

Resources for Finishing Our Lord's Unfinished Work, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 1:6–11

Code: 1701

INTRODUCTION

In the book of Acts, Luke talks about what the church is commissioned to do and how it is to be done. And in Acts 1:1;2:13, he talks about how Christ prepares the church for service.

REVIEW

I. THE PROPER MESSAGE (vv. 1-2)

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen."

II. THE PROPER MANIFESTATION (v. 3)

"To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

A. Christ Increased the Apostles' Faith (v. 3a)

B. Christ Increased the Apostles' Knowledge (v. 3b)

When Christ reappeared to the disciples, He taught them the same things He did before His death: "things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Therefore it's important to know what we can about the kingdom.

1. The universal kingdom of God

God rules the entire universe. Psalm 145 says, "I will extol thee, my God, O king, and I will bless thy name forever and ever.... Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (vv. 1, 13). He reigns even over hell. Matthew 10:28 says this about God: "Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

2. The mediatorial kingdom of God

A mediator is the go-between for two parties. God's rule is carried out through various people who rule for Him. Through the ages, God has carried out His mediatorial rule in different ways.

a) Ruling through man's conscience When God created Adam, He gave him dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26). God ruled the earth through Adam. When He wanted something done, He spoke through Adam, who carried out the command. But when Adam decided to rebel against God, he no longer mediated God's rule. God no longer had someone to rule for Him on the earth. Because of Adam's sin, the human race was cut off from God. Between the time of the Fall and the Flood, there are only two times when God intervened with mankind: when He threw Cain out of His presence (Gen. 4:9-16), and when He brought Enoch into His presence (Gen. 5:24). Otherwise, God's rule on earth was hindered by the sinfulness of men. Genesis 6:11 says that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence. During that era, God communicated to man through his conscience. But it's easy for you to ignore your conscience. It's also possible to improperly educate the conscience. The conscious can become insensitive when abused over a long period of time. Because man refused to let God rule through his conscience, God chose another method of mediatorial rule. b) Ruling through human government God ruled mankind through human government in the period between the Flood and the construction of the Tower of Babel. God allowed men to organize governments, and the basic law was capital punishment, which God instituted as a way to deal with criminals. Genesis 9:6

says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man." God developed human government and gave it the right of capital punishment to restrain people from murdering each other. The establishment of government has still maintained itself up to today, and to an extent, God still mediates His rule through it. Romans 13:1 says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." Yet as we will see later, God's mediatorial kingdom rule is not primarily through the government. Is God for a One-World Government? God has never wanted a one-world government; only when Christ establishes His millennial kingdom will God allow that. In Genesis 10 men from all over wanted to have a one-world government and build a tower that reached up into heaven. But God didn't want that, and He confounded the people by making them speak different languages. That scattered everyone, and the Tower of Babel was never finished. The best man can do now in his quest for worldwide cooperation is to get delegates from different countries to listen to each other through interpreters at the United Nations. If there were a one-world government, there would be no system of checks and balances to prevent corruption. Absolute power corrupts, so it's safer to have national governments who will keep an eye on one another. Through a one-world government, it would be possible to try to wipe out Christianity. That's why Satan will attempt to form one during the tribulation. Yet it will fall apart (Rev. 17;18) and be destroyed at the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:19-20). The only one-world government that will survive will be the coming millennial kingdom of Christ.

c) Ruling through the patriarchs From the time of Abraham to Moses, God's rule on earth was mediated through men known as patriarchs. Because Abraham was God's ruling representative on earth, he was as much a king as Saul and David were. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the other fathers of ancient Israel were the vice-regents in God's kingdom on earth.

d) Ruling through the judges, prophets, and kings From the time of Moses to Christ, God's rule was mediated through men such as Gideon, Samuel, and David. Regardless of whether the men were judges, prophets, or kings, God ruled them all. Some of the prophets were even greater instruments of God's rule than many of the kings! At the close of that period, God sent Jesus Christ. He was rejected, crucified, and He rose again. While He was on earth, He preached a simple message: "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Whose kingdom was He talking about? His own. Christ will return someday to reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will fulfill Isaiah 9:6, which says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder."

e) Ruling through the church Between the mediatorial eras of the prophets and kings of Israel and Christ's future kingdom is a gap known as the church age. We live in that age, and it's through the church that God is now ruling. Specifically the Holy Spirit is working through the lives of all believers. If you're a Christian and you are living according to God's will, He is ruling through you. The holiness within us is what helps restrain the influence of evil in the world. So when Christ spoke to the apostles about the things pertaining to the kingdom, He was teaching them about God's rule in the universe and on the earth. The aspect He probably focused on the most was the future kingdom He will establish at His second coming. That would reassure the apostles that Jesus indeed was King. Their hopes were dashed when He died on Calvary, but when He rose again and taught about His future reign, their hopes were restored.

III. THE PROPER MIGHT (vv. 4-5, 8a)

"[Christ] being assembled together with [the apostles], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard from me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.... But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you."

