

Scripture Reading Acts 1:8-11 & Revelation 5

Acts 1:8 "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **9** Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. **10** And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, **11** who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.""

Revelation 5:1 "1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. **2** Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" **3** And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. **4** So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. **5** But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." **6** And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. **7** Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. **8** Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, **10** And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." **11** Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" **13** And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" **14** Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

"Jesus Sits at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty"

We have moved on to the second part of Luke's orderly account given to his friend Theophilus so that he and all of us might "have certainty concerning the things that have been taught." In the Gospel of Luke we have seen Luke present Jesus as the great sacrifice for sin, the promised Messiah coming to save His people from their sins! In Ephesians chapter two, verse ten, the Apostle Paul reminds us that the gracious salvation that God has given us comes with a purpose:

- "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them."
- Luke will continue his account in Acts showing how God has now established His Church, preparing us as a bride for His Own Son
- AND Luke will teach us how, through the foreordained good works of the Saints in this Church, the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the whole earth

Last week we showed that the Book of Acts is about the Kingdom from first to last

We surveyed what Jesus had taught His disciples about the Kingdom and warned against the many errors that we can hold regarding the Kingdom.

- While there are many to avoid, there are two that created much havoc in the Western Church during the last century...
- Rightly understanding what Luke is teaching here in Acts will help us to avoid them

More specifically, what Luke tells us about the ascension of Jesus along with the heavenly view of the same event given to us in the Revelation of Jesus will help to keep us from these gross errors. Now before we consider these errors, allow me to review what we are told about the Ascension, focusing on two important lessons:

- First, we see clearly from Luke's Gospel and here in Acts that the Ascension of Jesus was a **bodily Ascension** and that He will return in like manner at the end of time.
- Secondly, we see from Revelation chapter five where Jesus ascended to: The Father's Right hand of power where He will rule until His bodily return.

The first point may seem simple enough, but sometimes we can miss the obvious... Jesus has spent 40 days with His disciples giving them many proofs of His bodily resurrection and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. Jesus takes them out on the mountain that has the Garden of Gethsemane on one side and the City of Bethany on the other and while blessing them is taken up into heaven. In his Gospel Luke says, "he parted from them and was carried up in to heaven." and here in Acts he tells us "He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight."

The angels who appear make it perfectly clear what they have seen and what will happen in the future: "This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." Just as we must believe that Jesus ascended into heaven in bodily form, so we must believe that He will return in bodily form.

Affirming both in the Apostle's Creed keeps us from all the various errors regarding secret comings of Jesus and the idolatry of believing that church officers somehow have the power to change the bread and wine served at the communion Table into the body or blood of Jesus which is rightly seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

- The bodily ascension & return of Jesus is a simple doctrine that has been greatly abused!

Luke will go on in Acts to show what Jesus ruling from the Father's right hand means from our perspective here on earth... We will see the promised Comforter poured out upon the Church giving the Saints the power they need to carry out the last command of Jesus:

- To be His "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth!"

The second lesson Luke teaches us is that Jesus ascended TO heaven, and thus God has also revealed to us what the advance of the Kingdom is going to look like from the heavenly perspective...

- This heavenly perspective is seen in the Book of Revelation!

Obviously I will not have time this morning to present a complete survey of this book that the Spirit of God says will bless those who read and keep what it written in it. We have made available to our families copies of my son-in-law's book which is a short survey of Revelation, "A Whole New World: The Gospel According to Revelation" *If you have not availed yourself of a copy please do so and let our homework this week to read it!*

Those who already have read it, I would ask you to give it a quick second read and I think you will greatly benefit from the review. For those who will be going through it for the first time, this little book may raise more questions than it answers...

- That is why there is lists of books in the back for suggested further reading and why we are always open to further discussion of such important matters.

For this morning we are going to focus on just Chapter five of Revelation, which we read as part of our text... We need to see and understand that this chapter is NOT referring to any future event, but giving us the heavenly perspective on what we studied last week:

- The Ascension of Jesus

And what we are considering this week...

