

## Sermon

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### Only the Beginning

Think with me. Aren't there all sorts of times when we think, "We've made it."

- Graduations
- Wedding
- Landing a Job

I think the birth of the Church had to be an occasion like this.

- Palm Sunday – We call it the triumphal entry because there was a sense that triumph was at hand.
- Good Friday – Crucifixion – brutal, public execution – had to seem like the bitter end.
- Easter – Resurrection – that had to be it! Who could stand against this one who so gloriously rose from the dead?
- Ascension

Don't you love the picture painted by the words at the end of our New Testament reading?

he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.<sup>1</sup>

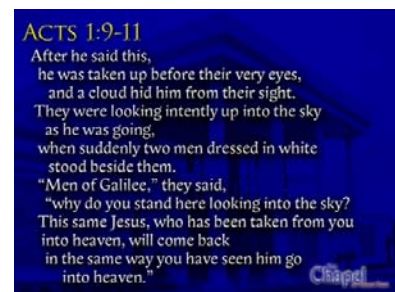
We might like to think that this was not a surprise? We would like to think that these friends of Jesus, His disciples that we have now come to revere as the Apostles and founding fathers of our faith... we would like to think that they were finally able to understand and anticipate what was going on.

But if *past performance is the best predictor of future performance*, we can imagine the looks on their faces as Jesus ascended into the clouds.

<sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going<sup>2</sup>

What was on their minds? Wow! Oh No! Not Again!  
Now what?

We don't know how long they stood there.



<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ac 1:9.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ac 1:10.

My translation says “suddenly” what appeared to be two men dressed in white appeared. “Suddenly” sounds like “immediately”, but it doesn’t say “immediately.”

This may be a case when the KJV does a better job:

<sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, **behold**, two men stood by them in white apparel;<sup>3</sup>

**Behold!** This is startling. If a couple of angels show up from nowhere, it is going to seem *sudden*.

<sup>11</sup>“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.”<sup>4</sup>

What are you doing? Mouths hanging open with those dumb looks on your face... don't you yet “get it?”

Here’s how Peterson phrased it in *The Message*:

As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, “You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.”<sup>5</sup>

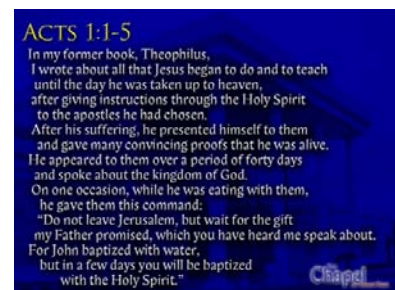
“Why do you just stand there looking up at an empty sky?”

If the question is “Now what?... you are the now what!”

Looking back, we can see that Jesus explained all this. He gave *marching orders* to His followers (just as He had before His crucifixion and resurrection).

Some of those most specific orders are right here in our passage from these first few verses in the Book of Acts.

<sup>4</sup>On 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. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>



<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version. (Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995). Ac 1:10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ac 1:10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2002). Ac 1:9-11.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ac 1:4-5.

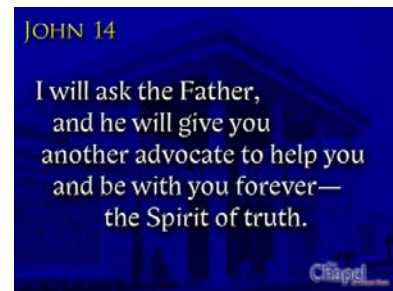
“You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Now what... **you** are now what... you **and** the Holy Spirit that is.

The risen Jesus that we celebrated last Sunday at Easter, had to not only rise from the dead, but had to ascend to the right hand of the Father **so** that the Comforter could come.

The Comforter, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit... here is what Jesus promised:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you *forever*—<sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.<sup>18</sup>I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.<sup>19</sup>Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.<sup>20</sup>On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am *in* you.<sup>7</sup>  
(John14:16-20)



The Holy Spirit, the Spirit sent from the Father and the Son, will be **in you**. Jesus promised a baptism, an all encompassing *soaking* of the promised Holy Spirit.

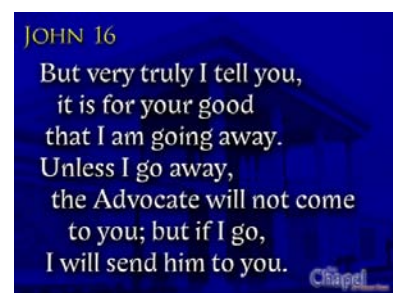
Jesus went on to say:

the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.<sup>8</sup> (John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit will bring power... power that God's people will **need**.

<sup>26</sup>“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.<sup>27</sup>And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

**16** “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.<sup>2</sup>They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the hour is coming when those who kill you will think they are offering a service to God.<sup>3</sup>They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.<sup>4</sup>I have told you this, so that when their hour comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you,<sup>5</sup>but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’<sup>6</sup>Rather,



<sup>7</sup> The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 14:16-20.

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 14:26.

you are filled with grief because I have said these things. <sup>7</sup>But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because people do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

<sup>12</sup>“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup>But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. <sup>15</sup>All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”<sup>9</sup>  
(John 15:26-16:15)

You may recall from the Resurrection account that I read last Sunday, from John 20, these words:

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup>And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:21-22)

Did they receive the Holy Spirit **then**? Or on the Day of Pentecost? Or when they would speak boldly to religious and government leaders? Or when they would perform miraculous healings?

