

Acts

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. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

Will You At This Time Restore The Kingdom?

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Acts 1:6-11

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Acts. We will be picking up in verse 6 of chapter 1.

Our passage continues Luke's account of Jesus' ascension. I don't want to assume that we all know what that term means, so allow me to briefly clarify. 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead and stepped out of his tomb he *ascended* to heaven and took his rightful seat at the right hand of the Father – thus the term “the ascension.”

I don't think that I could possibly overstate the significance of the paragraph that we will be considering this morning. You could faithfully draw ten different sermons from this passage. In fact, you could faithfully write ten different BOOKS about this passage! There is SO MUCH GOOD here for us to unpack! That is part of the reason why we've broken the opening 11 verses into two sections. Two weeks ago, we covered a great deal of the content that appear again in our text this morning. That gives us some freedom to “zoom in” on a theme that arises from this passage that will inform our understanding of the book of Acts.

So, before we go any further, let's take a moment in prayer to ask God by His Spirit to enable us to see what we are meant to see.

Amen. Look with me now to Acts 1. We will be reading verses 6-11. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

⁶ 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.

As we work through our passage this morning, I want to draw your attention back to the question that the disciples asked that solicited his response. Luke tells us:

So when they had come together, they asked him, “**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**” (Acts 1:6 ESV)

The disciples asked some bad questions in their day, but this wasn’t one of them. They had every reason to believe that the Kingdom of God was about to be realized. They were talking to the resurrected Messiah! Jesus talked about the Kingdom with his disciples all the time! As Jesus instructed his disciples for 40 days after the resurrection – as he walked them through the Scriptures and opened their minds to understand – what was the overarching theme of his teaching? Look back a few verses at Acts 1:3. There, we read:

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and **speaking about the kingdom of God.** (Acts 1:3 ESV)

So, the disciples weren’t wrong to be thinking about the Kingdom as they looked at their resurrected King. But their question reveals that they didn’t yet understand the *timeline* or the *nature* of the Kingdom.

Can I tell you something? I am SO GLAD that they asked this question because, 2000 years later, Christians are STILL wrestling with the same question. We’re still arguing about the *timeline* of the kingdom. Was it then? Is it now? Is it yet to come? And we’re still arguing about the *nature* of the kingdom. Is it national? Is it personal? Do we impose it by force? Do we “let go, and let God”? Your answer to those questions will have serious implications for your approach to ministry.

What are we asking for when we pray, “Let your Kingdom come”? What are we finding confidence in when we sing, “His Kingdom is forever”? What am I declaring when I preach, “The Kingdom of God is ADVANCING in the world”?

I’m glad that the disciples asked this question. Our passage this morning doesn’t say everything that there is to say about the Kingdom, but it does teach us three important lessons.

Three Important Lessons About The Kingdom of God

The first lesson that we learn about the Kingdom of God in this passage is that:

1. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, not consummated

Timing is everything, and THIS timing is frequently misunderstood. The disciples, for example, wondered:

“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. (Acts 1:6b-7 ESV)

“Is the Kingdom of God NOW?” That was their question. The Jewish people had been LONGING for the Messiah! They looked with great anticipation for the King who would restore their fortune and who would lift them up out of their oppression. And their hope was not unfounded or unbiblical! God promised that such a King would come. In 2 Samuel 7, God said to King David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and **I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.** (2 Samuel 7:12-13 ESV)

This anticipation explains the frequent attempts by the Jews to force Jesus to assume an earthly throne. Consider the scene in John 6, for example:

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him

by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:14-15 ESV)

They were ready for the fulfillment of the promise, and they were ready for it NOW!

The disciples looked at their resurrected King, and they considered all of the lessons that he had taught them for forty days, and they saw all of the prophetic strands coming together before their eyes, and unsurprisingly they asked, “Is the Kingdom of God NOW?”

But what they didn’t yet understand – what we often fail to understand – is that the Kingdom of God IS now. But it’s also not yet. It’s important that we understand this, so let’s unpack it further.