- Jesus sitting at the Father's Right hand of power

John was given seven letters written to the seven churches, seven churches in seven geographic locations, and churches spanning a full range of obedience and persecution...

- Thus we should see that Revelation is addressed to these specific churches and all churches!

John is then transported to heaven on the Lord's Day, as we are each week in right worship, and there He sees the very throne-room of God. In chapter five there is problem in heaven... The problem of sin.

- How is God to be both just and the justifier of those who are going to be in the Church?

The Church which God has ordained from before the foundation of the world to be the Bride for His Son? God holds in His hand a scroll, the story or history of the Church, the plan for taking the Kingdom of Jesus to all the earth, which is shortly revealed in the rest of Revelation...

- But first, an angel cries out asking who is worthy to open the scroll? ... None is found in all of heaven or on the earth.

John begins to weep bitterly, but he is consoled by an elder who says, "Weep no more, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals." John then sees the risen and ascended Jesus in heaven and he proclaims...

- "I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

Jesus has bodily ascended with the wounds He had shown doubting Thomas and the others. Now John sees Jesus in heaven empowered by the Spirit of God, pictured in sevens as God's number of completion: The Spirit who is to be poured out on His Church.

The new song that all those in heaven now sing explains what it all means:

"You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

- Again, Greg's little book will help us to understand how all this is pictured in Revelation

You can also go back and review the camp lectures on Revelation chapters 21 & 22 from Pastor Lusk who will be with us again in a few weeks... Pastor Lusk helps us to understand how this is all is pictured again with the glorious City of Jerusalem, the Church, descending down from heaven before the bodily return of Jesus at the time of the Great White Throne Judgment.

This ascension to and reign from the Father's right hand is clearly explained by John, but it was also seen as through a glass darkly in the Old Testament: [as Greg rightly points out John assumes you have read the rest of the Bible and paid attention!]

It is hard to miss the parallels in Daniel chapter seven:

"9 "I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire;"

- *[this was how the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel described God's throne room*
- *John describes Jesus in Revelation chapter one in the same way that Daniel does the Ancient of days]*

10 "A fiery stream issued And came forth from before Him."

- *[we will see this fulfilled in a few weeks at Pentecost]*
- **Now again Daniel describes what John saw in Revelation 5:**

"A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, And the books were opened.

- *The scroll with its seven seals!*
- *Daniel goes on to describe events similar to those John gives us including this picture of Jesus reigning through His Church...*

13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then 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 the one Which shall not be destroyed."

- **THAT** should certainly remind us of the Great Commission we read so often!
- *Daniel is troubled by what he sees and asks the Angel to explain things...*
- *He tells him about the four great empires from King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and then continues,*

"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."

- *Daniel is given much more insight into the Roman persecutions of the early church and then is told in verse 27:*

"Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

Another good example from the Old Testament comes from the Prophet Isaiah, the prophesy of Isaiah which we read at Christmas time without really pondering what it means:

"6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

- **Understanding how Jesus rules from God's right hand helps us to better understand Psalm 2 that we read and sing often:**

As we read through the Psalms we see the rule of Jesus as a constant theme, like this portion of Psalm 78: Psalm 78:8 "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust... 11 Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him."

- **And remember, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15 that all these enemies must be put under the feet of Jesus BEFORE His physical return**

I could go on, but I think you can see that not only is the Book of Acts about the Kingdom of God from beginning to end, but it is about the Kingdom of God filling the whole earth.

This brings us back to the two errors that I mentioned at the beginning... IF we have the wrong picture of what the advance of the Kingdom means, then we will not be able to properly serve Jesus as His Kingdom does advance.

- **The first great error the 20th Century for the western church came with liberalism working to establish the Kingdom of God through human effort**
- **The 2nd great error came from within the church where you had pietism working to take the Kingdom of God out of the world and into the hearts of believers.**

According to the liberals, man was his own savior who had advanced to the point where he no longer needed any god or gods. The liberals wanted a strictly earthly kingdom that would solve the problems of man through philosophical, political and if necessary military means. Perhaps the best example is the Philosopher Rousseau who proclaimed that man should be free, but added that if someone does not go along, "he will be forced to be free."

