

Church In Awe: Promise, Witness, Ascension (Acts 1:6-11)

Read Acts 1:6-11

⁶ 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."

The prophet Micah gives a beautiful description of the kingdom that Jesus' disciples probably hoped he would bring to reality. **Read Micah 4:1-4 (below) and discuss what aspects of this kingdom you would most like to see made real in our world.**

*"It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,
and many nations shall come, and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall decide for strong nations far away;
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,*

*and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.”*

(Micah 4:1-4, ESV)

When the disciples asked Jesus if he was about to “restore the kingdom”, he said: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”* (Acts 1:7, ESV)

The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that the “day of the Lord” – the moment when God would come to purge his creation of evil – will take the world by surprise.

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, ESV)

Q. How would it change our lives if we truly believed that the “day of the Lord” could come at any moment?

Jesus used his last moments of face to face conversation with his disciples to prepare them for action. He told they would:

“...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.” (Acts 1:8, ESV)

Jesus commissioned them to preach his message in Jerusalem – to go into the stronghold of the same people who had nailed him to a cross just weeks earlier. He gave them the task of teaching people about his victory over sin in Samaria, which was seen by many Jews as a realm of heretics.

Q. Where are the most challenging places to share the Good News about Jesus today? How can we Jesus’ witnesses “to the end of the earth” in our time?

Those early apostles knew that they would not win new believers through their eloquence; they depended on the power of God. **How have you seen the power of God at work?**

Read 1 Thessalonians 1: 4-5:

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” (1 Thessalonians 1: 4-5, ESV)

Q. How does it change the way we think about our Christian brothers and sisters if we see them as people loved by God, chosen by God, whose lives have been transformed by the power of our Father and the working of the Holy Spirit?

Compare the simple description of Jesus being lifted up and taken out of the disciple’s sight by a cloud with this vision described below of “one like a son of man” entering the presence of God.

Read the passage from Daniel and **imagine** Jesus’ arrival in heaven.

*“I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.”* (Daniel 7: 13-14, ESV)

Q. Do we think of Jesus as the ruler of an “everlasting dominion”? How should this change our attitude to authorities, governments and other sources of earthly power?

Now read 1 John 2:1-2 (below). How should knowing that Jesus is in this mighty position bring comfort to believers who are struggling with sin?

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2, ESV)

The disciples who witnessed the ascension were given a nudge to get on with their God-commissioned work of broadcasting the Good News. The two men in white robes asked them why they were “looking into heaven”, telling them:

“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11, ESV)

Think about how we will one day experience the return of Jesus, and how we will be reunited with the people we have loved and mourned in this life. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18:**

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, ESV)

Q. What does it mean to “encourage one another with these words”? Meditate on what it means to “always be with the Lord”.

Our own bodies will be transformed. **Read** Philippians 3:20-21.

“...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21, ESV)

Pray that we will recognise that our citizenship is in heaven and live each day believing that our Saviour will return. **Thank** God for the incredible hope he has given us that war and fear will

vanish and that we will be changed to resemble Jesus. **Ask** God for the power and opportunities to share his Good News this week.