

Don't Miss The Acts of You Know Who

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Originally one of the Old Testament feasts, it was a harvest celebration called the Feast of Weeks and it occurred 50 days after Passover. Over time it became less an agricultural celebration and more of a celebration of the giving of the Law. Shavuot. In the Christian tradition it is celebrated 50 days after Easter and it marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church as described in Acts 2.

I want to direct our attention to three key events that are referred to in the first two chapters of the book of Acts. It's interesting that over time the evangelical churches have chosen to focus all of our attention upon two - actually three - major events in the life of Christ: his birth, his crucifixion and his resurrection. Those are certainly the key events, but there are other events of significance that we need to preach and teach about. Three of those events are referred to or described in the first two chapters of the book of Acts.

I gave this message a rather strange title. Don't Miss The Acts of You Know Who. We call this book of the bible, Acts. Some call it the Acts of the Apostles. Some have suggested it would be more accurate to call it "**The Acts of Jesus Christ**". John Stott suggests it could be called, "**The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through His Apostles.**"

I believe the truth is the book of Acts is still being written here on earth and recorded in heaven. I believe this New Testament book could be called "**The Acts of Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit Empowered People, the Church.**" And that includes all of us. We are the "you know who" of my title. We are a part of the ongoing story of the book of Acts!

Turn with me to Acts 1 and I want to read these opening verses. **Acts 1:1-11.**

Notice verse 9. "**After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.**" It's a pretty simple statement, but it carries a great deal of theological importance for us. The disciples stood there gazing up into the heavens, no doubt amazed at what they had just seen and wondering where he was going? The angels appeared and gave them the assurance that he would return, but did they know where he was? They would find out in Acts 7. When Stephen was

martyred the bible says he **“...looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” Acts 7:55**

We know where Jesus went and what he has been doing. The bodily ascension of Christ and the fact that he is at the right hand of God indicates for us that the sacrifice of Christ and his atoning work has been accepted and completed. His saving work is done and he is seated at the Father's right hand.

We know where he is and what he is doing. The bible tells us that Jesus is the one **“...who died, yes who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us...” Romans 8:34.** The writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, **“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25.** Jesus ascended to heaven and is at the right hand of God making intercession for you and for me. He is praying for us and serves as our advocate to insure that we will overcome in this life.

We know where he is and what he is doing. Jesus said he was going to **“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there you may be also.” John 14:1-3.** He is preparing a heavenly home for everyone who has placed their trust and faith in Christ as their Savior and as Lord of their life.

We know where he is and what he is doing. He is ruling as Sovereign over all. His ascension back to heaven means he has been enthroned as the Lord and ruler of all, not just ruling over believers but unbelievers as well, not just his followers, but ruler over every power, every authority, every circumstance. The bible says, speaking of God the Father, that **“...He raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body....” Ephesians 1:19-23.**

Why is this so important? Because of the authority that has been given to Jesus. Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus told his disciples, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Matthew 28:18.** It is not some authority, but he

said all authority. It is not just authority in heaven to have his will carried out, but it is authority in both heaven and earth. Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father and from there he rules and reigns with all authority. And because that is true, then we don't have to fear anything that might come our way because Jesus is in control and he exercises ultimate authority.

That's what Stephen saw and what he knew when he looked up into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He was reminded that even if men on earth were turning against him, taking his life, at that very moment, God was still on the throne and Jesus was still ruling and reigning. Stephen knew that because Jesus was in heaven, upon his throne, and he had all authority, then everything was ultimately going to be all right. We don't have to be afraid of life or death or anything else because Jesus ascended to heaven and rules and reigns upon his throne. Understand the significance of Jesus' ascension.

The Ascension of Jesus and his Sovereign Reign provides the basis by which we carry on. We know Jesus rules and reigns. This is how we continue in the face of struggles or persecution or attacks of the enemy. Because we know the risen, ascended Savior reigns! This is how we carry on when sickness or death comes to us or to a loved one, because we know sickness and death don't have the final word. Jesus reigns! Jesus reigns in life and reigns over death! He lives and he reigns. Don't give up. Don't give in to despair. Jesus reigns.

If you are frightened about the future, wondering what will become of you, ask the Lord for a fresh glimpse into heaven. **We need a fresh vision of the risen and ascended Christ, seated upon the throne of heaven, ruling and reigning as Sovereign over all.** When we realize where he is and that all authority has been given to him, regardless of what we face, we can be assured through Christ we can carry on. We are going to make it. We are overcomers through Christ, the one who reigns from on high.

The second grand event referred to in Acts 1 and 2 is Pentecost itself. Jesus told the disciples before he ascended to heaven, **“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 1:8.

While the Ascension of Jesus into heaven provides the basis by which we carry on, the events of Acts 2 reveal that **Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit provide the power by which we carry on.** Jesus told his disciples **“It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”** **John 16:7** Jesus had a high regard for the work and power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It was good for them that he was leaving so the Holy Spirit could come in power.

