

Until The Day He Was Taken Up

Turn with me again to Acts 1. Last Sunday was Pentecost Sunday and we talked about the significance of both Christ's ascension and the out pouring of the Holy Spirit. The ascension reveals to us his authority. Pentecost empowers us to carry out his mission under his authority.

Jesus is preparing to return to heaven where he will rule and reign and he is preparing his disciples, his followers, to carry on the work – to carry on “all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” This is the birth of the church. The church, the apostles and all the followers of Jesus, both then and now, were to carry on “all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” We are to go in his name, in his authority, and make disciples and teach others to obey “everything he commanded”. That is the heartbeat of the church. This is what he spent those days between the resurrection and his ascension, telling them and showing them again what he needed them to know in order to effectively be the church.

Let me show you four things Jesus did in this first chapter of Acts with his disciples that I believe are essential for his disciples today. I believe we need to hear these things once again in light of his return. You see, his leaving, his ascension was set in the context of his return. He has gone from us but he will return in like manner. It is in preparing for his coming, living with expectancy, that we obey him and carry out his commands. As we prepare for his coming, we need to be reminded of what he was saying to us as he left. Here is what he was teaching them and us “Until The Day He Was Taken Up” Let's read **Acts 1:1-8**. The first thing I want us to notice from this passage, the first thing all of us disciples need to know:

1. We have been chosen. Verse 2 speaks of Jesus “...**giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.**” **Acts 1:2**. He chose his apostles and he chose us. We've been hand picked, selected, personally chosen by his Holy Spirit, by his mercy, by his saving grace. We have been chosen.

Everyone likes the feeling of having been chosen. Even when we don't believe it, like the annoying phone calls and form letters – “You've been chosen! You've been selected!” – but it still makes us feel good to think that someone might have chosen us.

Out of all the other possibilities and people in the world, Jesus chose us. You

and me. “Well, I sure don’t deserve it.” You are absolutely correct. You don’t deserve it. You are, in fact, the least deserving person of God’s mercy and grace and acceptance of anyone I know, besides, myself, and you and you and you and you and you and you and you and you.....

Might I remind you of one of my favorite verses of Scripture? **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done but because of his mercy.” Titus 3:5.** He chose us because of his great mercy! We were undeserving, but he chose us because of his great and gracious mercy. (Suggest you read *Without Spot Or Wrinkle* and notice the chapter on being a chosen people).

Ephesians declares, **“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...” Ephesians 1:11.** He chose us. When you wonder if anyone cares, if anyone values you and your efforts, when you wonder if you matter, if your choices matter, if God cares about you and what you are doing – remember that he chose you. He didn’t have to, but he did. He chose you. We are a chosen people. Out of his great mercy and love he chose us. Not based on our righteousness but upon his mercy, he chose us.

When you start to think that you don’t matter and that your life is without purpose, remember that he chose you according to his plan, that choosing you was in direct conformity with his purpose, his will. He chose you and he will work everything out in conformity with his will.

You have been chosen. Can you feel the joy in knowing that? Can you sense his acceptance, his forgiveness, his delight in you as his redeemed child? Can you picture his smile as he looks your way and extends his hands, opening his arms and welcoming you into his embrace. He has chosen you.

Why is it so important to us, the church, to know we have been chosen? Because there are days coming when evil will be released upon this earth, days when Jesus said “for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.” As we move towards the closing days of time, with all the evil in the world and forces opposing Christ and his church, we need to know that we know that we know that we are his. He has

chosen us. We belong to him and no one can pluck us out of his hand. Nothing can separate us from his love - not persecution or isolation or poverty or tribulation of any kind. Regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the evil days, know that you are a part of his church and you have been chosen. There may be days when you have to bear the weight and the pain of having been chosen, but settle down deep into the joy and peace of knowing that he has chosen you.

2. We have been convinced. Verse 3 says, **“After his suffering he showed himself to these men and gave them 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**

These disciples had seen the Lord crucified upon the cross. They saw him dead and buried in the tomb. They knew that their lives were likely on the line as well. I can't imagine that they were willing to die for a dead man, for a dead and buried Messiah. They needed a revelation. They need information. They needed convincing.

We preached about Thomas a few weeks ago. Good for Thomas. If he was going to lay his life on the line, he wanted proof. “I'm gonna need to put my hand in his side and see the nail prints in his hand.” He needed convincing. And Jesus gave him convincing proof and in response Thomas declared, “My Lord and My God”. The King James Version of this verse reads, **“He shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days...”**

The disciples weren't going to die for a dead man. I wouldn't either. But they were convinced that Jesus was alive. They saw him with their own eyes. It wasn't just a spiritual revelation for these guys – they touched him, they talked with him, they ate with him, he cooked breakfast for them, they were with him for forty days. That's not a spiritual vision, that's infallible proof. There was no denying. Jesus was alive. He conquered death. He was who he said he was. That revelation yields the same response as Thomas: “My Lord and My God.”

And what about us? We need a revelation. We need some convincing. He is still revealing himself. Uncertain about his claim to be the Son of God and Savior? Uncertain about the resurrection, about the bible's testimony? If you just read the words of skeptics and unbelievers you can almost convince yourself to ignore it all. But

then, you have to stop and look around. Look at the living proof of the resurrected Christ. There is no greater explanation, no higher proof to be offered than the extraordinary transformation of millions of lives that have been forever and eternally changed by the saving grace of God. Many infallible proofs.

