

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

From Thence He Shall Come To Judge

April 25th, 2021

Acts 1:6-11

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you I would love for you to open it now to Acts 1:6-11. Now if you were here with us last Sunday then you will remember that this was the passage we looked at last week when we were talking about the ascension of Christ – but as you will recall, in that passage, the return of Christ and the ascension of Christ are linked – just as they are linked in the Creed. The Apostle’s Creed says:

“He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

From thence.

From where he went up. In the same manner AS HE WENT UP – the two events are connected. So we’ll begin our journey where we left off last week. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning again at Acts 1:6-11.

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or

seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:6–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

One almost gets the sense from reading this passage that the entire church age – which has lasted for almost 2000 years – is really just an intermission of sorts in the great drama of redemption. It is no more than a brief PAUSE between the GREAT VICTORY of Jesus and the beginning of his ETERNAL REIGN. Jesus has gone to the GREEN ROOM as it were while preparations are made for his COSMIC coronation ceremony.

The Apostles spoke about this PAUSE as nothing less than SALVATION for the people of this world. Peter said:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. (2 Peter 3:15–16 ESV)

So brother Paul and I are on the same page here, Peter says. This PAUSE is nothing less than SALVATION! It is an opportunity for the message of Christ’s victory to go forth in advance of his return to RULE AND REIGN.

That’s what this is – so we need to make the most of it – because the return of Jesus Christ will be an event of LIFE ALTERING, EARTH SHATTERING, EPOCH ENDING, KINGDOM CRUSHING significance for every man, woman and child in all creation.

That’s what the Bible says. It will be an END and a NEW BEGINNING. It is the NEXT EVENT and the LAST EVENT in the great DRAMA of God’s redemptive work in Christ. So let’s talk

about that. Let's talk first about what that END will look like and then we shall spend our final few moments talking about how we should live in light of Christ's imminent return.

First of all then, what will the end look like?

What Will The End Look Like?

I mentioned that all the Apostles are on the same page here. They may use different language and different imagery but the sense they give is entirely harmonious. They all speak of the return of Christ in CATAclysmic TERMS.

1. It will be experienced as a great cataclysm

Peter says:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:10 ESV)

The Apostle Paul wrote to his people saying:

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:2–3 ESV)

The Apostle John in the Book of Revelation had a series of apocalyptic visions of the return of Christ. They are filled with very colourful and terrifying imagery. He says:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.

¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.”

¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Revelation 19:11–21 ESV)

That is the shattering arrival of the stone cut by no human hand – as prophesied in Daniel chapter 2. That is the coming of the KING whose arrival will CRUSH all remaining opposition and rebellion on the earth. It will be a day of great slaughter, death and judgment. It will be a COSMIC CLEANSING in advance of the eternal kingdom of Messiah.

He will come like a thief in the night. He will come like a meteor falling from the heavens. He will come like a King riding on a horse. He will come in POWER, he will come in VICTORY, he will come TO RULE.

That’s what you’re praying for when you pray THY KINGDOM COME. You are asking for the end of history and the beginning of a whole new world.

And you are asking for the Final Judgment.

2. It will result in a Final Judgment

The King comes in triumph and all his enemies are brought before him and they will suffer judgment.

We are far removed from the realities of war and battle in our generally peaceful and pleasant times. But history is filled with scenes like this – the bible is filled with scenes like this. When Babylon finally broke the people of Israel in the 6th century BC after a long siege around the city of Jerusalem, the king of Israel tried to run away – he tried to break through the siege and make a desperate escape with his family and the members of his household. Do you remember how that ended?

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. ⁶Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. ⁷They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. (2 Kings 25:5–7 ESV)

That's how wars end. That's what happens to those who OPPOSE the victorious King.

But you say, surely JESUS wouldn't do that! Jesus is a PEACEFUL KING! He's a happy King!! He's a gentle King.

Gentle with his people yes, but who told you that Jesus was gentle with his enemies? Who told you that Jesus would be gentle with those who have opposed him?

Not Jesus. He didn't tell you that.

