Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Continuing Christ's Work, Part 2
Scripture: Acts 1:4-11
Code: 44-4

If you will, open your Bible to the first chapter of Acts, again. We're going to go back to this wonderful, wonderful book, and I want to read again for you the opening 11 verses just to set them in your mind.

"The first account I composed Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up to heaven after He had, by the Holy Spirit, given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these, He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, which He said, 'You heard of from me.'"

"'For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epics which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.'"

"And after he had said these things, he was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received him out of their site. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while he was going, behold two men, two angels in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Now what we have been learning as we have begun our study of the Book of Acts is that the Lord's work of redemption, His cross work is completed. He has given the offering that sanctifies forever those who believe. He has provided the sufficient atonement to satisfy the wrath of God. He has done His atoning work. He has born in His body our sins in His death, and we have died and risen in Him. So the work of redemption has been completed on the cross as far as the sacrifice of Christ is concerned.

However, the work of gathering the redeemed goes on, and it goes on in that first generation through the apostles, and then through the church as the apostles establish the church. So what we have here in volume 1 is really the first great story of the history of redemption following the finished work

of Christ. This is indeed volume 1 of the history of the gospel in the world.

The responsibility for the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of churches passes to these 12. They're actually 11 until a little later in the chapter when a 12th is chosen to take the place of Judas, a man named Matthias. The 12 is sort of reconstituted, and they become the first wave of evangelists and preachers that go out to gather the redeemed and to establish the church. Here we are many, many millennia later, a few thousand years plus, two millennia later, hundreds of years later, and we're still engaged in the same work passed down generation to generation to generation of gathering the redeemed into churches and even establishing churches in places where Christ is not named, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, the remotest part of the earth, preaching Christ, establishing churches in places where they've never known that.

So this is the history of the church, and this history goes on until the last person in the economy in the plan of God is redeemed, and then the church is raptured out of the world, and that glorious era comes to its fulfillment. So we're seeing the Lord then pass the baton in those verses that I read to His disciples. You can see there that He is speaking, according to verse 2, to the apostles whom He had chosen.

That is the 11, and there will be added Matthias. Now from a human standpoint, to give them such a massive responsibility seems like a bad idea, a really bad idea. To think that these 11 plus one are going to be able to take the gospel to Jerusalem alone would be a stretch, and then to think they would fill Judea with the gospel and then expand into Samaria, and then they would go to the ends of the earth is many might think a pipe dream, something foolish.

And not just because it's such a massive undertaking. It's such an unthinkable thing. If you were to start a business or an enterprise with a small group of people, you might not say at the very beginning that our responsibility is to take this thing to every person on the planet. That would be probably beyond your most wild imagination. Just the sheer massive nature of such a task is daunting to even think about, let alone to be assumed, by essentially socially powerless people, people who are not only powerless socially. They're virtually powerless educationally, academically, religiously.

None of them is important in any of those categories. They're a bunch of working men. As many as seven of them may have been fishermen. And not only are they the most unlikely people to do this task, but beyond that, they don't seem well suited to it for a number of reasons. They have demonstrated very weak faith, and it would seem to me it'd take some very strong faith to get a grip on that kind of enterprise, and Jesus repeatedly says, "Oh, you have little faith. Oh, you have little faith." Not only that, they have a track record of very sketchy obedience.

They're as likely to be disobedient as to be obedient. In fact, when the Lord has given them specific things to do, they have failed to do them. In the heat of that night that Jesus went into the garden to

pray, He didn't ask them to do a very difficult task. He just asked them to stay awake and pray, and they fell asleep. After His resurrection, He asked them to go to Galilee and wait for Him. They went to Galilee. They didn't wait for Him. They went back to their old enterprise.

So they haven't proven either to be strong in faith or to be particularly effective or consistent in enduring and obedience. And you can add to that that they're cowardly. In fact, when Jesus was arrested in the garden, they all forsook Him and fled. It's also very true that they seemed to be impatient. And if you're going to take on a task that's going to end up taking the message to the ends of the earth, you're going to need a lot of patience.

But they demonstrate impatience. They even demonstrate their impatience here because their question is, "Are you going to bring the kingdom now? How long do we do that? A few days, a few weeks?" And they're marked with a lot of things that would make us doubt their ability to pull it off. So we understand then that they need to be made ready for this. Somehow, if these men are going to change the course of human history, something has got to happen to them. How are they ever going to be used to do that? So the apostles then become the focus of our Lord in this opening section before He leaves. He leaves right there in verses 9 to 11, so before He leaves, these opening verses tell us how He has tried to get them ready.