There is no other explanation for how hopeless alcoholics and drug addicts and sexual addicts and murderers and rapists and thieves become humble saints of God. It is through the power of the risen savior and by his grace alone. These disciples were convinced. They were eyewitnesses to his miracles, his passion, his death and resurrection. But in the days to come, they would witness the transformation of scores of lives as they told his story. Now it was the disciples talking and healing the sick and casting out devils - all in his name and in his authority. They did all of this because they had been convinced – he was who he said he was. He had all power and authority and it had been given to them in his name. They had a revelation of the risen Christ, the Savior of the world and they were convinced.

I'm convinced. I believe he is who he said he is and he can do what he says he can do. Jesus is looking for a church that has been convinced, that will put their faith and trust in him regardless of anything else. The evidence is there. The evidence is everywhere. Look around. Read the word of God and read the changed lives. Be convinced. If you are looking, there is infallible proof.

The Scripture said "he showed himself to these men." He revealed himself to them as the risen Lord and Savior. If you will allow him, I believe he will show himself to you. He will show himself to be exactly what you need in your life. Trust him. Put your life in his hands and trust him.

3. We have been commanded. Verse four says, "**On one occasion while he was eating with them he gave them this command...**" I like the power and forcefulness of that word. Command. This wasn't a suggestion. This wasn't an optional exercise – "If you aren't too busy and can work this in, I would appreciate it if you would..." This was a command – a direct order. Definite, specific instruction.

Folks we are a people who live under command. We must learn to take orders and carry them out as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We live in a culture that wants to rebel against, debate, test, argue with every command and authority and if we

are required to carry out a direct order, we will likely sue someone over the infringement of our rights. We don't like carrying out orders, but church, we are a people who are under orders. We serve under his command – under his authority. We need to be prepared to obey his word, to live out his commands, to say yes to his instruction, regardless of the cost. This is who we are. This is what we are called to do. We aren't our own. We have been purchased by his blood and we belong to him. Our choices need to line up with his choices. We need to live our lives in order to please him and not ourselves.

Too often we live under command unless those commands become too rigid, too confining, unless they cramp our style, unless we just don't want to obey them anymore. Is that how that works? Saints, his commands are not negotiable. These are not suggestions. They are not intended to be carried out as long as it's easy and comfortable and then, just go ahead and do as you please.

Obedience leads to victory but disobedience - refusing to believe and obey God leads to eternal condemnation, judgment and hell. God in his word, through his commands, has established wise boundaries to protect us and to ensure our continual freedom and his blessing and favor. Disobedience to God is a dead-end that leads only to separation and hell.

I don't know how to make it any stronger. He has commanded us. This book is his word revealed to us. This is his order for living, his standard for living. These are his commands and we must obey. This is the will of the Lord for us – to believe and to obey his commands. I urge you to bring your life into a place of obedience to God and his word and I warn you of the dire and dreadful consequences that await all who refuse to obey God and his commands.

4. We have been commissioned. Verse 8 says, **“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** He is sending us out to go in his name and carry out the task – the mission he has set before us as his church.

Webster defines commission as **Commission: “...an authorization to perform certain duties or tasks, or to take on certain powers; to send with a**

mandate or authority; to empower; to delegate.” Jesus has empowered us and delegated his authority to us. He has given us power by his Holy Spirit. He makes it so plain. In fact that was the command mentioned in verse 4: **“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** Jesus saw that anointing, that Spirit-empowerment as being essential - absolutely necessary to help them in the days to come. If the power of the Holy Spirit was needed for the church in the beginning, I believe that same power and anointing is just as important and necessary in the closing days of the church on earth. We need empowerment from the Holy Spirit to carry out the assignment he has given us. To go into all the world and make disciples requires his anointing and power.

We have been empowered but it is power with a purpose. I said last Sunday, the meaning of Pentecost was not just so believers could sit around the upper room and pray in tongues and feel spiritually built up. That Pentecostal experience immediately moved them out of the upper room and into the streets. It moved them to the world – a world in trouble - a world in turmoil - a world searching for spiritual answers - a world looking for truth.

That’s the world to which we too have been sent. Empowered and commissioned to go out into our world, to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in ever expanding, widening circles until we finally have reached the ends of the earth.

We have been given a purpose - to be followers of Christ, to make disciples, to share the good news of his kingdom, to let the whole world know that Jesus gave his life so they could be forgiven of their sins and have eternal life. We have been equipped for this purpose by the Holy Spirit, given power to be his witnesses and to do the job, and we have been commissioned to go in his authority and get the job done.

I thought about his command, that we would be witnesses to the ends of the earth. I wonder if by that he was sending us, not just to the geographically distant places, remote places, but I wonder if he was telling us that his love, his mandate, his commission would send us out of and beyond our comfort zone, to some of the last places we would have thought to go. His love would constrain us to go to Mexico to the garbage dumps or to Turley, or to work with teens or Alzheimer/dementia patients, or to

be a preacher or a teacher or a cook or a nurse or an interpreter for the hearing impaired or a thousand other extraordinary ways and places that we can go to every person's world with the gospel and with the love of the Lord.

You are part of the church of the risen, living, triumphant, ascended Christ. As such, know that you have been chosen. You have been convinced. You have been commanded. You have been commissioned. Now here are the companion questions we each must answer in light of what I have shared.

Will you accept His commission?

Will you obey his commands?

He has revealed himself to you and there is enough evidence to convince you of his resurrection and his life changing power.

Will you embrace and believe in him and his word?

Will you live as one who has been chosen?