The liberals rejected God and all His revealed truth but kept the old language so you could have a young girl who joined the atheist communist party because they worked to solve problems, saying with a straight face... "God knows we have a lot of problems" On a larger scale you have the social gospel or violent political revolutions that cloak themselves in god-words and often even church symbols.

Orthodox, fundamentalist and evangelical believers were right to reject the error of liberalism and to affirm the Scriptures, but in many ways they backed off the other cliff or as we often say, threw the baby out with the dirty bath water.

- **They took all that the Prophets, the Law and the Psalms declared about the Kingdom of God advancing and made it an internal religious experience.**

Yes, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was within us, and that we had to be born again, given hearts of flesh to replace our hearts of stone in order to enter God's Kingdom.

And yes, we were not to look for a worldly Kingdom the way the liberals pictured the Kingdom.

BUT the Church of the 20th Century was also wrong in rejecting much of what is clearly commanded and pictured in the Scriptures:

- **The Kingdom of Jesus is going to fill the whole earth and Jesus will reign with power through His Church, impacting individuals AND impacting nations.**

Not through military conquest or with any type of human effort or reason, but through service and dominion as the Power of the Holy Spirit is poured out on God's chosen people and they serve God in their various callings.

- Rome did not fall because the Christians built a bigger army!
- It fell under the judgment of God, as will all nations that do not kiss the son!

The Roman Empire was replaced by the age of Christendom that continues to bear fruit until our day, an era referred to as the ‘dark ages’ by the humanist of today.

- The early Christians did not prevail over the Jewish leaders nor the Roman Caesars by practicing our American pietism!
- They were not sent to the arena sands for quietly attending church
- They were not trying to save a few souls before Rome collapsed, they were busy discipling the nations, including Rome!
- They were accused of turning the world upside down, but in fact they were laying foundations for the civilization that would follow the failures of Greece and Rome

That would be an important example for us to be following today!

To bring this back to the texts I read this morning, we must avoid these two errors regarding the Kingdom:

- If we look only to the picture in Revelation it would be easy to fall into the language of revolution and use our human effort to build some sort of mythical kingdom of god.
- On the other hand, if we see the ascension only from the earthly perspective we can quickly fall into the sin of pietism:
Believing that Jesus has gone away and that now we are just here to try and save what souls we can until He returns
- To properly understand the Book of Acts, and all of God’s plan, we must consider both of these perspectives together!

Jesus has saved His people from their sins and established them as His Church: Pictured as the City of Jerusalem that descends from heaven to fill the whole earth with the waters that flow out of its gates.

As we obey the Great Commission we must strive to maintain this balance and remember the proper order of things that Greg rightly points out in his chapter on the Millennial Kingdom...

“The reign of the Saints is a present reality. But it manifests itself, first of all, in our victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. For in Christ’s Kingdom, spiritual dominion must precede cultural dominion. After all, fallen man has not lost the ability to build bridges, devise governments, or tell stories. What he has lost is the ability to do these things to the glory of God and in obedience to His Word. Man needs grace and righteousness far more than he needs ‘literature 101’

“On the other hand, the man who knows God will want to tell his stories well because he is telling them for the glory of God. The dominion of Grace goes far beyond the human heart or the walls of the sanctuary.”

And finally, we must heed the admonition from Dr. Schaeffer that we are to always do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way: A proper view of the Kingdom helps us to have proper understanding of the power we have been given by the Spirit of God

I want to close with a very familiar Scripture that we have for far too long used ONLY for our internal struggles, where it can certainly be helpful.

But as you hear Paul's words to the Church at Corinth this morning, please remember that our command is to advance the Kingdom and THAT is the real warfare that we are to be engaged in all of our lives...

II Corinthians 10:3

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 110:

**"The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."
2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!
3 Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. 4 The Lord has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 5 The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. 6 He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. 7 He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head."**