In Jesus life and ministry, the Kingdom of God was INAUGURATED. In Jesus’ life and ministry, we saw a glimpse of the Kingdom in our dark world. He said as much in Matthew 12:

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, **then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** (Matthew 12:28 ESV)

The captives were being set free! The evil one was being cast out! The word was going forth in power! Praise God! Because of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is here now! It was like the first ray of sunshine breaking through at the end of a storm!

But the Kingdom of God in its fullness has not yet arrived in completion. Do you know how I know that? Because I still look out and see a world that is broken because of sin. Our loved ones still succumb to disease. Children still die of hunger. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated here on earth, but we are still waiting for something more, aren’t we? We are still waiting for the final consummation when Christ returns!

“Well, why the delay?” you might be asking. In 2 Peter 3, we are told that one of the reasons for this delay is God’s mercy. In 2 Peter 3 we read:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.** ¹⁰ 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 3:9-10 ESV)

In his patience, the King is leaving open a window of opportunity for the salvation of those who have rejected his reign. He is sitting on his throne NOW. His kingdom is advancing in the world NOW. But, the consummation of his kingdom – the day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess his Lordship – has not yet come. But that day WILL come. And on that day:

This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11b ESV)

We're living in the season of patience – the now, and the not yet. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated. But it has not yet been fully consummated. That's the first lesson that we learn about the Kingdom of God in this passage. Second, we learn that:

2. The Kingdom of God is located in a person, not a nation

This represents one of, if not THE, most significant paradigm shifts that we find in the Book of Acts. The disciples were still expecting a localized kingdom. They thought the Kingdom of God was going to be a NATIONAL kingdom, which is why they asked:

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom **to Israel?**” (Acts 1:6b ESV)

Again, their question wasn't ridiculous. The anticipation of the Jewish people was that God was going to restore the kingdom of Israel. They believed that the promises of blessing were for the biological descendants of Abraham, and that they would experience those blessings in the geographical land of promise – Israel. But God's plan stretched beyond the national walls that they had grown so accustomed to. Writing to the church in Galatia, the Apostle Paul explained:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” **who is Christ.** (Galatians 3:16 ESV)

The promise WAS for Abraham's descendant. And that descendant is Jesus. And now, anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus has been engrafted into the family of blessing. As Paul goes on to explain:

Know then that **it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.** (Galatians 3:7 ESV)

If you have faith in Jesus – if you believe that He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords – if you accept the Messiah that the prophets pointed forward to – then you are a true child of Abraham. You are an heir of the blessings that have been promised to God’s people.

The disciples understanding of the kingdom was still limited by geography and ethnicity. The first two chapters of Acts demonstrate how God powerfully BURST OPEN their limited understanding! And we catch the first glimpse of that here in verse 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.** (Acts 1:8 ESV)

The Kingdom of God is FOR THE WORLD! Proclaim it in Jerusalem, yes, but don’t stop there! Proclaim it in Judea! Then go a step further and proclaim it in Samaria! Then proclaim this good news to the ends of the earth! God had a plan of redemption for the world and his name is Jesus! And let’s be clear, this was ALWAYS the plan! God prophesied through Isaiah about the servant of the Lord, and in that prophesy, we read:

“It is **too light a thing** that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6 ESV)

Through Jesus – the descendant of David – the seed of Abraham – servant of the Lord – the child of promise who was struck on the heel but who crushed the serpent’s head – through JESUS the promises of God have been unlocked for the nations! One Bible scholar argues:

When we see Jesus, we see the Kingdom of God with sandals.¹

¹ E. Stanley Jones as quoted by W.A. Young Jr. *What On Earth Is The Kingdom Of God?* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), 70.

The Kingdom is located in Jesus! And through Jesus the blessings of the Kingdom of God stretch beyond the nation of Israel and the biological children of Abraham to ANY and ALL who believe in his name!