They are the ones He chose for the job, John 15-16. "You have not chosen me. I've chosen you and ordained you for this. You are the chosen ones," at the end of verse 2. So here is the final countdown to His ascension when He leaves, and He won't be back until His second coming, which is yet future today. Our Lord then in these days that He has, a 40-day period between His resurrection and His ascension, has to provide the essential tools for them to finish what He started, to go out and preach the gospel and plant churches in such a way that it extends throughout all of human history and across the globe.

These provisions are laid out in these opening – essentially opening eight verses and with the addition of verses 9 to 11 as well. The whole letter is written to Theophilus, and I just want to make a comment about that. Theophilus is a proper name, most likely, that could be translated friend of God. Theo, God, Philus, friend. But it's a gentile name. It's a Greek name, so this probably refers to some noble gentile. There is some history that would indicate to us that this was an influential, wealthy official in the city of Antioch, perhaps well known to Luke, who is the writer. Maybe that indicates that Luke was also from Antioch. That's a little bit of speculation.

There is some history that says he was a convert in Antioch of Paul and Barnabus. So Theophilus, whoever he is, and maybe those are accurate things, doesn't need to be identified to the readers of Acts. Why? Because they would all have to know him. The reason Luke doesn't tell us who he is is because he assumes everybody knows who he is. So let's say this. At least he is well known to the church.

And by the way, he is not just Theophilus. He gets a little more branding than that. He is in Luke 1:3 “most excellent Theophilus.” Now when somebody gets to be called most excellent, you’re now in the category of officials. This is some important man, some important Roman officials. Later in the Book of Acts toward the end, you’re going to run into people like Felix and Festus, and they’re going to get that title most excellent. You reserve that for some very important person.

Here then is a very important person, a gentile in the Roman world. He’s an official of some kind. He has come to Christ maybe through the influence of Paul and Barnabas, maybe from the city of Antioch, and maybe Luke being from the city of Antioch, they would come to know each other. Why would Luke send the letter to him? Because he’s a man of great influence, and he wants to put this letter in the hands of a man of great influence so it can be distributed. And by the way, this is very good for Luke to do because Luke understands that the gospel is supposed to go ultimately to the world.

So you want to put it in the hands of somebody who is outside Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and is in that world. And there’s something else I think plays into this. All through the Book of Acts, you’re going to see this. This will kind of prepare you for what’s coming. Luke seems eager to find open doors with gentiles, and that’s what begins to happen, as you know, with the ministry of Paul in chapter 13 all the way to the end of the book.

It’s about Paul in the gentile world, and Luke knows that Paul took the gospel to the gentile world. He wants the gentile world to embrace the gospel. The gentile world has no experience in the gospel, essentially no knowledge of the Old Testament, totally pagan, totally alien. And the church in its early years is persecuted by the Jews and persecuted by the gentiles as well. So I think Luke is endeavoring to do what he can do to help make the gospel acceptable in a gentile world.

Now remember, the gentiles thought this gospel was foolish. Right? First Corinthians 1, “To the gentiles, this is foolishness.” It was, to them, maybe more than foolishness. Some of them saw it as a threat, and some of them persecuted the believers. In many towns, Paul was persecuted, and ultimately, he was executed. So I think Luke has an interest in commending Christianity to the gentile world to help get past the persecution to provide opportunity in the future.

How does he do that? Well we’re going to see that unfold. But occasionally, through the Book of Acts, Luke records an incident where the Romans are kind of to Paul, where – for example, in chapter 16, chapter 18, chapter 19, chapter 27, the Romans are kind to Paul, which means Luke is saying to future readers, “Hey, they didn’t see him as a threat. They didn’t see him as somebody they had to be afraid of. They were kind to him.” In chapter 19, very important official in the city of Ephesus gives Christians a commendation.

So here is someone else in the gentile world saying, “You don’t have to fear. You don’t have to be afraid of these people.” In chapter 25, Festus declares openly that Paul has done nothing worthy of death. Then you come later into chapter 25 and 26, and you come also to Festus and to Agrippa, and they both agree that Paul, if he had been released, would have every right to plead his case with Caesar. So Luke, at certain points, just touches on the notion that Christianity has been no threat in the gentile world to provide for future evangelists some acceptance. In the face of Christians being persecuted early on, he wants to show that they were good citizens, that they were no threat to the powers in Rome, they were no threat to the social order, they were not criminals, and they had proof of that by the way they conducted themselves in the ministry of Paul in particular, and the way the Romans responded.

