

Sunday, May 24, 2020 – Acts 1:1-11

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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. 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. ⁵ For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 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.”

And this is the word of God, for the people of God. And all God's people said Amen.

So, we've been discussing probably since Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of the gospel. And while the gospel we preach rests on many things this is the major foundation; the death, the burial the resurrection of Jesus. And so, we've looked at how the burial sometimes gets overlooked in the process of heading toward Easter with the bunnies and the chocolate. There are a couple of other aspects that are necessary to complete the picture. So now we're going to be like Paul Harvey, and we're going to get the rest of the story.

As we move away from the series that we were working with, which is mostly about how the love of Christ is seen his death, burial and resurrection, and everything that happened after that. We move into the book of Acts and we began to talk about those last days when Jesus was on earth. I wonder how much planning went into this. The entire plan for salvation of man was set into motion at creation. And so, it's now near its conclusion. And Jesus had already left them once, the day he died and he was certain that he was gone forever, and three days later, he was back. And all the power of hell trembled.

So, it's now time to bring the earthly ministry to an end and to prepare the disciples for their transition into leadership. They will be the architects of the New Testament church, that church that we have inherited. And they, even know fallible human beings will lead that church and cause it to grow, and bring many to faith, simply by following the leading of a helper that is promised to them.

How does he choose to do this, our Jesus? He performs one final miracle for his disciples to see. There will be another one, which we'll celebrate next week, and it's one that we all get to see. But Jesus last

miracle, well, it's just a cursory reading of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life that show that he was a miracle worker. Everywhere he went, there were miracles. They were expected miracles and there were much sought-after miracles, and the heart of Jesus, melted when he saw people in need. The heart of Jesus melted when he saw people battling sin. The heart of Jesus melted when he saw the sick, and he performed his miracles.

Well his first miracle, can you tell me what it was? The first miracle was one that wasn't expected at all. As a matter of fact, Jesus even kind of chided his mother about it because she had gotten him into it. He had gone to the wedding feast in Cana as a guest and they ran out of wine. Now in that culture, or ours, that would be a pretty big no no. Could you imagine running out of wedding cake? Could you imagine running out of that wonderful roast beef?

It was a shame. And Mary, always the good Jewish mama said, they've run out of wine. And Jesus said to her, it's not my town, what do you want me to do? And so, being the ever-good Jewish Mama, she looked at the stewards and said, do whatever he tells you. Which pretty much meant I don't care what you do, but do something. So, Jesus was in this position, where could he even make a difference. He told them to fill jars with water. And that water was miraculously turned into wine.

You know, when Jesus touches things, it always turns out better than you could ever expect. The standard is when you go to a wedding and you serve wine, you serve the best wine first so that everybody is a little bit too tipsy to notice when you bring out the cheaper wine. But it's recorded in Scripture that after Jesus turned water into wine, they said, why did you save the best wine till last? Jesus had given men a gift, just like every other miracle that Jesus did. It was a gift. And sometimes Jesus does save the very best till last.

But that was only the first miracle. He brought Lazarus back to life. We see Jesus working miracles in the lives of everyday people. We saw him bring a little girl back to life, restore sight to a blind man, heal a man by the pool. And those are only just a few.

How many more miracles Jesus really worked? Well they're not all recorded. We have no idea how many times he actually created miracles in the lives of other people. How many miracles has Jesus worked? How many miracles has Jesus worked in your life? You know that each one of you is a miracle. Each one of you is a miracle that you've come to believe and live in the presence of God. And each one of you is a miracle when you go from sickness to health. From suffering to joy. From weakness to faith. Each one of you is a miracle when you touch another life.

But Jesus isn't done yet, you see. He's been out among the people for 40 days; he's been seen by thousands of people which serves as some of the greatest evidence for the empty tomb. And he leads his disciples as far out as Bethany and he tells them that they have to stay in Jerusalem. He has to tell them that because Jerusalem is the last place they want to be. It was a scene of his arrest, the scene of his suffering and his death. And yes, it was a scene in his resurrection, but they are his disciples and they know that they are in danger.

And he tells them now. Stay. Now why would you give somebody an order like that. Well, a couple reasons. He promised the Holy Spirit to them. That was what in many circles is referred to as the promise of the Holy Spirit, different from just the idea of the Spirit. It was the coming of the Spirit to

dwell in us constantly. To become our teacher and our guide. To be the inspiration that we need for everything that we do. Not just a gift.

The Prophet said that the first preaching of the gospel would take place in Jerusalem. But they couldn't preach in Jerusalem if they weren't there, could they? And so, he tells them to stay. And then they ask Jesus about the establishment of the kingdom because they still don't understand. Jesus answers them, and then he ascends into heaven. And unlike the resurrection, where no one was present when it occurred, all the disciples, except for Judas, were present for Jesus' ascension. It's that important that they witnessed it.