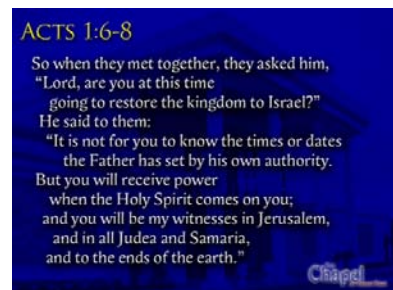
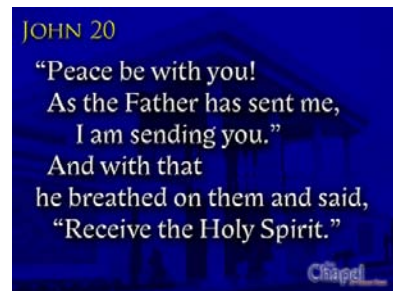
Yes! Over and over again they would be filled with power from the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus promised again in our passage in Acts:

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.”<sup>10</sup>

Now what... you are the now what... you and the Holy Spirit is what is **now what**.

Have you been in a committee meeting like this? I can just hear Peter speaking up:

WHEREAS, our people have been waiting for the Messiah to be our liberator; and  
WHEREAS, it is clear that Jesus is the promised Messiah; and  
WHEREAS, Jesus has promised that He would deliver God’s Kingdom;  
THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that this is the time that Jesus would restore the Kingdom to God’s People.



<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Jn 15:26-16:15.

<sup>10</sup> *The Holy Bible: Today's New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Ac 1:8.

Is there a second... All in favor, say aye... the ayes have it. The Kingdom will now come.

Jesus sits back in the chair and says “sounds great, excellent plan, **you** do it.”

“**You** will receive power... **you** will be my witnesses.”

It might make you wonder if they regretted speaking up in that committee meeting... they walked out with more than they bargained for.

The question that was intended to result in Jesus revealing the culmination of His mission, instead resulted in Jesus revealing that this wasn't the **end** of anything, but **only the beginning**.

Not a bad sermon title... could have been a song title.

*Why didn't we sing that today?*

So what? Fast forward to today, right here, in our church on this spectacular morning.

Could it be that we ought to be asked the same question posed to those who had just witnessed the ascension of Jesus?

“Why do you just stand there looking up at an empty sky?”

Walking through the season of Lent, through Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter... is there any chance that we are standing around now with our mouths hanging open?

Could it be that we might be found “just standing there?”

Here's the one big point I'd like for us to take away today: We don't have a **memorial** religion.

While the events **are** foundational, our faith is far more than memorializing the past.

I think it is really easy for people to reduce our faith to merely *getting the facts straight*. We err if we think that if we have a certain amount of data mastered, and we *buy into it*, that we can check our relationship and responsibilities to God *off the list*.



Jesus ascended... but there is more than an ascension required of us. We are called to more than a mere *mental ascension* to the facts of the Gospel.

There is: Growing, Compelling, and Worshiping.

- **Growing** in our knowing God and our becoming more like how we are created to be through the power of the Holy Spirit
- **Compelling** others to see that Jesus is the Savior. Not merely asking people to “come in” to our group, but “going out” to their worlds, their places, their points of view (even the most lost and misguided)
- And in all of it **worshiping**. We glorify God through the change in our own lives and in introducing others to Jesus. We worship by bringing ourselves to God, and as many others as possible with us.



Only the beginning...

Our Eternal Father is in control.

Jesus is alive.

The Holy Spirit is active.

In the Book of Acts, the birthday of the Church is recorded on the day of Pentecost; on our calendar this year it is on May 31, seven weeks after Easter.

We're taking these seven weeks, jumping around through the Book of Acts, as a path to Pentecost.

- Vertefeuille: The Church as Community
- Castleberry: Speaking in Tongues
- Kowalski: Women of the Mission
- Neary: Speaking Boldly
- Willis: Missions
- Neary: The Day of Pentecost



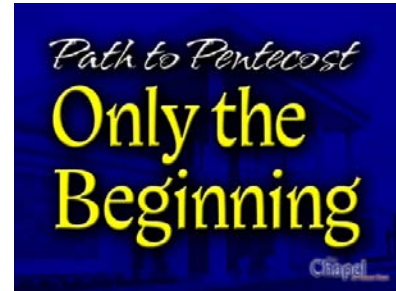
Through the series, I how we'll all more deeply understand that there is no “we've made it” only “we're making it.” Our faith is real, and active, and participatory.

Not a spectator sport. Church is not

- Entertainment – We really want you to like it here, but this isn't a *show*.
- Therapy – We want you *better*, but this isn't just a *group counseling session*.
- Fee for Service – We'll take an offering, but you're not buying a *service*.
- Club – We hope you will network, but Church just isn't *good for business*.
- Service Organization – We do good work together, but it is more than just *social justice*.

All about us... but certainly not merely for us. It is about us, and others, for God.

So today, I want to challenge us to not make the error that we have a **memorial** religion. That the facts and events are important... but we are called to more than merely master the data and remember. We are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be the Church.



It is a call to engagement... a call to engage with God, and to engage with God's mission. It is a call to action... lives actively being changed... starting with our own lives being changed... and as witnesses to Christ's power in our own lives allowing others to see and believe with us.

Our prayer today is that we would find ourselves engaged in the mission of God.

Maybe for the first time by believing that, because of Jesus, we can be part of God's mission... or maybe for the next time, ongoing time as we, filled with the Spirit, live our lives for the glory of God.