

5/21/2023

"COMING BACK"

Acts 1:9-11

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

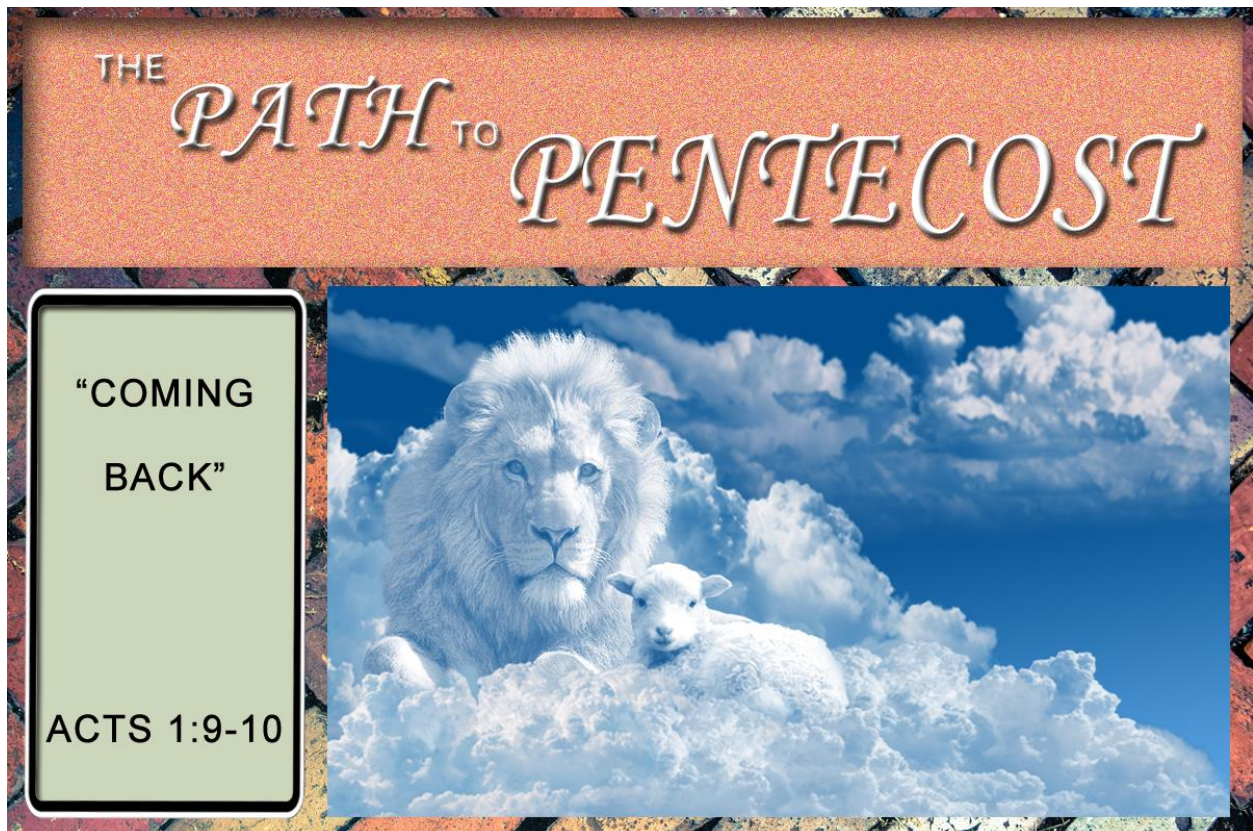
11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

SPECIAL MUSIC:

"Jesus is Coming Back"

Jordan Feliz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPo4wuQoIT>



I STAND WITHIN THE PROMISE

I stand within the promise

Where the peace of God abounds

I stand within the promise

Where the foundation is strong and sound

I stand within the promise

Of my Savior's love for me

I stand within the promise

In sweet serenity

For Jesus came to save me

Though I was lost and lame

He cleansed my broken spirit

And washed away my shame

I stand within the promise

That Jesus set me free

I stand within the promise

That Jesus came for me

I stand within the promise

That He can heal my very soul

I stand within the promise

That Jesus made me whole.

For Jesus came to save me

Though I was lost and lame

He cleansed my broken spirit

And washed away my shame

I stand within the promise

That He will surely guide my walk

I stand within the promise

Upon the solid rock

I stand within the promise

As I sing the last refrain

I stand within the promise

Knowing Jesus comes again

For Jesus came to save me

Though I was lost and lame

He cleansed my broken spirit

And washed away my shame

The Bible is full of God's promises. They can be found in both the Old and the New Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation. And never once, did God fail to keep a promise. It may have taken longer than people were willing to wait, but the promises have always been fulfilled... All except for one. But because He fulfilled all the other promises, I have no doubt that the promise of Jesus' return will be fulfilled as well. Knowing that leads me to think that the problem is more with us having trust issues with God, rather than with God intentionally teasing us by making us wait.

Ascension Day was on May 18 this year, and today we will be talking about that event. But before we get there, I want to talk a little about a passage we discussed recently. This will be in Luke 24:1-8:

1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

7 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'

8 Then they remembered his words.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” When the angels are asking this question, they are not trying to make the women feel foolish. They are trying to point out that they already have enough information to make sense of the resurrection. Christ had promised them He was going to be resurrected. Jesus had told them on multiple occasions what was going to happen. And yet, they are upset because He is not where they thought He should be, namely sealed up in the tomb. So, you really can't blame the angels for speaking the obvious to snap them out of their disillusionment.

And here we are again. Luke does not give us a great deal of detail on the Ascension. But, like we talked about in our last message, Jesus tells us in Luke that the Holy Spirit will come upon the disciples and tells them that the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit is to fulfill the Great Commission. This leads us right into today's passage:

Acts 1:9-11

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10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

11 “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.”