LESSON

IV. THE PROPER MYSTERY (vv. 6-7)

A. The Excitement About the Kingdom (v. 6)

"When they [the apostles], therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

When Christ taught the apostles about the kingdom after His resurrection, they got excited because they thought perhaps now He would begin His reign. Old Testament prophecy gave no indication that there would be a long period of time between the first and second coming of Christ. The apostles were probably familiar with Ezekiel 36 and Joel 2, which say that the kingdom will come when the Holy Spirit is poured out. When they heard Christ say the Holy Spirit would come soon (v. 5), they thought He was about to set up His kingdom on earth. They saw it as the next logical step after accomplishing the atonement.

B. The Secret About the Kingdom (v. 7)

"[Christ] said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

God didn't want the disciples to know when the kingdom was coming. Can you imagine what would happen if we knew the time of the second coming? Generation after generation of Christians would probably become slack in their commitment to doing God's work. There's no need for us to know when Christ will return. Probably the only thing Christ didn't explain to the disciples about the kingdom is when it would come. Otherwise they had complete knowledge about it. An Indirect Answer to an Incorrect Belief

There are some people who call themselves covenant theologians; most of them believe there is no future, literal kingdom for Israel (a view known as amillennialism). But when Jesus answered the disciples' question about the time of the kingdom's coming, He didn't tell them there would be no kingdom. He simply said that the time of the kingdom's coming was not for them to know. If there were no literal kingdom planned for the future, Christ would have said so in Acts 1:7.

The only thing the disciples understood about the kingdom in relation to time was that it was future. When Christ said they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) the disciples thought that meant the kingdom was coming soon. But later on they understood that the time of the kingdom is unknown. Both Peter and John said Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3).

Today, we still don't know the time of the Lord's coming. Yet there seems to be a general anticipation by many that it will be soon. In fact, I know one man who thought Christ was going to come before January 1 of a particular year, so he sold everything he had to buy Bibles and other things to give to people. He sent twenty thousand copies of Good News for Modern Man to Vietnam. He got little praying hands that glowed in the dark and keychains with Jesus' name on them, and gave them to people in the street. But Christ didn't come, and now the man has nothing. The Lord doesn't want us to act foolishly. In Luke 19:13 He says, "Occupy till I come." We are to keep busy with our responsibilities and not concern ourselves with the time of Christ's return. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God." In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 Paul says, "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Don't speculate about the time of the second coming.

V. THE PROPER MISSION (v. 8b-c)

A. The Proclaimers of the Message (v. 8b)

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me."

Jesus didn't say we will be theologians; He said we will be witnesses. We don't have to become master theologians capable of teaching complex doctrines before we can share about Christ. We're simply to be witnesses: people who see something and tell others about it.

The Criteria for Being a Witness

An incident took place in my life that illustrates what a witness is: I once saw two big men beating up someone on the street. Apparently they didn't know the person they were beating up, but they were trying to kill him. They had broken all his ribs and kicked his face to a point beyond recognition. I heard the commotion going on while I was inside my father's church. I went outside, and saw people on the sidewalk watching but not helping the victim. At first I thought it was a fight, and I told the men to break it up. But once I saw how serious the situation was, I tried to stop the assailants. They hit me, so I had the church secretary call the police. Eventually I had to go to court as an eyewitness, and I was asked to explain three things: what I saw, what I heard, and what I felt. In 1 John 1 the apostle John uses the same criteria in his witness about Christ: "That which ... we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled ... declare we unto you" (vv. 1, 3). A Christian witness declares to others his experience with Christ.

The Greek word translated "witnesses" in Acts 1:8 is martures. In the early church so many Christians died for their faith that the Greek word meaning "witness" came to mean "martyr." That's how willing the early Christians were to be witnesses for Christ. Most Christians today aren't willing to put their lives on the line like that, much less live in total commitment to Christ. Do you know what it means to be a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1)? Hosea spoke of sacrifice when he said, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips" (14:2, NASB). God asked Abraham to give up what was most precious to him by telling him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:1-13). The promise of a great nation through Isaac would vanish if he were killed. But Abraham was willing to obey God. That's what being a living sacrifice is about: God doesn't necessarily want you to die for Him, but He wants you to be willing to live for Him as if nothing else mattered. Peter was a witness; he talked to others about the Lord (2 Pet. 1:16). You are a witness, and you have the same mission. Are you telling others about Christ as you should?

B. The Proclamation of the Message (v. 8c)

"Both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Christ told the apostles they were witnesses, and that they were to start their mission in Jerusalem. From there, they were to witness about Him in Judaea, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the earth. They fulfilled the Lord's desire in about thirty years. They didn't have any sophisticated organizational plans; they just went out and did it. From the day of Pentecost on, the early church witnessed fearlessly. They turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Yet many Christians today who have access to the same power as the early church had aren't accomplishing as much. It takes commitment.