So Luke is taking a long-range view at the great commission in the gentile world. Now that’s just a little introductory material. Let’s go to see the tools that he gives them in this section, the tools that he gives them. First of all, we told you the proper message. He had to give them that. Verse 1, “Jesus began to do and teach. He began to do and teach.” And we talked about the fact that Jesus began, and He will continue this work through His apostles and through His church and through His people until He comes again.

It’s the work of doing and the work of teaching. We talked about the essential. If the gospel is go to the end of the world is that you get the gospel right, that you teach the truth. That’s why the New Testament makes such an issue out of getting sound doctrine. Right? We read that in 1 Timothy again this morning purposely. Avoid those people who have strange doctrine. Find those people who have sound doctrine. If anybody comes along, preaches any other Christ, don’t listen to him. “Don’t invite him in your house, John says.” “If anybody comes and preaches another gospel, let him be damned. Let him be anathema,” Paul says.

There is all through the New Testament, Epistles, this effort, and even in the Book of Acts to protect the true message, the true gospel. You know me. You know that through all the years of my ministry, I’ve done everything I can to point out where the gospel is misrepresented or where it goes wrong. This is part of the sacred trust. We are stewards of the gospel in our generation to make sure it gets spread correctly and passed to the next generation without defect.

So to begin with, He has to give them the content of the message, and so in verse 3, we are reminded that He spent a period of 40 days speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Not nonstop for 40 days, but during those 40 days, He appeared to them on many, many occasions with a purpose of instruction. Instruction. They were to make sure they had the right message. And may I remember you what we said this morning? It’s all about the words. The words have to be correct. It’s all about the words, the words.

Whenever God discloses Himself, he discloses Himself in words, and the words of divine revelation are written down. God did not give the Bible writers impressions which they turned into words. There's a big movement now attacking the inerrancy of scripture, attacking the inerrancy of scripture by saying – they use this kind of phrase. "There was a speech act. There was some kind of divine speech act in which God disclosed himself, but the writers didn't necessarily write it down without error."

But that is not what the Bible claims for itself. The Bible claims for itself that every word of God is pure, every word, like silver refined seven times in a furnace. This attack is mounting right now, by the way, as we speak at this particular time, in the evangelical world. There's a massive attack on the true doctrine of inerrancy, but that's not surprising because Satan wants always to attack the word of God going back to Genesis. Right? Has God said, has God said, has God said.

So we're in the process even now as I speak of planning to address this head on going forward to uphold the inerrancy of Holy Scripture because that's everything. It comes down to the words, the words, and we saw that. Didn't we? John 5, John 6, John 8, John 12. "The words that I speak. The words that I speak. They are life. They are life. They are life. They are life." When God reveals Himself, He doesn't reveal Himself in impressions. He reveals Himself in words, and the words are written down accurately. It doesn't mean that they understood the words necessarily. You remember 1 Peter 1:10-12. Peter says that the prophets of old looked at what they wrote to try to understand it.

They got the words right, but they weren't sure what the time was or the person of the fulfillment. You remember in 2 Peter, Peter says, "The things that Paul wrote are hard to understand, and some people twist them." But it was never a question of the words. It was a question of the interpretation. Wasn't always – and even today, there are some passages where we don't know what the appropriate interpretation is because we can't reconstruct all the original setting.

But the words are essential, so just making that little emphasis sort of on that point of the right message. Jesus wanted them to get the right message. For 40 days, He made they understood the kingdom, they understood the nature of the kingdom, and how to come into the kingdom, which is the gospel way and what the gospel was. And of course, they were to not only teach it, but to do it, to do gospel ministry. Part of that was living exemplary lives to support the claims of the gospel.

Secondly, we looked at the proper manifestation of the proper confidence I think is a better word. They – if they're going to do this job, they have to have the right message, and they also have to have the right confidence that going forward, this is the mandate that they need to do. And what is that confidence? "It is that confidence that comes to them when they see him alive from the dead," verse 3. "He presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over those 40 days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."

They needed to know it was Him. It was really Him, and He proved it by many, many infallible proofs, many convincing proofs. And one of them was, and I love this one, one of them was when He came back from the dead, He was speaking about the same subject He was speaking about before. The kingdom of God. The subject never changed. Same subject talking about the kingdom of God, the rule of God. I think He probably started with the universal rule, Psalm 1:45 and verse 13. “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. God is the king of all that He has created. God is the sovereign of the entire infinite universe and of all eternity.”