Jesus told them in Acts 1, **“But 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.** It was and is essential that believers be empowered to carry this message of the kingdom of God to the whole world. It is by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that we can live for and serve the Lord, and it is by the empowering of the Holy Spirit that we can effectively carry out the mission given to us. It is in his authority and by his power that we are to **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”** **Matthew 28:19-20**

If we just focused upon the Ascension of Christ into heaven, we might begin to believe that his focus, his emphasis is upon the events of heaven – interceding for us and preparing a place for us, etc. – and not the events taking place right now here on earth. But the Ascension is followed by the day of Pentecost. Acts 2 records that the believers, about 120 of them were gathered in the upper room when **“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”** **Acts 2:2-4**

But the focus doesn't rest there, upon supernatural wind or tongues of fire or believers speaking in other tongues. No the focus rests upon what happened next. People from every nation under heaven came to see what this was all about and heard

the gospel preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. They heard and understood in their own languages and the result was 3,000 people did what Peter told them to do.

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38-39

Three-thousand people born into the kingdom of God. We quickly recognize that the focus of the ascended Christ is not simply upon the events of heaven, but it is upon the empowerment of the church so we can carry the good news to those who have not heard, to those who are lost and waiting for someone to tell them the way to heaven, the way to life in Christ.

We need a fresh vision of the risen, ascended Christ, ruling with all authority. And we need a fresh visitation of the Holy Spirit. We need a fresh impartation of the Spirit’s power to equip us and empower us to do all he has called us to do. Our friends and our family members are lost and perishing without Christ. We need the Spirit’s power and anointing to effectively share the gospel and reach them with that good news.

We need a fresh realization of the purpose for which he has empowered and gifted us. Ephesians tells us that “when he ascended on high, he...gave gifts to men.” Ephesians 4:8. Those gifts have been given to us, that power has been bestowed upon us so we can preach and teach and make disciples, so we can equip the saints for ministry, so we can bind up the wounded and bruised, so we can bring freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, so we can go into every person’s world with the love and mercy of Christ. We need a fresh Pentecost.

He commissioned us to go into all the world. That’s what Pentecost is all about. The Christian world has spent a lot of time arguing about the place and role of speaking in other tongues. Is it for today? Was it just for the New Testament early church? Pentecost was and is about power to carry the gospel to the whole world. It is about power to be witnesses here and around the world.

When you combine the ascension accounts of Matthew 28 and Acts 1, Jesus essentially tells his disciples that all authority had been given to him and he was going

to delegate that authority to them. He also told them to wait until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then in his name, under his authority, with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives, they were to go to the whole world and teach and preach and make disciples. The commission hasn't changed, the orders haven't been rescinded.

He desires to equip you and empower you. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit today, just as he did the believers in Acts 2. Call upon him. Tell him you need his empowerment to be the witness and the disciple you long to be. Ask him to baptize you in the Holy Spirit and watch what happens in your life.

“God give us a fresh outpouring of your Holy Spirit so we can continue your work in this earth. Help us to be the witnesses you have called us to be, working and living and ministering in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.”

The third major event referred to in these chapters is found in Acts 1:10-11. As Jesus was being taken up into heaven, the bible 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**

The Ascension of Jesus and his Sovereign Reign provides the basis by which we carry on.

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The promise of the Lord's return provides the hope by which we carry on. The angels give the disciples some direction. “Don't just stand here staring up into the sky. There is work to be done. He won't return any sooner if you just stand on the mountain top and wait. Instead, go back to Jerusalem, wait until you receive the promise of the Father – the baptism in the Holy Spirit – and then with that empowerment go do the work the Father has for you to do.”

“And don't worry about the future. Don't worry about how it's all going to turn out. Don't worry about whether he is with you or not. He has promised to be with you until the end of the age. He will be with you all the way and then he will come back. Just as

you saw him leave, you will see him return for all those who are waiting for him and expecting him.”

John tells us, **“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” 1 John 3:3.** This is the blessed hope we have. This is the hope that keeps us going: Jesus is going to return one of these days and then we will be with him forever.

Feeling overwhelmed lately? The risen, ascended Christ rules and reigns. Even when folks are throwing rocks at you like they did to Stephen, Jesus is still ruling and reigning. Trust him. Get a fresh vision of the Sovereign Christ, with all authority, ruling over all.

Feeling frustrated at life? Maybe you need that fresh impartation of the Spirit’s power so you can be all Christ has called you and commissioned you to be. The risen, ascended Christ is ready to send the Holy Spirit to empower your life. Ask him.

Feeling frightened about the future? The risen, ascended, ruling Christ has promised to return one of these days. He has the future in his hand, he has your future in his hand, he has you in his hand and it’s all going to be all right. Be encouraged. This same Jesus, the one who ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower you and enable you, he is going to come again. Sooner than we might think. So be encouraged. Rejoice. Trust him. And let’s continue on, serving him and living for him until he comes again.

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