but it will make you sick." Stick with Jesus. Stick with the Trinity. Stick with the Bible. Stick with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Stick with the sacraments. Stick with the Creeds. Stick with our tested moral vision of male and female in marriage and what it means for them to love and interact morally. Stick with the church's tradition of spiritual wisdom, guidance, and meditation. There are more riches here and more adventure than you can explore in ten lifetimes. Go off on some safari after spiritual exotica and I guarantee you will get burned and may not make it back within the circle of the church with life or sanity intact. The great G.K. Chesterton got it right, "The Christian faith has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried."¹¹ Following Jesus among his people is the way, and it is a difficult way that will set you against much of what passes as current conventional wisdom, but inside the difficulties are immense intellectual and spiritual riches, including the surprises of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely at this transition point between the life of Jesus and the life of the church that Luke pauses to make clear that what he came to reveal is what they received. The deposit has been secured.

Distracted By Non-Essentials(vv.4-8)

We do not know much of the details Jesus taught during the forty day interim between his resurrection and ascension. His subject was the same- the kingdom of God, but of the specifics we know little. We only have one nugget. We ought not to think of this as a forty-day-and-night camp out but rather as a series of appearances and disappearances scattered over an extended period, each of which added something to the disciples understanding. And in verses 4 through 8 Luke gives us an example of what one of those sessions included.

¹¹ <http://thepfjournal.wordpress.com/2008/01/16/difficult-and-left-untried>.

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That Jesus stayed or ate with them is to demonstrate he was not a ghost but a glorified body. The daily meals they enjoyed with Jesus during the ministry are now brought to a new level of intimacy as they feast with the risen Lord, a tradition that continues in the Lord's Supper where we believe Jesus to be invisibly but truly present by the power of the Holy Spirit. He gave himself to them in those settings, even as he gives himself to us at the table.

When you pause to think about what Jesus said, it scrambles the mind. The risen Lord was there before them, yet he said there was more to come. They knew his teachings. They had relationship through him with the Father. But what they lacked was a transforming internal experience of God. This is why he told them to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Before them was a world mission they could not accomplish on their own strength; it would take divine power, the same Spirit that empowered and then launched Jesus at his baptism. There was a lifetime of work to be done, but first they were to wait, simply wait on God's timing. God must act before they can. It was a test of obedience, one I often fail. Eagerness is no substitute for obedience, and what Jesus said was *Wait*, and so they stayed and prayed for ten days until heaven opened and the torrent of the Holy Spirit crashed in upon them.

Our normal Methodist mode of operation is to reorganize our structures and fuss at pastors. We believe if you only get the organization chart right and fill it with hard work, new spiritual life will come. It's not true! Jesus said wait together and pray together and learn together that this movement is not human powered.

Have you ever done something stupid in front of a person you wanted to impress? I have. So did a woman once in a Kansas City Haagen-Dasz store. She went in for an ice-cream and there found herself face to face with Paul Newman who was in town filming the movie *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge*. When he smiled that famous smile and said *Hello*, Newman's blue eyes caused her knees to shake. She somehow she managed to pay for the cone, then left the shop, heart pounding. When she regained composure, she realized she didn't have her ice cream. She started back in and met Newman at the door. "Are you looking for your ice cream?" he asked.

She nodded, unable to speak.

"You put it in your purse with your change," he said. In the presence of one whom some have worshiped, she did something stupid.

Well, so did the disciples, which is a great comfort to me. In the face of Jesus' promise of the coming Spirit they asked a dumb question, but it was on their hearts.

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They were Jewish men who loved God’s promised land. They burned for the day when the Roman forces of occupation would be gone and Jewish rule restored. God had promised their restoration, and with Jesus’ resurrection it had to be near. As his friends they assumed they had the insight track on prime positions of rulership. “Lord, is it now? Will you at this time restore the kingdom *to Israel*? Can we now wrap you in the colors of our Jewish flag? When do we get to win?”