He probably taught them about the sovereign kingdom of God in which God rules over everything and nothing escapes His sovereign rule. But He probably brought that down to what could be called the mediated kingdom, the kingdom that is mediated on earth that becomes the kingdom of salvation, and then talked about what it meant to have God as your savior, God as your king personally, not universally in the infinite aspects of the universe, but personally in the heart.

And He taught them the gospel and entrance into the kingdom. We looked at that a little bit last time. That brings us to the third point. They needed the right message. They needed the right confidence, the right assurance, and that was that He was indeed alive, that He had conquered death. They also needed the proper power, the right power. Let’s pick it up at verse 4. “Gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem.” That’s sort of putting on the brakes after telling them to go and telling them that they were going to have to fulfill the great commission as we see it at the end of Matthew, the end of Luke. He holds them back. He puts the reigns on them a little, and He says, “Don’t leave Jerusalem.” Why? Wait. Wait for what the Father had promised, which He said, “You heard of from me. Wait. Don’t go anywhere.”

They are trained at this point. They’re educated. They have the message. They have the evidence that He’s alive. They’re ready to go. But He says, “Wait. Don’t go anywhere. Holy history in this next segment is not to begin yet.” Wait for what? “Wait for the promise the Father had given. Wait for what the Father had promised.” What would they have thought about that? How would they have processed that?

Well, let me take you back to Ezekiel 36. Ezekiel 36. Here’s a promise from God. A familiar new covenant promise. “I will sprinkle clean water on you,” – verse 25 – “You will be clean. I’ll cleanse you from all your filthiness, from all your idols. I’ll give you a new heart, put a new spirit within you. I’ll remove the heart of stone from your flesh, give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.”

That is what the Father promised. Promised the coming of the Holy Spirit who will come and dwell in them. That is the promise of the Father. The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. That’s God’s pledge to His people. Joel 2. They would have known, Ezekiel 36, they would have known Joel 2. “It

will come," – verse 28 – "after this that I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. Your sons and daughters will prophesize or old men will dream dreams. Young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants, I will pour out my spirit in those days." So they knew that connected with the arrival of messiah and the establishment of the kingdom of God and the salvation that God had promised would come the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

So that is the promise of the Father. The promise of the Holy Spirit, which He said you heard of from me. As long as they had been with Jesus, Jesus had reiterated that promise. He had reiterated that promise. In fact, if you go back to John 1, when John was speaking, John the Baptist testified, saying, "I have seen the spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and he remained on Him."

At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus at His baptism, the Holy Spirit comes on Him. When Jesus begins His ministry in the city of Nazareth, He says, "I am here to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies about messiah. The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the gospel." So in a very real sense, Jesus is the prototype of the filling of the Holy Spirit, the empowering of the Holy Spirit for ministry.

And Luke 3, the spirit comes on him. In Luke 4:1, he goes forth to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. So what was promised in the Book of Joel, what was promised in the Book of Ezekiel, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon God's people took place first of all in Jesus Christ who is the prototype. He is the God man, but He is fully man, and He is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and we know that His whole ministry was basically operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. What he did, he did by the power of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus who had received the Holy Spirit at His baptism, who was empowered by the Holy Spirit, then began to promise to his disciples that they would have the very same thing, that the Holy Spirit would come upon them as well. Let's kind of track that just briefly.

John 7:37. On the last day – this is the last day of the feast of tabernacles, which we'll get to on Sunday morning, "The great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me as the scripture said from His innermost being will flow rivers of living water,' but this He spoke of the Spirit whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified."

So it is the promise of the Father, but it is also what Jesus promised as well. The promise of the Holy Spirit who would come after Jesus had ascended and been glorified. He repeats this a number of times in 14-16 of John's gospel. "I will ask the Father. He will give you another comforter, another helper, a *parakltus*, that He may be with you. That is the Spirit of truth." Verse 26. "The helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things. Bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

Again, chapter 15, verse 26. "When the helper comes or the comforter whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. He will testify of me." Chapter 16,

verse 7. All this is going on in the upper room at the Passover, that final Passover. “I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. If I don’t go away, the helper will not come. If I go, I will send Him to you.”

And then over in chapter 20, the most interesting gesture, verse 22, “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” That was in anticipation. Didn’t happen then. It didn’t happen until the day of Pentecost. All that to say that’s what was promised by the Father and reiterated by the Lord himself. Look at Acts 2:33. This is Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost. “He says that Christ has been exalted,” – verse 33 – “to the right hand of God in His ascension, having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.”

