

The Lord will Come
Acts 1:9-11

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Romans 6:1-14

Responsive Reading: Proverbs 8:1-11

This morning we are going to be continuing in Acts chapter 1. This week we are going to continue working through this account of the ascension of Christ, last week having looked at the first half where Jesus had instructed his disciples to stay in Jerusalem for a few days, for he said that the promised helper will come, the holy spirit will come upon them and they shall receive power. As we discussed last week, this does not mean that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives supernatural power, albeit the Apostles were given such at various times. But I think that is an important distinction to make as well here, for as we go through this book there are many who use it to justify miraculous healing, and speaking in tongues and other such “signs of the spirit.”

Now I want to tread lightly here, for this opens up into the debate between what constitutes a spiritual gift, and the question, have certain gifts fade away with the Apostles? I don't want to spend a lot of time on that debate, but I will say this. I believe many of what we see today done in the name of the Holy Spirit is indeed false, and as I said last week, it really is nothing more than an exercise in pride and arrogance. But that being said, I also do not want to discount or discredit the power of the Holy Spirit to minister, and to move in miraculous ways.....personally I hold to the view that such signs of the Holy Spirit you are highly unlikely, but not impossible.

Really, the safest way to judge any such accounts of the miraculous, is to understand it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit itself. The Holy Spirit was given so that man may know God, so that man may understand God, and so that man may think God's thoughts after him. There is, and has always been a redemptive purpose in the work of the Holy Spirit. Which puts pretty much most anything we see today, that calls itself a miraculous work of the spirit disqualified, for there tends to not be a redemptive purpose or ministry in it, but rather such quote unquote works, just a show to prove how strong you are in the spirit.

It is self serving, and therefore self deceiving. IF we look at verse 8, we get our answer right there as to what exactly the power of the Spirit is. After he says, the power of the Spirit will come upon you.. he doesn't say so that you can work miracles, speak in tongues, and the like....although in the case of the apostles, they did...but the purpose, and the power was this, verse 8. “and you shall be a witness to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Such miraculous powers was given to the Apostles at that time so that men may know, that they were speaking the words of God. Even those signs, of healings, and speaking in tongues had a redemptive purpose.

The ministry of the spirit is to empower the words spoken in witness, to prepare the soil of the heart for the seed of the gospel, and then to water that seed so that it may grow. To encourage, exhort, convict, cultivate, and grow the believer in their faith and understanding of God, to work in them sanctification. To work in them, the desire to do that which is pleasing to the Lord, to work in them the mortification of sin through conviction. This, is a power beyond the expressions we see attributed to the spirit today, this is the power to change hearts, the power to change minds, and the power to change lives. There is no power in unknown angelic languages, and as we all know now, the miracle healers that we grew up with who were on TV have all been proven to be frauds, having in their healing ceremonies actually caused harm, and physical damage to those they have claimed to have healed.

So, looking at the ascension today here in the book of Acts, we know that The book of Luke ends with the ascension, it is the finale, and without this book of acts, it would seem that would be the end of Jesus ministry, he had come to accomplish that which he had come for, and that would be it. But as we see the book of Acts here starts exactly where all the gospels end, and as we discussed in the introduction a few weeks ago, that is the purpose of this book, it is to show the power of the spirit working through God's people to continue the ministry that Jesus first established.

The start of verse 9, closely links what follows in this account in what Jesus himself had said to them, it says, "Now when he had spoken these things," the ascension, and his return are closely linked with the ministry as well. For without the ascension the Holy Spirit would have not come, and without the return of Christ, the hope we have within this gospel ministry is empty. For we are not witness to a dead messiah, but a living, a messiah who has returned in glory to the throne from which he had left to become an atoning sacrifice for us, a perfect mediator for us, and our perfect high priest.

As we know from verse 3, after Christ's resurrection, it says that he was with his disciples for 40 days, during this time he would appear to them, instruct them, minister to them, and would again leave, and come back, but here at the ascension we see he leaves, but this time there is a finality to it. He is taken up into the clouds, As David Peterson said, "being taken up into the clouds was not the beginning of his heavenly exaltation, rather it was the ultimate confirmation of that which was his from the beginning." His work here on earth was complete, redemption has been accomplished, Christ had come and established his holy kingdom, and now is the time for his disciples to go, and spread the good news of the gospel so others may become a part of his kingdom.

