

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:46-52 & Acts 1-14

“46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." 50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.”

Acts 1:1 “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But 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." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

"He Ascended Into Heaven"

We begin this morning our journey through the Book of Acts. I read the final portion of Luke's Gospel as well as our opening Scripture from Acts so we could see how the two books flow together. In fact this is exactly what Luke immediately points out to his friend Theophilus, saying that the former account gave him all that "Jesus began both to do and to teach!" Our focus this week and next will be on the Ascension where we confess in the Apostle's Creed, "He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

The Heidelberg Catechism spends six of its 129 questions and answers dealing with the ascension. It is an important doctrine to understand and I would commend those questions, answers and Scriptures to you for further study.

Before Luke again gives an account of the Ascension, he reminds his friend from whence they have come and shows again that Jesus has given His young Church evidence, instruction and power to advance His Kingdom.

- The same Holy Spirit that would be poured out upon the Church in just ten days had served Jesus guiding, protecting and empowering His ministry to these disciples.

These chosen ones had been given commandments and Jesus had presented Himself alive after His sufferings by many infallible proofs: Evidence and instruction!

Jesus tells them to remain in Jerusalem until the promised Comforter has come which John had prophesied when he declared, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

- Evidence, instruction & power!

I want to emphasize again the importance of keeping all of these in balance.

If we ONLY look back to the evidence in the history of what God has done without ever learning what it means to us or seeing God’s power in our lives, then we will soon become part of what Dr. Francis Schaeffer referred to as dead orthodoxy. At the same time, if we move on to only the study of these teachings and instructions from the Scriptures, and perhaps looking to some worldly wise men as well, then we run the risk of doing what the liberals have done for the past couple of hundred years...

- Believing they had become wiser than God by being more ‘modern’, having moved past the primitive religion of miracles and history.

And finally, we have those who reject both historical evidence and Biblical instruction in favor of real spiritual power! The Charismatic movement was right to look at liberalism or dead orthodoxy and say they were wrong... But in forgetting much of what Jesus gave His disciples they have chased after a series of experiences which now lead many further and further away from Jesus.

- We must believe the evidence that God has given us...
- We must hear God’s instructions and gain the wisdom He desires to give us
- And, we must walk in the power of the Holy Spirit as He leads us as the Bride of Jesus!

These are the simple lessons that Luke, in the writing of Acts, is going to teach his friend Theophilus and all the attentive Saints God has called down through the ages. Jesus tells His disciples they are to be His witnesses: This means they are to faithfully relate the evidence that has been given, faithfully pass on the instructions or wisdom that has been given, and to demonstrate God’s power in their lives as they live faithfully in their callings!

- This is how the Kingdom of Jesus is going to fill the world...
- And YES, the Book of Acts is about the Kingdom of Jesus filling the world!

Right here at the beginning Luke reminds his readers that Jesus spoke with His followers during the forty days after His resurrection about the “things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” When we reach the end of Acts, perhaps a hundred sermons from now, we will see Luke close with this statement: “[Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance!”

- Such was the case in the early years of the Church and such continues to be the case today!

However, we must be careful to not repeat the mistake these disciples immediately make, by not understanding all that Jesus means when He speaks of His Kingdom. These disciples brought their Jewish background with them and assumed that Jesus was talking about a local Kingdom that would throw off the yoke of Rome and establish a new Kingdom like that of David or Solomon for the people of Israel.

- Jesus gently reminds them that they do not know all that God does and that He will work things out in His time frame and in His own way.
- They are to wait for the promised Comforter who will bring to them the power they need to carry out God's plan for them!

Jesus reminds them exactly how this will be done:

- "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea & Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
- We will see that this is exactly how things work out in the Book of Acts.
- The Apostles will witness in Jerusalem until the persecutions begin with the stoning of Stephen in chapter seven...
- Then their message will be carried into all Judea and even Samaria until chapter ten when the Gospel is taken to the Gentiles...
- And we will then see the ministry of Paul advancing the Kingdom until the end of Acts, where he is proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Rome.

So Jesus instructed them about the things pertaining to the Kingdom, they go on to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria and to the end of the earth and Luke concludes with the work of the Kingdom continuing unhindered.

- All well and good, unless like those disciples, we have a wrong view of the Kingdom!
- Here there are not just two cliffs we can fall off, but many, as we have sadly seen with errors down through church history and those still with us today!

Here is a basic truth that we need to understand: The more complex something is, the more difficult it is to properly understand it and the more potential for error we have.

Allow me to illustrate this: [show child's block] We have here a child's red, rectangular wooden block. Pretty simple to understand and not much room for error: And any that come up should be easy to correct. Someone might assume it was metal, but a simple touch would confirm that it is wood. Someone might have just caught a glance and thought it was a square block but we could show them it is not with a closer look. If Mike were here in all his color-blindness he might question whether it is red. Finally someone might want to use it as a paperweight: We could explain that it might work, but that this is certainly not its intended purpose.

- Simple concepts: Simple corrections

Now since I referred to our newest covenant child Pauline last week, allow me to use her as the other example this week. If I say she is a female infant who we pray will grow up as a faithful covenant child, that could also be taken as a pretty simple statement.

Because little Pauline is a complex person made in the image of God, we have many more places to go wrong than we did with this simple block.

Obviously the world would object to saying Pauline is made in the image of God: She is just a new form of primeval mud that has advanced WITHOUT any assistance from any sort of god [maybe aliens].

We think she bears the guilt of Adam's race, while the world thinks she is innocent:

- A clean slate that will be good until some of us mess her up.