So what is the promise of the Father, back to chapter 1? Back to chapter 1, verse 4. “The promise of the Father is the coming of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus also spoke of, which they heard from Him.” Then He goes on in verse 5. “John immersed you with water, buried you in water, but you will be immersed with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” I don’t want you to see that word as associated necessarily with water there.

This is simply a word that means immersed. Literally submerged. You’re going to be submerged with the Holy Spirit not many days from now, and of course, he was talking about the day of Pentecost, which was just a few days in the future. I want to mention something to you that I think is so very important. This is not a request to the apostles to somehow get baptized in the Holy Spirit. This isn’t telling them to seek it, pray for it, plead for it. This is a statement of fact.

Can we go back to it again? This is a promise of the Father, which the Lord reiterated, and verse 5, “John baptized with water, John the Baptist with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” That’s a statement of fact, and that is a statement of fact for every believer, every believer. First Corinthians 12:13. “All of us have been literally submerged into the Holy Spirit. It is a simple command. It is not a condition. It is not something you look for. It is not something you hope for. It’s something that is a fact, unconditional.”

First Corinthians 6. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.” You don’t seek that. You don’t seek that. In fact, that is a gift that comes to every believer. I love the language of 1 Corinthians 12:13. “For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and we’re all made to drink of one spirit.” We’re literally engulfed in the Holy Spirit.

Now what is the purpose of this, verse 8? “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” This is for power. The job is too great, too formidable, too demanding to be done in human strength. Paul’s language in the letter to the Corinthians. “Weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but mighty unto God.” This is the promise of the Holy Spirit. Every believer following Pentecost receives the Holy Spirit, takes up residence. Literally a dominating forces, dominating power of our lives.

John refers to the Holy Spirit as the anointing which we have from God who teaches us all things. Paul in Ephesians 1 says, “We are sealed by the spirit of promise. The spirit protects us unto eternal glory.” We’ve gone through in recent years all the ministries of the Holy Spirit. But those ministries which the Holy Spirit renders on our behalf, and this is the important thing, He does within us. Within us where He has taken up his residence. Listen to the language of Ephesians 3:16. “Paul is praying, and he prays that God would grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man.”

He’s saying to these Ephesians, “I want you to know the full power of the Holy Spirit who is in your inner man so that Christ settles down and is at home in your life, so that you’re rooted and grounded in love, so that you can comprehend with all the saint, the breadth, and length and height and depth and can know the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge, and you may be filed up to all the fullness of God. I want you to know the full power of the Holy Spirit, which shows up in increased love, which shows up in increased fullness. That is to say a complete, consuming sense of obligation and joy and worship directed toward God. And when that happens, He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we can ask or think according to the power that works. Here is the key within us.”

In other words, what Paul is praying is that you would take advantage of the power, the fullness of God, the Holy Spirit that is in you. How do you do that? Well, Galatians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly.” Ephesians 5:18 says, “Be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Same thing. Be dominated by the word of God because that’s where the Holy Spirit’s power is released. You know the word, you love the word, you live the word. The Spirit uses the word to empower you. We know all those things, so I won’t belabor that point. But there is a necessary power, and that is the power of the Holy Spirit.

We’ve seen that through the years in every passage in the New Testament that deals with it, and we’ll see a lot more of it when we get to Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16 of John’s gospel. We’ll also see more of it, and I’ll save some of this when we get to Acts 2, and the Holy Spirit actually shows up, and we see what happens. We’ll kind of delineate more about that. But at this point, let’s just say in the transition they needed the right message. They needed the right assurance, and they needed the right divine power because this is not a task that can be accomplished by the strength of men.

Fourthly, our Lord identifies what we’ll call the proper mystery, the proper mystery. Verse 6. “When they had come together, they were asking Him saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel? Is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It’s not for you to know times or epics, which the Father has fixed by his own authority.’” I quoted 1 Peter 1:10-12. The prophets who wrote the Old Testament didn’t know what person or what time. There’s a necessary mystery, a necessary mystery. Of all the kingdom teaching that Jesus had done, the part

that excited them the most was that this was going to happen soon. The earthly kingdom was going to come. He was alive from the dead. Their hopes were burning bright. He was about to establish His kingdom. They had to be sure about it.

Remember back on the Emmaus road? Luke 24:21. “They were moaning and said, ‘We thought He was the one. We thought He was the one.’ And then he discloses himself, and they’re joyous, and then He appears to them.” John 20:19-20. “They see him, he appears, and now this energizes their desire for the kingdom, and so they jump to the conclusion that this is the end. It’s going to happen. They’re saying, ‘Lord is it at this time you’re restoring the kingdom to Israel? Is it now?’”