We think of the ascension as that last week after Easter right before Pentecost, and we kind of skip over it, because we really think it doesn't have much to offer. But it's of great importance because it has so many witnesses. It's just as important as those days when Jesus was seen walking through Jerusalem after he was risen from the dead. The truth of the resurrection is best represented in the fact that Jesus was seen after the fact. The truth of the ascension couldn't be seen in that kind of way because it had to occur in broad daylight, in the presence of witnesses. Had Jesus suddenly disappeared, confusion would have ensued. And the disciples, wonderful as they were, were often confused. More confusion just simply wasn't needed.

So, we read that as Jesus ascended, a cloud took him from their site, a site that reminds us of the stories of Elijah in the Old Testament being carried away into heaven. Many believe that it was nothing less than the glory of God. The presence of God, himself, that was seen in a pillar of fire and cloud at the exodus. It is a major feast, even though sometimes we skip over it.

So, Jesus has now gone. What do the disciples do? They continue to stare at an empty sky. Not too uncommon, when more surprised by something we continue to stare at it too. But while they're staring at this broad expanse of the sky, two men in white appear before them, and they confirm to them, what has happened. Angels, most likely. They confirm the Jesus was taken up. The phrase in the passive voice indicated that it was done by the Father Himself. And there's the miracle. After getting confirmation that Jesus is indeed returned to heaven. They get an affirmation that's important to us. And he'll be coming back again, and it will be in the same manner that you saw him go. And when Jesus comes back, we're all gonna see it.

The disciples followed Jesus command. They stayed in Jerusalem. They were united in purpose. They were united in prayer. They were united in hope, and in less than 10 days, they received the Spirit that was promised to them. So, what's the implication of all that. Well, we might think, like I said that the ascension of Jesus is just some minor event with a little importance. But the truth is, the ascension of Jesus is one of the most important components of your faith. It made his purposes clear.

While Jesus was with them, they still held to the hope of an earthly kingdom. They can picture themselves rowing with Jesus, they can picture Jesus set up as a king. But when he left, and he sent the Spirit of God, they were meant to see that Jesus came not to set up an earthly kingdom but to save sinners and make them members of a heavenly kingdom. Not to sit on an earthly throne. Jesus never planned to be a political messiah.

He made the Lord's presence real. When Jesus ascended, the door was opened for the spirit of God to descend upon all flesh. Upon the earth. The coming of the spirit made the spreading the gospel possible

and successful. Not only could the spirit be with, and in every person at the same time, but he could work through all the saints at the same time.

He could provide strength, when we are weak. And there are many times that we are. He can provide joy when we are sorrowful. And he could call us out and gift us in such a way that we would be successful in spreading the gospel, no matter what circumstance, we spoke in. He made the Lord's work complete. The work of the son was not completely finished until the son had ascended back to heaven and sat down in glory. The ascension impacts us personally. It impacts our ministry, and we all have one.

Ten days after Jesus ascended back into heaven, this amazing event took place and we're going to talk about Pentecost next week. The gospel was preached on Pentecost, and 3000 people were saved. Could you imagine what it would be like if 3000 people were saved in our area on one day? The churches would be full, Pastors wouldn't know what to do. And we'd all be running to and fro trying to figure out how we were going to provide for so many new believers. And you know what, it would be the most exciting moment of our lives. It would be something we would give thanks for forever. I'd love to see 3000 people in this area saved. We should probably spend the next 10 days praying for that. The power that did that? That's the same power that works in us.

Jesus already had ascended back into heaven but we're told he continued to work through them. As we labor for the Lord, every day, we can be assured that he's always there. He's with us guiding us and interceding us with the Father on our behalf. And we know that the Spirit remains with us. He is our motivator. So, as they cruised, Jesus was confirming the word that they spoke with demonstrations of divine power. He still does. He touches lost sinners' hearts, he keeps his promises, he speaks to his people through the word, he enlivens our experience.

The ascension of Jesus is not just the week before Pentecost. It's an important event. When he ascended into heaven, and took up his place at God's right hand, he remained there to continue his ministry. On behalf of his people, through his people. Jesus meant what he said when he said, power will come upon you when the Holy Spirit comes. And that you will be witnesses, wherever you are planted. He said that we will receive that power. If Christ hadn't ascended, we Christians wouldn't have had the love of the Holy Spirit either. But he did. And we do.

So, do we have an exit strategy? Because when he comes, we want to be able to check out of this life, this place, with the final destination of eternity with the father. And we want to be able to take others with us, having major plans. If not, what are you waiting for? There is an exciting journey ahead. Amen.