Looking Up

## (Acts 1:1-14)

Today’s message is entitled “Looking Up” and we want to turn our attention to the Word of God, because kingdoms come and kingdoms go, leaders come and leaders go, but it’s the Word of God that stands forever. If you would turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 1, we’re going to look at the ministry of Jesus in the weeks following the resurrection. This was a time when Jesus did not seek the crowds, but he sought after those who believed, he visited those who knew him, as the Bible says,

“The Lord confides in those who fear him…” (Psalms 25:14).

And so, he had already come to the people of Israel and for the most part they had rejected him. The Bible says, he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him, and so he has given up on public gatherings. He wept over Jerusalem saying,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing…” (Matthew 23:37).

And so, he’s moving on, he’s through with that, he’s turned his back, and he is following his own advice. He told the crowds in the sermon on the Mount:

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

And now we find the Lord Jesus ministering only to believers. Just as it was then, so it is now; there are some things that God will only reveal to people who believe in him. There are certain things that God will only show people that are truly seeking him. And so, Jesus walked among us every day, but was rejected and crucified, and now he starts showing up for visits.

Luke begins writing in the book of Acts saying,

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2).

I want you to notice the word began, because whenever God says he began, that means he’s working, he’s not finished yet. Luke began writing about all that Jesus began to do and to teach, because he’s not through, he’s not finished yet. That’s good news, because I’m not finished yet. He’s still working on me, he’s still building me up, he’s still getting me ready, he’s still doing some finishing work on me.

Luke said, “All that Jesus began to do and to teach” and I wonder if there are some of you that God hasn’t finished yet? Maybe you’re here today and he’s sanding you down, nailing you together, or putting on a coat of varnish? I praise God for all he began to do, because you should’ve seen me before, I’ve come a long way to be where I am right now. Somebody ought to give God some praise right now!

Luke continues in verse three saying, “After his suffering.” In other words, after Jesus was stripped naked and beaten like a criminal, after he was nailed to a tree, after he was hanging high with arms stretched wide, after he was humiliated in front of everybody, after he was left to die in the hot midday sun, after his suffering…

“He showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

And so, just as God visited with Abraham, just as he revealed himself to Moses, just as he showed himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, for the next 40 days after his resurrection Jesus showed himself to his disciples. See, every now and then God stops by and visits. He’s always had a way of just dropping by, and a visit from God can change your attitude, change how you see things, and change your whole outlook on life. If you’ve ever had a visit from Jesus, if you’ve ever experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit, you don’t want him to ever leave, you don’t want it to be over, you want him to hang around because he’s just that good.

There may be some of you that don’t know what I’m talking about because you’ve come to church, but you’ve never truly spent time in the presence of Jesus. And I want to encourage you to keep looking up, to seek him, because there are moments in your life when the Spirit of Jesus will visit you in your house, he will meet with you as your driving to work with tears running down your cheeks. I want you to know what I’m talking about because when the Holy Spirit drops by, he will change how you see everything in your life. He will remove the fear and anxiety, he’ll remove your doubt, remove your inconsistencies, and all of a sudden everything will fall in the place, everything will begin to make sense because you had a visit with Jesus.

Today as we come to the Word of God, as we contemplate the Scriptures, we do so that we may be changed and have a different and deeper understanding of the truth. As we come to verse four, Luke tells us,

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5).

In other words, up to this point, the disciples knew something about the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament Scriptures, but they don’t know him personally, they haven’t experienced his power, nor do they realize that he is God in the same way as the Son and the Father are God. We know that at this time in their lives Jesus had already breathed his Spirit into them because he met with them in the upper room the evening of his resurrection. We read about that in John chapter 20, verse 22, but now he promises them more. It’s called a baptism, an outpouring or an immersion in the Spirit’s life and power, reproducing the ministry of Jesus in the life of the believer. This is an empowering for service, a power beyond ourselves for ministry, because we can’t do it effectively in our own strength and so he tells them to wait for it.