VI. THE PROPER MOTIVE (vv. 9-11)

"When [Christ] had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

A. The Response of Motivation

Motivation is what drives you to do something. On the old "Our Gang" series, I remember one episode where the kids couldn't get a goat to pull a cart. One little guy got the bright idea of tying a carrot onto a bamboo rod and dangling it six inches in front of the goat. That made the goat move the cart! The boy understood the importance of motivation. So do those who make commercials which are designed to motivate you to purchase a particular item.

The disciples were bewildered as they watched Christ ascend to heaven. Two angels appeared and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" (v. 11). The disciples acted as if they

were going to lose Jesus. But the angels said no; Christ was going to return. They said, "This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (v. 11). Knowing that would stir the disciples to greater service.

The same Christ who ascended into heaven in Acts 1:9 will return the same way. He won't be different. He will return in the same glorified body that the disciples saw when Christ joined them for breakfast by the Sea of Galilee in John 21:4-14. He will be in the same body Thomas saw when he said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

When my father was in seminary, he was young and brash. One night he went to a service featuring a black preacher who called himself Father Divine spoke. He claimed to be the Son of God. Just as the service ended and everyone was about to leave, my father stood up in the back, put his arms across the door, and said to the preacher, "Before anyone leaves, I want to ask a question. If you're really the Son of God, can you show me the nail prints in your hands?" The church became very quiet, and then threw my father out. Obviously the preacher was a false Christ. He wasn't the same One who ascended into heaven in Acts 1:9, for Christ will return just the same as He left.

B. The Reason for Motivation

Knowing that Christ will return someday should motivate us to serve Him diligently. The apostle Paul said, "We labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (2 Cor. 5:9). Someday we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for what we did while on earth (2 Cor. 5:10). Christ said, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). One of the greatest motivators for serving Jesus is that He will reward us for what we have done.

Some people think it's materialistic to look forward to those rewards, but it's not. We should look forward to the crowns we will receive Paul did (2 Tim. 4:8). If a man loves a woman and says to her, "I love you; I want to marry you" she doesn't say to him, "You're so materialistic! It's not enough to love me; you want to have me." Marriage is the natural reward of love. Likewise, if a general wins a battle, we don't say he's selfish. A person doesn't run a race just to stop in the middle of it. You run to win. Paul said, "I, therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (1 Cor. 9:26). Paul ran so that he might obtain the prize (Phil. 3:14). Should we do any less for our Lord?

Jesus is coming with rewards for His own. When He comes, what will you have to show Him? My grandfather wrote this in his Bible: "When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ and He shows me His plan for me--the plan of my life as it might have been--and I see how I blocked Him here and checked Him there and would not yield my will, will there be grief in my Savior's eyes--grief though He loves me still? He would have me rich, but I stand here poor, stripped of all but His grace while memory runs like a haunted thing down a path I can't retrace. Then my desolate heart will well nigh break with tears I cannot shed. I will cover my face with my empty hands; I will bow my uncrowned head."

Focusing on the Facts

1. What are the different ways God has ruled His mediatorial kingdom, and how is He carrying out that rule now?
2. When Christ rose again and taught His disciples about the kingdom, what aspect of God's rule did He most likely focus on? Why?
3. Why did the apostles get excited when Christ taught them about His kingdom after His resurrection (Acts 1:6)?
4. How did Christ respond to the disciples' excitement (Acts 1:7)?
5. What are we to do as we wait for Christ to return (Luke 19:13)?
6. What is a witness? What Bible passage backs up that definition?
7. What happened to the Greek word meaning "witness" as a result of the many Christians who were

killed in the early days of the church? What is being a living sacrifice all about?

8. How effective were the apostles as witnesses for Christ?

9. What did the angels say to the apostles in Acts 1:11? What was the effect of their statement?

10. What announcement did Christ make in Revelation 22:12?

11. One of the greatest _____ for serving Jesus is the fact that He will return with _____ for us.

12. Is it materialistic to look forward to how Christ will reward us when He returns? What was Paul's attitude?

Pondering the Principles

1. Christ says that we are witnesses for Him. That simply means we are to tell others about Him.

Read 1 John 1:3-4. What two reasons did John give for witnessing about Christ? Have you ever considered those as reasons for sharing Christ with your unsaved neighbors and friends? Read Acts 2:37-41. What kind of results were the apostles getting from their witnessing? Think about why you share the gospel with others, and what kind of responses you are getting. While you do that, ask God to help you have the right motives for witnessing and to be the kind of witness that makes people see their need for Christ.

2. Some Christians go to one extreme or the other regarding the second coming: they either neglect their daily responsibilities in anticipation of the future or they live without serious commitment to the Lord, as if Christ would never return. Consequently both groups live as poor witnesses for Christ. Based on what you learned in this lesson, what would you tell someone who neglects his present responsibilities because he's preoccupied with the second coming? What would you say to a Christian who lives without serious commitment to Christ?

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