The Old Testament age is over. Messiah is here. He did the work of atonement. He’s alive. This is it. A few days. Now He’s saying the Holy Spirit is going to come, and Joel connects the coming of the Holy Spirit with the last days, and Ezekiel 36 connects the coming of the Holy Spirit with the last days. And Peter, James, and John had seen Christ transfigured on the mountain and seen his glory, already a glimpse of His kingdom glory. This is a natural question. When is it going to happen? When is it going to happen? When is the kingdom going to come?

You say, “Well wait a minute. The kingdom already existed.” Yes, in one form it did. The spiritual kingdom. He was ruling over the hearts of those who had put their faith in Him. That’s not what they’re talking about. When they say to Him, “Is it at this time you’re restoring the kingdom to Israel,” what were they saying? They were expecting what kind of kingdom? What kind of kingdom were they expecting? Millennial kingdom. No, that hadn’t been introduced as a 1,000-year kingdom until the Book of Revelation.

They were expecting the kingdom promised to Abraham, the kingdom promised to David, with all the promises that were reiterated to the prophets and through the prophets. They were expecting that Israel would be restored, Israel would be saved, the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 would be fulfilled, Israel would be saved, that Israel would be restored, the throne of David would be elevated again. All the kingdom promises would come to pass. Salvation would come. They would be the dominant nation in the world. All the kingdom promises, including the coming of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they were pre-millennialists. They believed in an actual kingdom for Israel.

And they said, “Is it now?” So if Jesus was a millennialist and there is no kingdom, this is His moment to say, “Oh, by the way, guys, not going to happen.” It is inexplicable if there is no kingdom for Israel that Jesus didn’t say that. But rather, He said, “None of your business when that’s going to happen.” That’s very different than saying, “That’s not going to happen.” The Greek order, Lord, at this time, will you restore the kingdom to Israel? And there are a lot of people who say, “Oh, there’s no kingdom for Israel.”

I preached recently in a place, and I preached on Isaiah 53. And you remember when we went through Isaiah 53. I talked about how that's the confession that the Jews will give in the future when they look on the one they've pierced and mourn for him, and then out of that will come salvation in the kingdom. After I finished the message, someone came to me and said, "You know, it was a great message. I really appreciated it, but it would have been a lot better if you'd left the part about Israel out."

I said, "This is Isaiah 53. This is Israel. This is Israel's confession. How do I leave it out? What do you mean leave it out?" There are a lot of people who just don't see a future kingdom of Israel. This is the moment of all moments for Jesus to say, "Guys, I got some bad news for you. That's all been canceled. You'll find out more about it later. Just get past Pentecost. The church is taken over for Israel. Israel is done. The church is the new Israel. All the promises once given to Israel are going to be fulfilled in the church. You just need to kind of wait. We'll unfold that."

He could have said, "No. Israel gets the curses, but the gentiles are going to get the promises." He would have had to say, "You know, the prophets are kind of dreamers," or, "That was Plan A, but God had to go to Plan B." But that wouldn't make any sense for Him to say that. Why? Because in Matthew 25 and in Luke 13, He told them the kingdom was going to come. He told them He was going to come. He described features of His coming, features of His kingdom. He told them about the kingdom.

So if you're going to cancel out the kingdom, you're going to have to explain why Jesus didn't do that. But what he does tell them here is, "You can't know the time. You cannot know the time. It's going to come in an hour when you think not." Didn't he say that? It's going to come like a thief in the night. He's going to come suddenly. Here we are a couple thousand years later, and I don't have any more information on it than they did, but I have news for you. That's a good thing not to know so that every generation lives as if He might come at any moment. The doctrine of imminence.

Luke 19:13. He said, "Occupy until I come." He said, "Work, for the night is coming. You live as if every day was your last day. You invest in every single day everything that you can for the sake of the kingdom of God." That's why I always say vacations are highly overrated. God revealed enough to excite our anticipation and kept enough secrets so we don't know when it is, so every generation lived in the anticipation that he could come at any time.

When Paul was talking about the rapture of the church, he said, "We who are alive and remain." We. Talking about himself as if it could happen in his day. So they needed to know that as they went out on this task it was an open-ended situation. They were going to just keep being faithful without ever knowing when it was all going to come to an end. Don't concentrate on that. Don't speculate on that. In the last couple of weeks or so, Harold Camping died.