They did not anticipate that He would establish His Kingdom through a person. And this leads to the third lesson that we learn here about the Kingdom of God:

3. The Kingdom of God advances with Holy Spirit empowered words, not weapons

We take this for granted because we live in a culture that was shaped by Christianity, but one of the things that is most remarkable about the Kingdom of God is the way that it advances. Jesus told his disciples:

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. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

Jesus could have told his disciples to take up arms. He could have rallied his followers for a last-ditch attempt to overthrow their Roman oppressors. But, as his heart stretched out to the farthest reaches of the globe, he looked at his tiny assembly of followers and he told them how they would change the world.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.

They will stone you. They will crucify you. They will burn you in the Emperor’s garden. They will feed you to lions in the coliseum.

But the Kingdom of God WILL advance.

Not by the sword. Not by statecraft. But by the Spirit-empowered witness of the church.

As the world rejects you, bear witness that I bore their griefs and carried their sorrows.

As they attack you, testify that I was pierced for their transgressions.

As they condemn you, remind them that I suffered for their iniquity.

As they mock you, tell them that I was silent as I stood accused.

And with your dying breath, bear witness that I have conquered death and that I offer resurrection life. By MY stripes they will be healed!”

There is Kingdom of light that is breaking through the darkness, and it advances through the Spirit empowered witness of the church.

This was Jesus’ plan to turn the world upside down.

And, let’s be honest, this plan shouldn’t have worked! This rag tag team of disciples in Jerusalem were opposed by the occupying Romans and they were opposed by their own religious leaders. They were a motley crew with an impossible assignment.

But they carried with them a testimony that proved to be unstoppable! And they were carried by the powerful Spirit of God!

And thus, the world was changed forever.

Like a tiny mustard seed planted in the ground, these lowly men and women went forth with a message of resurrection hope – a message of a Kingdom that was breaking into the world! And that seed grew to a tree that now reaches to the ends of the earth!

I am so thankful that the disciples asked their question, because now we know that the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. It is located in a person, not a nation. And it advances with Holy Spirit empowered words, not weapons. Now, with the time that we have left, I want to spend some time thinking through the implications of what we’ve just learned for our ongoing ministry here at Redeemer.

First, because the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but not yet consummated:

1. Our approach to ministry must not confuse the “now” with the “not yet”

As is often the case, we are called to walk a road with ditches on either side.

In one ditch, we find those who discredit the “now” of the Kingdom. They don’t seem to believe that God still work miracles today. They don’t seem to believe that the Gospel has power to bring about real change today. They assume that such expressions of the Kingdom of God were reserved for the Apostolic age, and they therefore believe that it would be *wrong* for us to expect any such power today.

In the other ditch, we find those who disregard the “not yet” nature of the Kingdom. They have an over realized eschatology. They believe that every benefit of the Kingdom of God should be manifested *in full today*. They believe that *every* sick person will be healed if they have enough faith. They would argue that the only reason that we’re not witnessing more miracles on a daily basis is because we’re not asking for them desperately enough.

We’re going to be talking a lot about the Kingdom of God and the work of the Spirit as we study through Acts, so I want to make our theological position clear from the outset. We identify both of those approaches to Scripture as unhelpful and potentially dangerous.

So, for example, if you ever tell a person in this church that they are sick because they don’t have enough faith, you will be getting a stern visit from the elders. That is not going to fly here. On the other hand, if you discourage God’s people from believing and expecting Him to do miraculous things by the power of His Spirit, then you too will be getting a stern visit from the elders. That won’t fly here either.

Our ambition is to minister faithfully in the now and not yet reality of the Kingdom of God.

So, what will that look like? We will minister with an expectation that Jesus will overcome the powers of darkness in our city. We will *expect* that every man, woman, boy and girl in this church

who is a child of the King will grow in holiness and will be set free from besetting sin by one degree of glory to the next. We WILL ask for great and miraculous things from our capable King! So, for example, tomorrow night, the elders are going to be obeying James 5, and we are going to anoint one of our sisters with oil and we're going to pray expectantly for her healing.

But we're also going to acknowledge in humility that the Kingdom of God has not yet been fully consummated. We still live in a season of waiting and groaning. So, we will ask in faith, but we will not be undone or disillusioned if God's answer to our request is "not yet."

