**PRAY**

Johns gospel concluded with the disciples having presumably returned to their family homes around the Sea of Galilee, but today’s text from Acts 1, written by Luke, indicates that Jesus told the disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait there.

The Book of Acts was written by Luke, who was also the writer of the gospel and at one time Luke’s gospel and the Book of Acts were one continuous text.

Luke was doctor **Colossians 4:14**, a Gentile (from his name) and a companion of Paul.

It has been suggested that Luke wrote both his books as part of a defence preparation for Paul who was awaiting trial and that part of that defence was to illustrate:

* Christianity is harmless (some Romans officials had embraced it).
* Christianity is innocent (Roman judges could find no basis for prosecution).
* Christianity is lawful (as the true fulfilment of Judaism - an approved religion in the Roman Empire).

Another person has said the Book of Acts should be studied, ‘…first, to trace our Lord’s unseen but actual continuance of his divine teaching and working; and secondly, to trace the active ministry of the Holy Spirit as the abiding presence in the church.’ (Pierson)

That’s where we are being led in this Book – to see the earthly ministry of Jesus being handed to the disciples, who with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, have been tasked to continue that work over the centuries, until this day and beyond, until the Lord returns.

In, Luke makes it clear that Jesus presented Himself as a witness to His resurrection for forty days, providing what are described as convincing proofs of His existence.

In **1 Corinthians 15:6**, Paul described one of these **convincing proofs**, that Jesus was **seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present.**

The implication was that there was a great body of eye-witnesses who could be examined to the truths that were being taught about Jesus being the Son of God.

We are not told exactly what He did or said during this period, but we can be assured that it was done through the Holy Spirit and would have reinforced the messages that Jesus had been delivering throughout the previous three and a half years – the text says **He spoke about the Kingdom of God**.

The point that Luke makes is there is nothing mystical that was taught during this period – it was the same message, because there always was just one message – that salvation comes through Jesus only and He is the only route to God.

That is important for us today. There is so much being pushed at us in terms of religions that claim there is another way to God.

There is a massive amount of teaching that says everyone’s faith is individual and there is no right or wrong – God will accept everyone.

There is also a mass of teaching that claims experience and feelings are the only important thing – be good, do good things and you will be rewarded with heaven.

Jesus made it very clear when he said, **‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**.’

That is the eternal truth that you must take hold of and never let go.

Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples were **‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.’**

It’s an interesting command. Normally a command tells you to do something, but in this case the disciples had nothing more to do other than to **wait** for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Waiting for something, especially when you don’t have any idea when it will arrive or happen, can be difficult. We live in a world where things are instantly available, so waiting can cause us problems.

But, Jesus knew that they really could do nothing effective for the Kingdom of God until the Spirit came. Waiting meant:

* It was worth waiting for.
* There was the result of a promise to come.
* They couldn’t create it themselves.
* They would be tested in the waiting.

The promise to come was well worth the wait – there would be a gift from God Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit.

This wasn’t one of those promises that never gets fulfilled, or that you know from the start is worthless.

God is never changing and what He promises to do, He will do.

That remains true today – the Bible is full of God’s promises, many of which we would call prophecy. Some have been fulfilled or have taken place, whilst others are yet to happen.

The greatest prophecy that has been fulfilled is that God sent Jesus, His Son, to live and die as a human, to shed His blood to atone for - make payment for - our sins – the things we have done wrong.

Almost the whole OT is preparing for Jesus’ arrival – and whilst that covered some thousands of years, the prophecy was fulfilled.

The Bible tells us that Jesus will one day return. Again. we have to wait for that, but we have the advantage now that we know God will keep all of His promises.

No matter how difficult life is on earth, we are promised a place in heaven where there is no pain or suffering. That is surely worth waiting for.

Next comes a question from the disciples, which may indicate they still didn’t fully understand the direction that God’s mission was to take.

They asked, **‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’**

This was a question that had been asked before, but it had a special relevance now.

**Luke 22:20** tells us that Jesus had brought in a new covenant and by knowing their Scriptures, the disciples would have understood the restoration of **the kingdom to Israel** was part of the New Covenant - **Jeremiah 23:1-8, Ezekiel 36:16-30, Ezekiel 37:21-28).**

So, it was reasonable for them to wonder when the *rest* of the New Covenant would be fulfilled and the language used implies they expected an immediate restoration.