You probably heard about him. He kept predicting when Jesus was going to come. He made 12 predictions, and every time he did that, he violated the simple statement of scripture. He's coming in an hour you think not. Twelve times, and he was wrong every time. There have been all kinds of strange, bizarre groups that have predicted the coming of Christ. You know, people who get their pajamas on and sit on the roof on a certain day, ready to go. That is not how we approach the coming of Christ. We work as if every day is our last, and we plan as if his coming was far off, and we leave the date to him, and that infuses every waking hour with tremendous responsibility. I don't want to know. I don't know when I die, when I'm going to die. I don't want any previews of that.

I don't want somebody to tell me, "You're going to be dead in six months." I don't need that. I just want to work every day as if it's my last. I don't want to know that. I don't need to know that. Now all that leads us to a simple conclusion tonight. We'll just call it the proper mission. The proper mission. And what is this mission? Verse 8. After the power comes on you, you'll be my witnesses. You shall by my witnesses. You shall be. The Holy Spirit comes, and you become a witness. This is a statement of fact. You're the only witnesses he has. Right?

You are the witnesses. In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even the remotest part of the earth. The word witness, very interesting word. It's *martyres*, plural. We get the English word martyr. What's the connection? The connection is that the word witness came to be the word martyr because so many witnesses to the gospel died. They died. Word came to mean one who dies for his testimony because so many did. You remember when Jesus said, "If any man will come after me," He then said, "Let him deny himself." Take up what? Cross. Cost you your life. You have to be willing to hate your own life.

You know, in thinking about that in our context, and I want you to just kind of think this through with me for a minute, there was no supporting Christian culture at this time in the birth of the church. The world was pagan, totally pagan. There was no affirmation of some kind of cultural Christianity, cultural Christian morality. They were aliens to everything in the culture. And there they went, preaching the words of Jesus about God becoming incarnate, the bread of heaven coming down there.

They were saying that if you didn't believe in Him, you were going to hell forever. They were saying that people were sinners, and they were going to perish in their sin. They were preaching the gospel. They had nothing to support them whatsoever. It was alien to the Jews. It was a horrible message to the gentiles. It was an equally horrible message. Persecution was happening everywhere so that witnesses essentially became martyrs because it was so tough.

When I wrote the book Slave, I said they were going into the Roman world full of slaves, and they were saying there's a necessity if you're going to enter the kingdom of God and escape eternal hell that you become a slave of Jesus. The worst possible invitation imaginable was to say to somebody, "You need to become a slave, a permanent slave of a master who will be your only master," and this

master was a crucified Jew from Israel. This is a very hard sell. Foolishness, stumbling block.

Keep in mind there was no support for that message at all. You think about that kind of connected up to our country today. Most of you older people grew up in a time period in America when there was cultural Christianity. There was a kind of Christian consensus in America. People understood the church, they understood the Bible, they understood the gospel. They understood the morality that came out of the Bible. Sometimes it was called the Judeo Christian Ethic. But even more, it was a cultural kind of Christianity. If you grew up in the south, you probably joined a church, some church, because if you joined a church, you could get a job at the bank.

If you joined a church, you could be hired somewhere because you were one of the good guys. If you joined a church, you connected with other people, and you were socially acceptable, and you were religious, and you believed in God, and that was good, like the founders of America believed. They didn't believe in the God of the Bible, but they believed they couldn't keep people moral if there wasn't some divine threat. So they created a God of their own imagining to hold over peoples' heads. So there was a belief in God, and it was defined primarily by the Bible.

So there was a kind of cultural morality that survived a long time in America, and it was showing up in elections 20 years ago, 15 years ago. There was still a consensus. We remember the moral majority, the religious right. They were still to get people elected, still able to have some clout and some power. Let me tell you something. Gone. Gone. No more. There is no more cultural Christianity. There is no collective Christian consensus that is going to have any power in this country whatsoever.

In fact, the more distinctly Christian we are, the more we will be labeled as extremists. Bizarre, alien, homophobic, intolerant, guilty of hate crimes. Cultural Christianity is, as we know it, that kind of consensus coming from a Biblical understanding is gone. It is gone. The people who now vote in America couldn't care less. They couldn't care less about that. The people who carry the elections, they don't want anything to do with that. They want to escape the extremism of cultural Christianity as they see it. So I think as we go forward, it's going to come down to this, and this is exactly where it ought to be anyway.

Forget the cultural Christianity, because people really got going in the wrong direction all that time, fussing around in Washington, trying to get certain things done legislatively. You do everything you can to vote for morality and family and marriage and all of that because it's better for people to live that way. It's better for kids to have two parents. It's better for men and women to get married. It's better to be moral. It's better not to be a criminal. It's better not to commit all kinds of sex outside your marriage.