Can you see a common thread here?

11 “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.”

Why are you looking for Jesus where He isn't? Why are you looking in the last place you saw Him? He told you where He was going to be. Why aren't you looking there? Why aren't you waiting where He told you to wait?

I know that some of you younger people will not get this reference, but have you ever been to a train depot? The passengers line up along the passenger boarding zone. They know when they think the train will arrive. And the closer it gets to the time for the train to arrive, the more you see people sticking out their necks to look down the tracks to see if they can catch site of the train coming down the track. I am here to tell you that no matter how much you cranny your neck out over the track, it is not going make the train arrive any faster. The train gets there when the train gets there. If it's early (not very likely) then it's early. If it is on time, then it is on time. And if it is late then it will be late, and your neck will be sore from looking expectantly down those tracks. The

smart and well-traveled passengers procure them a bench and have their noses buried in magazines, books, or playing with their phones.

Jesus ascended into heaven. His disciples watched him go. And they just keep watching. Like we might watch for that train. But Jesus did not call us to be train watchers. He did not call us to be thumb twiddlers. He did not call us to be neck stretchers. He gave us instructions on what to do while we waited for His return.

7 “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

8 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.”

Why do we stand here watching the sky? Jesus promised He would return, and He will return. And only the Father knows when that will be. No amount of worry over war, pestilence, hatred, hunger, despair, or disbelief will change the appointed time. And even when we think we have it all figured out, we don't.

One of the hard things for many Christians to understand is that when Jesus returns, He retains His seat of judgement. Nothing we say or do will be a factor in how Jesus judges others. I know that we all want to have our opinions, but being the judge has never been our purpose. We don't get to separate the sheep from the goats. Not our job. That job is reserved for Christ Almighty.

Why don't we see that our job is to bring the Good News of the love of Christ to both the sheep and the goats without discrimination or bias.

“and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus doesn't say that we will be witnesses to just good people or bad people. Black or white or brown or any other color of skin. Male, female, or other gender. He did not ask us to approve of how anyone else lived. We do not get to decide which people belong to the flock of our Lord. That is His decision alone and He loves each and every one of us the same.

In the 21st chapter of John, Jesus is bringing Peter back in the fold. Peter had really let Him down by denying Him at the crucifixion. Now, Christ knew that Peter loved Him. He also knew that Peter had been frightened and His behavior out of character, even though Jesus had warned him it was going to happen. But in John 21, Jesus is trying to reconcile with Peter and reach him at a deeper level, to remind him of how much He loved Him. Jesus needed to let Peter know that to love Christ, to love the message of Christ, to love the essence of Christ, Peter had to take his relationship with Christ to the next level.

Three times Peter had denied knowing Him. And now, three times Christ asks Peter, “Peter, do you love me?” And each time Peter responds by saying “You know that I love you, Lord.” To which Jesus responds, “Then feed my sheep.” It is frustrating and almost humiliating for Peter that Jesus asks His dear friend this question three times. I'm not sure that I am confident enough to draw

a one-on-one conclusion that each time He asks Peter this question is in response to each one of Peter's denials.

I believe that Jesus does this to make sure that Peter understands the importance of the question and the follow through. "If you love me, feed my sheep." "If you love me, **be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" "If you love me, take care of my flock." "If you love me, love your neighbor." Why is that so hard for us to understand?

Jesus' sheep are in need of shepherds. And not just pastors. We are all called to take care of the flock wherever we are. We are not White Christians, Black Christians, Hispanic Christians, Republican Christians, Democratic Christians, Straight Christians, Gay Christians, or any other identifier that can and is used to separate us as a body. We are Christians. To claim otherwise is to deny our very core. And as such we have one singular purpose. To feed the flock of Christ.

I think one of our problems as believers is that we try to compare ourselves with other Christians which eventually leads to one of two options. Either we believe those other Christians are falling short or that we are somehow superior. We are not unique in this. The early Christians had the same problem and it eventually led to schisms much like today. But they were able to move past them. There were Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, Christians of every ethnicity and color, male Christians and female Christians, rich Christians and poor Christians, Christians that were slaves and Christians that were free.

The problems occurred when Christians stopped working for the kingdom and started staring into the sky twiddling their thumbs. Why do we do the same thing? I want to reassure you with this thought as we contemplate this message during the week. It's a passage from the 14th Chapter of John rather than Luke but you are all familiar with the promise that it holds.

John 14:1-4

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God ; believe also in me.

2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

Christ makes some very important promises in this passage.

- 1. He tells us He is going away.**
- 2. He tells us that He is going to prepare a place for us.**
- 3. He tells us that He will come back for us.**
- 4. He tells us that He will take us with Him to be where He is.**

And He expects something from us. Not as tribute or as payment. He simply tells us that if we truly love Him, we will want to continue to take care of

business here on here on earth until He comes back. We do that because we love Him. He asks these things of us, things that He exemplified in His time on earth.

- 1. We should Love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and all our souls, and all our minds. In other words, we are not going to fail to continue worshipping our Creator.**
- 2. We should love our neighbors as ourselves. We will wash feet.**
- 3. We should take care of the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the people around us. We will heal the sick, give water to the thirsty, and feed the hungry,**
- 4. We should lift the flock in prayer. We should pray for the entire flock, not just those we see as worthy.**
- 5. We should Feed the Sheep by teaching them the word, the truth of the gospel, enlightening each soul.**
- 6. We should be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

And Christ gives us what we need to do that. He brings the gift of the Holy Spirit into our lives to give us strength, forbearance, guidance, and courage. We are heirs to the Kingdom of God and this planet we live on is no longer our home because we have a place in heaven waiting for us. The way that we live our lives on earth should reflect that. We should be beacons and examples to all those around us.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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