The disciples were excited, they had given up everything to follow Jesus, now the kingdom of God was coming and they’re going to get power and authority. And so, when they met together, verse six tells us they asked him,

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

And so, they were anticipating positions of authority, ruling and reigning with Jesus, and they’re anxiously waiting for him to overthrow Rome’s influence over Jerusalem. They’re trying to figure all this out because they wanted him to be their king, and they saw the king, but they weren’t expecting the cross. They didn’t understand that, they don’t understand God’s timing, and Jesus said to them in verse seven,

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7).

It’s kind of funny because once someone gets something in their head, no matter how many times you tell them otherwise, it’s still there somewhere in the back of their minds. And I have counseled people over and over and over again, and once they get something in their mind, it’s in their mind all the way to the end. And so, the disciples were asking, “Is this the time? We’ve seen you raise the dead, heal the sick, and cleanse lepers, but when are you going to set the captives free, when are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” And Jesus replies, “It’s not for you to know the time,” but he says in verse eight,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Now, if you’re anything like me you’re thinking, “Weren’t they already his witnesses?” I mean, they’d been with him day and night for three years, they were there in the boat that night when a storm came upon them, the wind was blowing, but Jesus was sleeping. They shook him and the Bible says,

“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm” (Mark 4:39).

Or there was that night on the lake when the disciples were straining at the oars because the wind was against them, but this time Jesus wasn’t with them and the Bible says,

“About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake…" (Mark 6:48-50).

The disciples were there when Jesus interrupted a funeral in a town called Nain, the Bible says,

“He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk…” (Luke 7:14-15).

They were there when Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on a blind man’s eyes. They heard him tell the man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. “The man went, washed, and came home seeing” (John 9:6-7).

I don’t understand how they could not be witnesses, because they were there when Lazarus was dead four days in the tomb, and Jesus stood outside the door and said, "Lazarus, come out!" They were there, they saw Lazarus come out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face” (John 11:43-44).

They were there when the woman with the issue of blood came up behind him in Luke chapter 8 “and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped” (Luke 8:44).

They were there when Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish and fed 5,000 people. The Bible says, “All ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over” (Matthew 14:20-21).

They were there when some men cut a hole in the roof above them, and a lame man was lowered down before Jesus. The Bible says, Jesus healed him, and “Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God” (Luke 5:24-25).

They were there. They were there when the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. They were there when he walked through a solid door into the upper room. How could they not be witnesses since they were there?

And I think it’s because that’s not the kind of witness he is talking about. He said, “You will be my witnesses,” but you’re not a witness yet, because I think he’s talking about the witness that was there when he said, “Let there be light and there was light.” I think he is saying that you had to be there when I wrestled Jacob in the middle of the night, you had to be there when I appeared in the fiery furnace.

You see, everything that they were witnesses of is their own experience on earth, and so he said you are not a witness until the witness comes. In other words, you saw some stuff, you’ve got some evidence, but you’re not a witness until the witness comes. And that’s why Jesus said in verse eight,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you…" (Acts 1:8).

Because you can’t witness things that you never got to see, that you never got to do, and so you’re going to have to wait on it.

In Luke chapter 24, verse 48 Jesus said, “You are witnesses of these things. (But there is a greater witness) I am going to send you what my Father has promised; stay in the city (stay in Jerusalem) until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49).

You see, there is a power that comes from the Holy Spirit that will drive sickness out of your body. There is a power that comes from God that will loosen the shackles of addiction, a power that will open prison doors, a power that will break every curse off your life and set you free; but he told the disciples, you’ve got to wait for it. He said, “you’ve got to stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

It’s at this point that Jesus leads them out as far as Bethany where he lays hands on them, blesses them, and tells them to go on to Jerusalem. Luke tells us in Acts chapter 1, this is the same guy talking, he’s just turned the page, and verse nine says,

“After (Jesus) said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (Acts 1:9).