There were many reasons these men followed Jesus, but this was one of the main ones, and we just need to be frank about it. It was political and it was personal and it was full of ambition for status- regular *guy stuff*, maybe even for revenge, and it was largely hidden until the moment it burst forth, “Will you at this time- now that you have resurrection power- restore the kingdom *to Israel*? Will you revenge us?”

For them the kingdom of God was still a very this-worldly Jewish political reality. But for Jesus the kingdom is not for one people but for all peoples, not for one race but for all, not a realm but a rule, the active power of God setting things right wherever people are receptive and that will one day recapture the whole creation. But I’m glad they asked it, if for no other reason than to remind us that even the Lord’s closest associates misread his intentions and got it politically wrong- even after three years with Jesus and forty days with the risen Lord. So deep was their hidden hope nothing would dislodge it. It is part of the intransigence of human sin that we are forever trying to bend the Lord to our agenda rather than offering ourselves for his.

Remember, in this religion only one person gets to look good. Not me, not you, only Jesus. To be a believer you have to be willing to look like a clown, for your flaws to go public and your politics to be exposed, which is just what happened here. They told him what they really wanted- which was a Jewish victory *now*, and he said *No*. It’s a good lesson. God saying *No* to us, just like to children. Jesus will not be wrapped in anyone’s flag or taken captive as a mascot for a political agenda of the left or the right. Jesus is not a Democrat or Republican. Hello? He is his own party of one, and he not after incremental improvement; he promises radical change! Jesus’ reply was direct and unmistakable, “That,” he said, “when and how the kingdom comes, is none of your business.”

What could be clearer, “It is *not for you to know* the times or seasons the Father has fixed by his own authority.” So when people ask me, “Do you think the end is soon?” I give a smart-alec answer, “It’s closer than it’s ever been!” Or else I say, “I just don’t know. I’m on the welcoming, not the planning committee.”

We don't know, and he's not telling. It's none of our business. Yet Christian bookstores and TV programs are full of preachers and teachers speculating on the end times and spreading fear and distraction. It's foolishness. The so-called rapture is a 19th century doctrine not grounded in Scripture, not part of the church's historic faith, and caters to the attractive idea of *escapism* in which *we go up before the blow up!*¹² Church history is littered with the stories of those who made predictions that turned out not to be true. Don't be caught up in this silliness; it will always mark you as a Christian fool. Don't get ready, stay ready with a clean conscience and a heart of love and wisdom. It's none of our business, Jesus said. It is a distraction from the main thing which is the Spirit-empowered mission to the world. So in verse 8 Jesus for a second time pushed them back to the Holy Spirit who would give them power to be his witnesses from where they were to the end of the earth.

We here in Greenwood have a lot work here to do in our Jerusalem, our own back yard. How many lost people live within five miles of this church? Do we feel any sense of responsibility for them? To say that the church is here and open is not enough. Pastors are not sent here to continue the holy huddle. We are sent to help maintain our biblical identity as a mission society at worship. But it can't be done, it can't even be started without our waiting on and welcoming the light and fire of the Holy Spirit back into the church.

I don't know what form the renewal will take. I don't have a program to make it happen. I've read church history and know something about what God has done in earlier times to renew and refresh the church. But what it will mean here I do not know. We will have to wait and see because the Holy Spirit is ever-creative and loves to customize his inspirations. And, in the meantime, it's OK to ask questions. The disciples did, and that means it's OK for all of us. When we are honest about our desires, when we quit being nice and religious and get real, we also become remarkably teachable. Jesus' didn't beat up on them too badly. He simply corrected them and brought them back to the promise of the Spirit. We exist for Spirit-empowered mission, not for idle speculation about the end. It's a distraction, and Jesus said it's none of our business.

Passivity And Nostalgia (vv.9-11)

¹² For a critique, see Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), "Rapture, Tribulation, and Armageddon," 19-25.