Do you remember the parable of the minas? Jesus said that the kingdom of God was like a nobleman who went away to a distant land to receive HIS KINGDOM and he gave instructions to his servants about what to do while he was away. In Luke's version we get some extra detail – not only do we hear the story of the servants and their various activities – we also learn that not everyone was excited about the new Lord and his coming reign. Luke says:

But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' (Luke 19:14 ESV)

Well, as the story goes, eventually the Lord returns and he summons his servants AND in Luke's version his subjects to account. He rewards those who have served him faithfully and he

condemns those who have foolishly rebelled against him. Luke's version of this story ends with a surprising THUD. Luke 19:27 records the Lord as saying:

“But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.” (Luke 19:27 ESV)

Jesus said that. In a parable about his return to RULE and REIGN – Jesus said that; so let's be absolutely clear: when the King comes he will judge every man, woman and child on planet earth. He will reward his servants and he will condemn his enemies.

The Apostle John teaches the same doctrine by means of an apocalyptic vision. He says:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15 ESV)

Remember our great, white throne from last week? According to John, when it descends that last 10,000 KM – it will land like a THUD and it will shatter all remaining opposition and it will summon every human being who has ever lived to stand before the King in Final Judgment and if your name is not written in the Book of Life then you will be condemned and cast into the Lake of Fire forever.

Is your name written in that book?

Have you ever prayed: “O God! Have mercy on me a sinner! Cover me in the blood of Christ! Have mercy on me because of Christ! I submit Lord! I bow my knee and I own you as my Lord and Savior!”

Have you prayed that prayer?

If you haven't – then do it today. Do it now. Because that throne could drop to this earth at any moment. You will be summoned. You will stand. Books will be opened. Your name will be in one of them. If it is found in the Lamb's Book of Life then you will walk past the throne and join the jury, but if it is not found then your sins will be read, your rebellion will be named and you will be condemned and cast alive into the Lake of Fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth forever.

The second coming of Jesus Christ will be experienced as a cataclysm and it will result in final judgment and, thirdly, it will precede an eternal kingdom.

3. It will precede an eternal kingdom

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” (Revelation 22:14 ESV)

If your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, then you will enter the Celestial City through the GATES and you will experience the rest and the joy of your Creator forever.

We are thankful again for John's colourful descriptions. Revelation 22:1-5:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5 ESV)

The second coming of Jesus Christ will bring an end to this world and it will mark the beginning of another. A Kingdom that will never be shaken, that will never end, that will never fade or fail. That will only grow and increase and flourish FOREVER.

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:17 ESV)

Come.

The way is open now because of Christ. All you must do is bow your knee. Forswear your rebellion. Confess that you are a creature in rebellion. Claim the blood of the cross and be forgiven. Take Jesus as your Lord and Savior today! Enter through the DOOR! And be forever saved.

Come.

That is the END of the Gospel story and the beginning of a new, eternal story – thanks be to God!

Now then, how shall we live in the time before?

How Then Shall We Live?

In the Bible ETHICS are DRAWN out from ESCHATOLOGY. Eschatology means “what we believe about the end”. We’ve just spent 30 minutes talking about what we believe about the end – and now we must DRAW OUT FROM THAT certain ethical conclusions. That’s the rhythm of the Bible and you see it everywhere – we saw it in our passage in Acts 1:6-11. Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples stood there watching and waiting for him to return. That wasn’t the right response, so God sent two angels to rebuke them. They said:

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11 ESV)

We are not to be star gazers or date setters. That is not the right response to the doctrine of Christ’s return to rule and reign.

1. Not as star gazers and date setters

That was the last thing Jesus said to the disciples before he left them:

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7 ESV)

The Father doesn't want you to know the precise details of my return – so don't waste your time trying to find what God has hidden – just do your job.

The disciples of Christ have needed that reminder in every generation, haven't we? We want to know. I've often wondered why people are so eager to know. As a pastor, it makes me wonder, what is it that you would do differently if you KNEW FOR SURE that Jesus would return on April 25th 2022? What would you do differently?

And you say, “well Pastor, quite a lot actually. First of all I should immediately be much more careful about what sort of things I want on television. And I would immediately begin to wage war on that last little bad habit that I've been tolerating – that would have to go. And of course, I would write letters, to all my unsaved loved ones pleading with them to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. And I imagine that I would spend less money on my own comforts and pour a great deal more into missions. I would do all those things – straight away – if I knew for sure that Jesus was going to come back in 1 year's time.

Well of course, we should all be doing those things anyway – shouldn't we?

And I suppose that's the point.

It is actually better for us if we don't know. And since we don't know, and can't know – and according to Jesus WON'T know, then obviously we shouldn't be star gazers and date setters and we should just get on with the things we know we need to be doing anyway. There is great wisdom in taking that approach.

And in truth, it appears to be in TAKING that approach – in doing our jobs as ambassadors and heralds of the kingdom - that we have our best chance of hastening the Day of the Lord. The Bible does seem to hint at that.