But, Jesus merely told them that the answer wasn’t for them to know.

There are many reasons that we don’t know some things:

* Sometimes it is because we never bothered to enquire.
* Maybe you didn’t study or listen at the right time.
* Maybe you don’t need to – because it is someone else’s business.
* Or maybe it is just best that we don’t know some things.

The answer to the disciples’ question is within the last two categories.

Jesus says **it is not for you to know**. He warns the disciples and us against enquiring into aspects of the timing of God’s kingdom, because those things belong to God the Father alone.

Jesus is clear that this area **the Father has put in His own authority**.

It may have really encouraged the disciples to know that within a few weeks their numbers would have grown by many thousands and they would have the power of the Holy Spirit.

It may have discouraged them to know that the full restoration of the kingdom to Israel that they hoped would happen soon, would not come for some 2,000 years.

Jesus is saying that the disciples needed to concentrate on the work they had to do right then, rather than worry about timings and the future.

The same is true for you – you need to be diligently be doing the work that God has for you, not worrying about anyone else, as we saw last week, nor worrying about the future – about things that we do not fully understand, yet which are in God’s control.

In Jesus’ words, those things **the Father has put in His own authority**.

We, like Jesus should put our trust and submission in God the Father – we see here that the ascended Jesus again showed His submission to the Father. His submission to the Father was not temporary, but eternal.

We may not know the date, but we have great gift from God - the **power of the Holy Spirit**.

This isn’t a worldly power of the type that needed occupying armies to enforce – this was a power that would make people faithful witnesses to Jesus, all over the world, in all circumstances.

It wasn’t a command either – Jesus made a simple statement of fact: **…when the Holy Spirit comes on you... you will be My witnesses…**.

Jesus doesn’t suggest a course of action, for us to be witnesses, He says we will be **His** witnesses. So are you fulfilling that role?

It has been said that, ‘if we want to be witnesses, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the best training program for evangelism is of little effectiveness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Our mission field is probably not going to be **in Jerusalem** or **all Judea**, we are more likely to be in the group encompassed by the phrase **and to the end of the earth**.

The gospel message spread from **Jerusalem**, to **Judea and Samaria** and then **to the end of the earth** and that is a brief outline of the Book of Acts.

So where is your mission field? I would suggest, unless the Lord directs otherwise, it is where you live – in your road – then to the are a of Harold Hill, then **to the ends of the earth**.

Jesus wants all of us to be witnesses for Him in these places – and He promises the Holy Spirit will empower you to do this work.

After saying these things, giving Hid disciples that great promise, Luke tells us, Jesus **was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight**.

This was no ordinary cloud – the word used by Luke here is the same used for the cloud that led the Israelites in the wilderness.

The glory of God Himself was contained in that cloud – it was His *Shekinah*, which is associated with the presence of God in the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus may have gone, but He had already told them **John 16:7 - It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you**.

Now the disciples could know that that promise would be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit was coming because Jesus promised to send the Spirit when He left.

Whilst we are told to get on with God’s work on earth – being Jesus’ witnesses, we are left with an assurance that Jesus will one day return.

Luke describes the appearance of two ‘men’, ho we can take as angels.

They prompt the disciples to put their attention in the right place (obedience to Jesus’ command to return to Jerusalem), not in wondering where and how Jesus went.

But they assure us, **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.**

The same Jesus, (there are not two different Messiahs), who is currently seated at the right hand of God the Father, will one day will return just as He left.

* He left physically and **will come back in the same way**.
* He left visibly and **will come back in the same way**.
* He left from the Mount of Olives and **will come back in the same way**.
* He left in the presence of His disciples and **will come back in the same way**.

That event is recorded in **Zechariah 14.**

How should this passage affect and govern our lives this week?

Jesus wants each one of us to be His faithful witnesses in the meantime – to be about His work, to be ready for His return. You must be ready at all times.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READINGS**

**Acts 1:1-11**

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

**3After his suffering, he presented himself to them 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.**

**4On 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. 5For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.’**

**6Then they gathered round him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’**

**7He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8But 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.’**

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

**10They 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.’**

**Matthew 25:1-13**

**‘At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.**

**6‘At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”**

**7‘Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.”**

**9‘“No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”**

**10‘But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.**

**11‘Later the others also came. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!”**

**12‘But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”**

**13‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**