And so, the disciples had just been in the presence of Jesus, and they watched him go up into the clouds. They’re standing there looking up, looking at him going up in the air, and verse 10 says,

“They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

I believe when you get excited about what is about to happen and stop focusing on what you’ve lost, everything will change in your life. In fact, sometimes the only way you can survive what you lost is to look up and anticipate the Holy Spirit coming where you are and visiting you, because he can give you a joy that doesn’t even make sense in your circumstance.

You see, the presence of God can change the darkness of your midnight into the brightness of a new morning. Just a visit from the Holy Spirit turns hopelessness into hope, mourning into dancing, sorrow into praise. Just spending some time with the Spirit of Jesus can stop the tears that are falling down your face, turning your despair into revelation. You just need a visit from the Holy Spirit, and so you’re going to have to go where he told you to go, and you’re going to have to wait on it.

Verse 12 says that the disciples, “returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James” (Acts 1:12-13).

They went upstairs to the room where they were staying, seeking a quiet place of prayer, to wait for the promise of the Father. They go into the room with anticipation knowing that God desires to have a private moment with them. And so, they’re not in the upper room out of fear, now they’re trying to get some privacy, because they’re waiting for the Holy Spirit. They’re waiting on the promise, no longer are they trying to figure out what to do, now they’re waiting to see what God is going to do. And verse 14 says,

“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

The problem with the world today is that everybody wants everything in an instant, they want it quick, they want it in a hurry. The thing is that everything of value, everything that lasts, is going to take some time. It’s like growing a towering oak tree, it’s going to take some time, you’re going to have to wait on it. There was a time when we would gather around the altar and wait for it.

I’m not talking about giving God your heart, I’m talking about going deeper, getting in the presence of God and waiting on the anointing of the Holy Spirit. You see there is a power that comes from God that will save everybody in your house, but you’re going to have to wait for it. And so, I dare you to put that book away, turn the phone off, get in the room, pull the blinds and wait on it. Get on your knees and wait on it until the tears begin to flow.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you’ll have power to walk right, talk right, live right, pray right, but you’ve got to wait for it. It’s coming in this room, it’s coming in your house, it’s coming after that wayward child, it’s coming after that cancer, and so I want you to wait for it. It’s coming, wait for it because Jesus said,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The greatest challenge facing the church today is that we don’t want to wait for it. God is ready to do it, but we don’t want to wait for it. The reason why many churches are struggling today is that we want to grow up overnight, we don’t want to put in the time, we want instant gratification, we don’t want to wait for it, but the Bible teaches that great things come to those that wait. The Lord said in Isaiah chapter 40,

“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31, NKJV).

I want to encourage you, I want to challenge you to learn how to wait for it. There are some of you whom God has already told you something he’s going to do in your life, but you’ve got to have faith enough to wait for it. You can’t raise a child overnight, get out of debt in three days, lose weight in a week, or have a strong marriage in three years, you’ve got to learn to wait on it. You’ve got to work it out, you’ve got to cry for it, you’ve got to persevere.

Jesus told his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for it. He said,

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about” (Acts 1:4).

God is faithful, he said he’s going to send it, but are you willing to wait? Faith is showing God that you are willing to wait for it, and he will answer that prayer, answer your questions, remove your anxiety, but you’ve got to be willing to wait for it.

I wonder if this church is bold enough to lift up your hands in total surrender, in submission to God. Is there anyone willing to lift their hands and say not my will but yours be done, not my time but yours, not my plan but yours, not my way but yours, I surrender. I will wait on it.

I want you to go ahead and wait on it, just lift your voice to God, let the tears come. He’s not going to spoil you, he said wait for it, and so you and I have no choice. You’re going to have to put down the phone and get on your knees. You’re going to have to wait for to show up in your life. You’re going to have to get on your knees and wait for the tears to flow as the presence of the Holy Spirit comes on you.

God said he’s got something to give you but he’s waiting on you to wait for it. The promise of God is already on your doorstep, but you have got to let it in, you have got to let it happen, you have got to wait for it. Everything God promised is going to come to pass, it’s right on time, and so I want to encourage you to settle down and wait for it. Let’s pray together.

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