It is interesting in the account it is mentioned that a cloud received him, and he was then out of their sight. There have been other accounts of clouds in scripture, we see the Pillar of smoke, like a cloud which was the presence of God among the Israelite as they traversed the wilderness, and there was also the account of the transfiguration, which mirrors this account, Turn to Matthew 17, starting in verse 1 and see if you can also see the similarities here "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves, and he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him." Again, we see 2 men appeared with him, just as 2 in the account of the ascension, "Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, let us make here three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah...and while he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came from the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, hear him."

Again we are seeing this imagery of a cloud and I am sure that the 3 who had witnessed the transfiguration as a precursor to God's glory would indeed also see the connection, as Christ is revealed as the conqueror, and received in glory, into the very presence of God. Whereas Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about all the things which were to come, these 2 angels who were among these disciples here also told them that Christ would return, in the same way that he had left. In power, and in glory, in the same manner as he went into heaven. There will be one major difference though between the ascension and his return. In the ascension it was in the presence of those who were closest to him, but in the second coming he will come in power, to call all of his children,

Revelation says, "Behold, he is coming with clouds, (just in the same way he left in the ascension, except this time,) every eye will see him, even they who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him." His second coming will not be secretive, it will not be hidden, but will be glorious, and fearful beyond what we can even imagine. Luke says that he will be returning in his own glory, and in the glory of the father, in the company of Angels, and as Paul wrote in the letter written to the Thessalonians, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."

Picture this if you will, the deafening sound of loud thunder, and the sounds of trumpets, you run outside to see what is going on and you see the clouds part and Jesus descending victorious, in all his glory, and then, those who have died who are his, rise up first to meet him. There is no mystery in this, nothing will be hidden or secret, there will be a great finality to it all, the end, truly will be the end. No secret raptures, no hidden thoughts, but all will be revealed when Christ returns. Not only is this glorious beyond our own comprehension, it also is fearful, for when Christ returns, he not only returns to take all those who are his with him, but likewise he will come as a judge of the world.

There is no purgatory to work off your sins, that is a construct created by man to excuse sinful behavior, there is no interim state to right your wrongs, Christ comes, in power, and in judgment. That is why the Author of Hebrews wrote, in chapter 3, "Therefore the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me, tried me, and saw my works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways, so I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Exhort one another daily, while it is called today...because you may not have tomorrow. Notice here in this text in Hebrews, if you remember when we went through it. The Author was writing to a group of believing Hebrews, likely a fellowship, or quite possibly it was sent to a few in the area who were struggling with some in their midsts who were teaching and instructing the worshiping of Angels. Throughout the book he treats those to whom he writes to as fellow believers, he equates himself with them, but look what he says here, "Beware brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

He is warning them, that there maybe some among them who are in fact not believers, despite their claims to faith and belief. I think the lesson we can take away from this is that we must not assume a persons faith merely upon their claims, but rather has the book of James instructs, that the faithful will be known by their works. The faithful will be known by their love, the faithful will yearn for the things of Christ, the faithful will hurt and suffer along with those who are suffering, the faithful will be seeking after Christ, seeking to know him more, they will be growing in faith, growing in understanding, growing in assurance and belief.

In this passage here in Hebrews, he is instructing his readers to actually seek out these people whose life, is not matching up with their claims and to exhort, and instruct, to teach, and to preach to them so that they may not be deceived, but rather that they may turn today, before it becomes to late. This ties back to what we talked about last week, the power of the holy spirit given to God's people, the function and purpose of this is so that we may see him, and that we may know him more!

We must pray for those around us that the spirit will minister, we must pray that God will soften the hearts to those to whom we have been giving opportunity to minister, and we must do it today, for today is what we have. I have talked to people before, and have heard others claim that they will deal with it when they are on their death bed, but what if you don't get that chance? I think of people we know who have died in car accidents, a friend of mind who recently died of a massive heart attack, or the people of Ukraine who are dying in this war.

We can not go through our lives thinking that we have tomorrow, for in an instant life changes, in an instant the world changes. This is why it is so imperative to heed God's word today, to not harden your heart in unbelief, but instead lay down your rebellion and trust in the one and only true God. I think of those who are sitting in churches this morning, going through the motions because its what they have always done, its tradition, or, out of some sense of responsibility, or believing that in doing so they are gaining merit points with God, that their good will hopefully out way their bad. But again, Matthew chapter 7 comes up...verse 23, "Depart from me, you who work lawlessness, you who are sinful, and rebellious, you who do not truly believe for...I....never....knew...you. He isn't speaking to the the atheist, this isn't necessarily the unchurched, and unbeliever, this is one who believes themselves to be saved from God's wrath. This is one who sought to appease God's wrath with their own righteousness, with their own works saying, Look at all these things I have done for you, in your name God.