2. As ambassadors and heralds

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

And then the end will come!

Sounds like we’ve got a job to do in the time between – and that job of course, is to herald the news of Christ’s victory to all the nations.

You know, this whole COVID thing, I understand, has been very hard on the church. We have felt restricted in our worship, haven’t we? And yet, on the positive side, it has forced us to figure out the internet. Even small churches. Churches that didn’t know how to use PowerPoint 14 months ago are now broadcasting over BoxCast and have their own YouTube Channels – we have witnessed a technological revolution over the last 14 months LARGELY because of COVID19.

Now, listen, I’m well aware that the internet is the playground of fools – and yet it is also a SUPER HIGHWAY for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a little sample. Google Analytics gives us a list of our Top 50 Countries every month in terms of online listening and viewing. Here are a few from our Top 50 Countries over the last 30 days:

Canada

USA

Australia

Great Britain
South Africa
Malaysia
Russia
Uganda
Singapore
Qatar
Viet Nam

Now, here's an interesting one, do you know people in the United Arab Emirates have listened to 174 tracks from just Into the Word – just one of our online offerings – in the last 30 days. I'm not sure I could find the United Arab Emirates on a map – but we've been delivering Gospel content from the Bible to that country multiple times a day over the last 30 days.

Who in the world could have ever imagined that?

So maybe it's not a bad thing that COVID has forced us to figure this out.

Now listen – don't over hear that. I want this to come to an end – I want 600 people to gather again in person in this room and to sing as loud as they possibly can and to hug each other and to pass the communion plate to each other – I want that. I'm praying for that. But I'm just saying – as hard as this has been **ON OUR WORSHIP** – it may have been a boost of rocket fuel for our **MISSION**. The whole world is on the internet right now looking for truth and for answers.

Let's get out there!

Let's get on the internet – not to complain about our hardships but to capitalize on this opportunity! How about instead of complaining that you couldn't be here LIVE today – you share this service – or you share your favourite sermon or your favourite Bible resource on Facebook. That's what I'm saying. Let's **FIND THE OPPORTUNITY IN THIS SITUATION!** We have a **LIMITED AMOUNT OF TIME** before the **RETURN** of Jesus Christ and I just don't think we should be using **ANY OF IT** to complain about our circumstances. Let's do what we can

with the tools that we have to tell as many people as possible about the person and work of Christ.

Can I tell you something? If I were Jesus – and I am not – but if I was and I was planning on coming back in 6 months and I was frustrated with the lack of progress being demonstrated in the cause of world mission – I wonder if I might not have DESIGNED COVID19 to simultaneously chasten my church and EXPEDITE my mission. I wonder.

I don't know the answer to that – but I'm just saying, instead of complaining about our loss of pleasures and freedoms maybe we should just do everything we can to capitalize on this remarkable opportunity – because who knows, the time may be very short indeed.

Thirdly, and lastly – coming right from the pen of the Apostle Peter, given what we know about the end we ought to be diligent in our preparation and at peace.

3. In diligent preparation and peace

2 Peter 3:14 says that very thing:

“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.” (2 Peter 3:14 ESV)

At first glance that sounds like two things but it is really just the one. Peter says we are to be working hard on our sanctification AND AT PEACE. The peace there, Thomas Schreiner says, refers to:

“being right with God, entering his presence with joy rather than experiencing his wrath.”¹

If you KNOW how this ends – if you know that Christ will return with a thud and set up his throne and summon all people to judgment – if you know that his servants will be judged and his enemies condemned then OBVIOUSLY you do everything you can NOW to make that a joyful

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 394.

experience. You don't want to be explaining to Jesus why you didn't ever wage war on that nasty habit or why you spent so much time lying on the couch watching smut on TV – that would be foolish! You want to be growing in holiness, growing in godliness, purifying your character so as to have an entirely peaceful and joyous experience on that day. The Apostle John said the same thing:

“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3 ESV)

We don't know how much time we have before the Lord returns. It could be today. It could be a year from now. It could be 10 years. I suppose it could be 100 years. But based on what we know ABOUT THAT DAY we know exactly how we should be living in the time before. We should be ACTIVE and ENGAGED in Gospel proclamation and we should be DILIGENT and EARNEST in our own sanctification and purification so that we may hear these and ONLY these words from our blessed Savior:

‘Well done, good and faithful servant. ... Enter into the joy of your master.’
(Matthew 25:23 ESV)

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.