Surely we can find some common ground... Like saying she is a female!

That would be easy enough to prove, but wait, there are some today SO confused about gender identity that they would insist that we can't really consider her to be a female until she is older and decides for herself!

- Even if we stay within the community of faith and away from such utter nonsense from the world, it is not easy.

Is Pauline a faithful covenant child today? We believe that young children do exhibit faith even before they can intellectually understand it. Others insist that she can only be faithful when she is older.

Is she a covenant child because she was born to covenant parents or will she become a covenant child when she makes a decision for Jesus?

Is her ability to reason impacted by the fall of Adam?

Is Pauline a body and soul? Or does she have a body, mind and soul? Or is it body, soul, mind and spirit?

- We could go on and on, but I think you see that here we can ask a lot more questions and it is more difficult to give simple answers, like just feel the block and know that it is made of wood.

So what does this have to do with the Kingdom?

- Well since the Kingdom is established and ruled by our infinite God...
- And since this Kingdom is comprised of a countless multitude of chosen Paulines and Pauls...
- And since this Kingdom stretches from the first coming of Jesus until He returns in like manner

Then I think you can see how many questions can be asked and how much room there is for error.

- Lord-willing we will come to see that the Book of Acts is the story of the advance of God's Kingdom.

And I trust that as we do so, we will learn MUCH about this Kingdom!

- Jesus had indeed spoken to His followers about the Kingdom before He ascended to the Father's right hand...Not only in the last forty days, but throughout His earthly ministry and in the Scriptures that had been given in the Old Testament.

The word Kingdom is used 119 times in the Gospels alone:

Some things we learn about the Kingdom are pretty straightforward and others are mysteries that have now been studied and pondered for two thousand years without fully understanding all that they mean.

- Jesus said His Kingdom was at hand
- We are told to pray, “Thy Kingdom Come on earth as it is in Heaven”
- We are told to seek first the Kingdom of God
- We are told that His Kingdom is not divided
- We are told that His Kingdom was established before the foundation of the world
- We are told that His Kingdom is given power with the coming of the Spirit and in the Keys held by church leaders
- We are told the Kingdom is Good News
- We are told that the Kingdom is not of this world
- We are told that His Kingdom will fill the whole earth!
- We are told that the Kingdom does not come by observation but is within you
- We are told that one must be born again to enter the Kingdom

Jesus gave many examples of what the Kingdom is like...

- It is like a grain of mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree
- It is like a tiny bit of yeast that impacts the entire loaf
- It is like a buried treasure in a field or a pearl of great price
- It is like a drag-net that brings in all types of fish
- It is like a field where good wheat & weeds are planted & must grow together until the harvest
- It is like a child
- It is like a great wedding feast that one must be invited to and come to properly dressed

Jesus also gave us many insights into the mysteries of the Kingdom:

- He told the parable of the sower with four types of ground and three qualities of soil
- He told us it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom
- He said it was like those ten virgins who waited for the bride groom, five who were prepared and five who were not
- He said there is great forgiveness like the King who forgave great debts
- He said there is much grace with the story of the owner paying the same wage to those who worked an hour as he did those who toiled all day.

I think you begin to see the point:

- The Kingdom of God is a BIG subject!

When we say that we believe God when He showed Daniel that the Kingdom of Jesus would fill the whole earth, we are saying a lot!

These are all matters that we will wrestle with as we move through the Book of Acts.

- It begins with a reminder that Jesus spoke of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God and ends with Paul proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

- These are lessons that the disciples learned and lessons we must learn as well.

We will see, just like with the question they asked in today's text, they did not always get it right and neither will we.

- BUT as we will see, Lord-willing in two weeks, these disciples began to wrestle with the Scriptures and to trust God to open the eyes of their understanding, just as we should.

In verse nine it says, "Now when [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Jesus now ascends to His Father's right hand as He said He would and the disciples look steadfastly up knowing that Jesus had left them here on earth to carry out His work. Two angels come along side to remind them of this and to assure them that Jesus will return just as surely as He had left... We will get to this a little further down in the Apostle's Creed! Once again Luke gives us the names of the chosen Apostles and tells us that they continued in one accord in prayer and supplication.

- They began to be the Church!
- They were preparing to be witnesses for Jesus, sharing the many evidences He had given them

They approached God in prayer and supplication to better understand all the lessons that had been taught

- And they waited patiently as they were told to do, for the coming of the Comforter: The Holy Spirit who would empower them to be the Church.

Jesus told them what they were to do after they received the Holy Spirit: "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"

- We will see them carry out these commands in the Book of Acts and learn what it means to proclaim the Kingdom of God
- We must learn these lessons well because we too have a command that is still being carried out:

Because He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus said that we are to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age", just as the angels assured these disciples.

Paul alludes to this important task for the Church in chapter 15 of I Corinthians between his glorious defense of the resurrection of Jesus as the Gospel and the wonderful reward of our glorified bodies. Listen carefully to what is often passed over lightly in this chapter:

20 "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

Luke begins Acts with the account of Jesus ascending and Angels assuring the disciples that He will return in like manner.

Luke ends Acts with Paul “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

If we are to fulfill our calling as Saints with all confidence, comfort and contentment...

- **Then we must believe that Jesus is going to return in like manner to be the judge of all the world**
- **AND we must believe that the Kingdom of Jesus must be proclaimed with boldness and will advance without hindrance until that same day!**

Communion Meditation: Hebrews 4:

“9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”