It's better not to freewheel through life having relations with anybody you want. That's bad. It's better not to do all that, and we want what's best for people if nothing else as a common grace. But we're

not going to have any power to make that happen in the future, and many people thought that was exercising their Christian witness, and it wasn't. It wasn't. I remember a few years ago when I was asked to go to the White House during the Bush administration to meet with the White House staff to explain to them how they could get back to the point as Christians where they could see the people who opposed them politically, morally, and socially as the mission field rather than the enemy. They had turned their mission field into political enemies.

Christianity went into redefinition, and Christianity became some kind of political movement. It's shifted now. Nobody is going to call it the Christian right. People who used to say things like that now call themselves the Tea Party because that's not a religious phrase. But we're not going to have that kind of clout anymore, and what's going to happen is we're going to have to be back to where we should have been all along. The gospel advances by personal testimony to Christ one soul at a time.

Okay? This is what we were originally called to. And as I said this morning very briefly, I think we're closer to living in conditions like these people did in the Book of Acts than we've ever been in the history of our country. We're like aliens in an increasingly anti-Christian culture. And what is our witness? Our witness is to give testimony to Christ, to speak of Christ, to speak the gospel. Obviously, you could say a lot about that, but let's just leave it at that point.

We need to say everything we can possibly say about Christ personally. May I just point one thing out to you? If you are a Christian, you have received the Holy Spirit. If you have received the Holy Spirit, you are a witness. The only question is if you're a faithful one or an unfaithful one. And your Christian witness isn't discharged by getting mad at non-Christians. Your Christian witness is scandalized by doing that. They're the mission field, not the enemy. And the kingdom advances not through politics, not through some kind of cultural morality. The kingdom advances one soul at a time through personal testimony, personal witness.

From you, from me. From me, maybe it includes preaching. For you, maybe it includes neighbors and giving them a Bible study. Maybe it's one-on-one, but that is the way the kingdom advances. Spirit filled, spirit powered, individual believers are made witnesses who give testimony to the power of the gospel and the truth of the gospel on a personal level. And so again, I say the kingdom advances one soul at a time.

Well, so we don't drag this out endlessly, there's a final word here, the proper motive. Proper motive is tied to the proper mystery. Verse 9, "After He said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold two men in white clothing stood beside them. Two angels appeared. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky, gazing?'" The verb there is very strong. Why are you transfixed, gazing into the sky, as if you're losing Him?

“This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you’ve watched Him go into heaven. He went in clouds. He’ll come back in clouds.” Is that a motive? Yeah, that should be a motive. That should be the great motive. What do you mean? I mean he’s coming back. Listen to what John writes at the very end of the Book of Revelations. “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’” John says, “Amen. Come Lord Jesus.” I’m coming quickly. My reward is with me to give to every man. That’s our motive. He’s coming. He’s coming suddenly, unexpectedly, and that kind of splits into two realities. Personal meeting and eternal reward.

What’s the personal meeting side of it? Then shall every man have praise from God, 1 Corinthians. You’ll be rewarded for what is gold silver precious stones. That’s the other side of it. The personal meeting, well done, good and faithful servant, the eternal reward crown that he gives to faithful servants. So it’s a two-fold motivation that when I see him face-to-face, I want him to know I love him. I want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” and I want to receive a full reward. John says, “Look to yourselves that you lose not the things you’ve wrought, but that you receive a full reward, a full reward.”

That’s the message. To that first generation of 12 apostles, and here we are 2,000 years later, and amazingly, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were able to get it started right. And now Christianity in your generation is circling the globe in a way that they would never have ever imagined the day in which you’re living. Just imagine, you hear me preach here, and there are people in rice patties in Asia hearing the very sermon I give to you in their own language. Not just me, but many, many other preachers and teachers.

The gospel is circling the globe. We’re living in the greatest revival of Biblical truth in the history of the world simply because of its electronic capabilities circle the globe. We’re also nearer the second coming than we’ve ever been as the gospel is extending to the ends of the earth. Many verses in a new testament encourage us to be faithful until he comes. I hope maybe you’ll see that in a fresh light. Lord, again, we are so blessed to have your truth to understand life and history and ministry and the church, and ministry responsibility, and the gospel, and all that is incumbent upon us to fulfill our responsibility to you, and to express our love, and to serve in a way that will produce eternal joy.

We’re so thankful for all of this. We give you glory. Make us faithful. In the Savior’s name, amen.

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