Second, because the Kingdom of God is located in a person, not a nation, and because the Kingdom advances by words, not weapons:

2. Our approach to ministry must shift from "Come and See" to "Go and Tell"

This is one of the fundamental shifts that the disciples needed to come to terms with. In the Old Testament, the strategy for world mission was always a "come and see" approach. Think, for example, of the time when the Queen of Sheba came to Israel to marvel at Solomon's wisdom and to worship Israel's God. *That* was the Old Testament approach for mission.

But our marching orders have changed. Jesus tells us here:

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." (Acts 1:6-8 ESV)

Do you see the shift that has taken place? Under the New Covenant, empowered by the Holy Spirit, our plan for global mission is no longer, "Come and see!"

It is, "Go and tell!"

Brothers and sisters, the gospel PROPELS US OUT!

Now, am I saying that lost people will never wander through those doors? Of course not. Lost people are drawn to our community of faith all the time, and praise God for that!

But our approach to ministry should not be to build and build and build something here in hopes that the neighbor might look inside. Too often I find myself slipping back into the old “come and see” mentality. “If the sermon is clear enough, and if the music is good enough, and if the programs are promoted enough, THEN we will reach the city! THEN the Kingdom will advance!”

If we adopt that mindset, then over time the majority of our budget will be devoted to comfort, and the majority of our time will be devoted to maintenance, and the majority of our energy will be devoted to inhouse arguments over our preferences. This shift in focus happens all the time, and we need to be on guard against it.

Church, we need to GO! To our families, to our neighbors, to our cities, to the nations – we are called to go and to bear witness to all that Christ has done! There is so much more that I’d like to say here, but this theme will be coming up again and again in Acts, so allow me to love to one final implication.

3. Our approach to ministry must be shaped by an expectation of the return of the King

As we conclude, look with me at verses 9-11:

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 1:9-11 ESV)

We’re not told how long they stood there, gazing up at the heavens. I always laugh when I read this passage, because I imagine that they stood there for quite some time. That’s what I would have done.

Put yourself in their shoes for a moment. They had just embarked on a roller coaster ride of emotions! Over the course of two months, they experienced the celebration of Palm Sunday, the

horror of Good Friday, the amazement of Easter Sunday and the joy of 40 days with their resurrected King! They're expecting him to consummate his kingdom right then and there, but instead he gives them another assignment. And what an assignment it is! "Be my witnesses, and go to the ENDS OF THE EARTH!"

And then, POOF! He's enveloped in a cloud of glory, and they're standing by themselves. Do you think they stood there dumbfounded for a little while? I can't tell you how long they stood gazing heavenward, but we learn in the text that they were there long enough that God needed to send two angels to say, "He'll come back, the same way that he left. So why are you still standing around?"

Almost every time Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom, he took the opportunity to include a warning about the return of the King. We see this in the parable about the virgins at the wedding feast. We see this in the parable about the talents. We see this in the parable about the servant of the house. They all conclude with some form of warning about Christ's return:

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.
(Matthew 25:19 ESV)

You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Luke 12:40 ESV)

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:13 ESV)

Jesus was crystal clear on this. We must be as well. As one commentator notes:

Discipleship is not about knowing the times and dates, but it is about being ready.²

Our King is going to return in the same way that He left. Until then, we are to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. That starts in our homes, extends to our neighborhoods, stretches out to our workplaces, and beckons us to resolve to go wherever the King may lead us. He has given us our marching orders.

² Conrad Kempf et al. eds., *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1070.

He has also given us power for our assignment! It doesn't matter how uneducated you might be, or how awkward you think you are, or what natural abilities you do or do not possess – NONE of us will be able to stand before God with the excuse that we weren't equipped for the assignment. We have been given the Holy Spirit! Each and every believer in this room is indwelt and empowered by God Himself!

So, the angels' question for the disciples strikes me as an appropriate question to conclude our sermon this morning.

“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)

The King will return. Redeemer City Church, let him find us busy with the work that he has entrusted to us.

Let your kingdom come, and let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let's pray together.