And then he was gone, enveloped in the cloud that both reveals and conceals the glory of God. Borrowing the imagery of an oriental court, the church said Jesus was now seated at the Father’s right hand and sharing the rule. This is the ascension, which Thomas Oden describes as following:

“From the finite world of space, time, and matter into the transcendent heavenly sphere the Son moved.... His glorified body rose above both the visible sphere and the invisible sphere, to enter into the presence of the Father. Jesus ascension signified his triumph as victor over sin and death.”¹³

Do you know what ascension means, and why it’s such hopeful news? There is a man, a particular human being with holes in his feet and hands, a gash in his side, glorified at the highest place in heaven. Heaven- and after that the kingdom of God come to earth- is not allergic to humanity, and it is not a spiritual place if by spiritual you mean immaterial. Those open wounds speak every day to all heaven of his love for people just like us. To those left behind it looked like abandonment, but it was in fact the highest honor because Jesus bore our common humanity into the heart of God as a promise that one day they would be rejoined in a glorious reunion which includes a resurrection and a new body for all of us.

So there they stood, gaping upwards, rubber-necked and slack-jawed. But who will correct them now that Jesus is gone? No problem. Two angels take up the task in verse 10, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?” I love it. It’s meant to be funny. Angels with their superior intelligence must see us humans as Cro-Magnons. At the tomb they ask, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” And here, “Why are you guys staring up into the sky?” Corrected by Jesus, now corrected by angels, learning what the kingdom means; it’s a lifelong process in the church, and especially for leaders.

Two spiritual diseases can cripple any church, passivity and nostalgia, which I define as looking back on the good old days while sitting on our rears. There are all sorts of diversions to keep us away from the main thing which is connecting with the Holy Spirit for the sake of the mission. Speculating about the end, looking back to the good old days, sitting on our duffs. You tell me. What is it that is keeping this church locked up? It is in the mission that we can count on the presence.

¹³ *The Word of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987), 503.

My hunch is that it has to do with our desire to control things which puts the squeeze on the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Are you willing for God to move in your life in some new, unexpected way? Are you willing to be immersed in the Holy Spirit, soaked to the bone, and then flung out into some mission field, be that next door, in your own home, at work, in the city, or around the world if God so wills?

Conclusion

The risen Lord has work for us to do, the strength for which comes from the Holy Spirit. Doug Nichols discovered what that meant in India when- as a missionary- he spent several months in a TB sanitarium. Here is the story in his own words:

“I did not yet speak the language, but I tried to give Christian literature written in their language to the patients, doctors, and nurses. Everyone politely refused. I sensed many weren’t happy about a rich American- to them all Americans are rich- being in a free government-run sanitarium. They didn’t know I was just as broke as they were.

The first few nights I woke around 2:00AM coughing. One morning I noticed an older man across the aisle trying to get out of bed. He would sit up on the edge of the bed and try to stand, but in weakness would fall back into bed. He finally fell back into bed exhausted. I heard him crying softly. The next morning I realized what the man had been trying to do, walk to the bathroom. The stench in our ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. The old man curled into a ball and wept.

The next night I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering. I don’t like bad smells, and I didn’t want to get involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, his eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up. He was very light due to his old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom, which was just a filthy, small room with a hole in the floor. I stood behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. I picked him up, and carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn’t understand.

The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a

steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hand that he wanted a tract. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout the day nurses, interns, and doctors asked for literature. Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ as Savior as a result of reading the literature.

What did it take to reach these people with the gospel? It wasn't health, the ability to speak their language, or a persuasive talk. It simply took a trip to the bathroom."¹⁴

Where is Jesus now? Ascended, seated at the Father's right hand, calling us to mission, giving us the Holy Spirit, correcting our errors. And what are we supposed to do? Whatever it takes to be a loving witness to him. And that is your future should you choose it.

¹⁴ "To Illustrate: Evangelism," *Leadership*, n.d.