Didn't I say the sinners prayer and ask you into my heart? Didn't I pray to you? Didn't I witness for you? Depart from me, for I never knew you. Do not deceive yourself, do not harden your heart but rather cry out to God for forgiveness. Again I ask, as I did last week, do you doubt your faith? Do you doubt your salvation? Then I challenge you to wrestle with it, struggle through it, do not cast such things aside, do not attempt to silence that conviction by trying to convince yourself that you are right with God because of a certain day you claimed to believe, or because you attend church, or because you think you are a good person. For scripture says, "There is non righteous, no, not one." The reality is, there is not one single one of us who is righteous enough to earn our way into the very presence of the most glorious, holy, and righteous God. There is none of us who do enough good in this world to merit favor with such a holy, and just God. God does not owe us salvation, we owe him everything, for our breath, which he gives, for our lives in which we are allowed to live another day, and for the salvation that he gives, as a gift to us who believe.

And that is why the ministry and work of Christ on the cross so so paramount, for we need a righteousness that is not our own, to be applied to us. And there is non more righteous then God himself, so he taking on flesh, becoming like us, has made himself the perfect and necessary sacrifice for us, he has taken his own righteous punishment and anger upon himself for us who believe, for us who are the called according to his own good pleasure and will.

And it is the Holy Spirit who ministers this to us, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts, who exhorts, who encourages, and assures us. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no real faith. There is a type of faith without the holy spirit, but it is empty, it is false, and it is the type of faith which will be met with the words, "Depart from me, you who work lawlessness and sin, for I never knew you." We must have Christ's atoning work on the cross applied to us, to be saved from the wrath of God. And it is the Holy Spirit who witness and ministers to us, through the word of God.

That is why I say, if you even have the slightest doubt, then wrestle with it head on. Scripture says, that we will be known by our fruits, we will be known by our actions, and that we, being the children of God, will have the traits of God. But if your actions, if your traits are those aligned more of rebellion toward God, rebellion toward his righteousness, and rebellion against his created order, then despite what you may verbally confess, you are not truly a child of God, for you shall be known by your works. Works does not grant you faith, but faith is proven by your works.

As Paul wrote in Roman's the unrighteous are those who are, sexual immoral, wicked, full of covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving unmerciful, who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, and that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.

We look at such a list, and always the big things stand out....but in there is included envy, disobedient to parents, covetousness is linked in with sexually immoral, violence, and murder. The point being, that there is no small sin, but all sin, every sin makes us unworthy, even the smallest of sins damns our souls to hell...and not only that, but it says not only those who practice such, but also those who approve, for a person who has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, can not, and will not approve of sinful, rebellious behavior. Therefore, if we were to be honest with ourselves, this truly does describe every single one of us, it truly is only through the work of Christ on the cross who paid that righteous penalty for us that we may escape the coming wrath for our sins, so that when we are inevitably standing before the God of this universe, we do not stand on our own merits claiming, "have we not done these things in your name", but rather we stand before God worshiping him for his grace, mercy and love toward us that while we were yet sinners, he died for us.

My friends, as the Author of Hebrews wrote, I implore you today, turn from your sin and rebellion to the only one who can offer peace from the torment and suffering that sin brings, turn to the only one who can offer meaning to an otherwise meaningless world, to the only one who can offer an eternal hope, in the face of our temporal hopelessness, turn to God, believe in him, trust in him, worship him, praise him. Wrestle with your doubts, wrestle with your fears, do not suppress them, do not allow yourself to deceive yourself that you are right with God....If you are God's, the Holy Spirit will minister to your soul such comfort, and such assurance that you need. That is why I say wrestle, and fight with those thoughts of doubt...prove them out, and in doing so you may very well find the peace and assurance you need, or in doing so you may discover that you have yet to truly turn to him, you may confess a belief, but he isn't truly Lord of your life, the doubt of your belief may very well be the Holy Spirit's conviction that you yet have not believed, but instead have deceived yourself, justifying your sin, and justifying and approving the sin in others, therefore, again as the Author of Hebrews wrote, Today, do not harden your hearts through the deceitfulness of sin, but rather turn and believe. .