



Sermon – 07/30/2023
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Verses Covered

Acts 1:6 - 11

Well, amen. As you take your seats, let me invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Acts chapter 1. We'll be looking at verses 6 through 11 in Acts 1. And while you're turning there, let me say it's so good to be with you. If you're new here in particular, we especially want to welcome you. And that worship guide that we pointed out earlier this morning, if you don't have a Bible, you can find the passage written out there for you. And we want to just explain what we're doing. Every single week we come together and we open the Bible and we go verse by verse through a Scripture because we believe these words are from God Himself and these have the power to change lives, to change hearts. And we're looking at a text this morning and I'm excited because it's one of my favorite books in the entire Bible, the Book of Acts. And it's one of the most misunderstood passages in the entire Bible. When Jesus, seemingly out of nowhere, ascends and goes to heaven. And so, I love this text because almost no other passage in Scripture pulls together the entire story of the Bible like the way this does and paints so vivid of a picture of our hope. And if we as a church and if we as individuals grasp the implications of this passage of Scripture that we're about to read, it can transform everything about the way you live your Christian life. So, let's take a look at this text in Acts chapter 1 starting in verse 6. This is what the apostle, or this is what Luke says to us through the Holy Spirit.

⁶So when they had come together, they asked Him, (Him being Jesus) “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and then in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”

This is God's word for us today. My dad has an interesting sense of humor. And it may have turned me into a light law breaker at a very young age. You see, I spent the first several years of

my life in a small town in North Mississippi. And my house was right at the edge of a very long, very straight stretch of road. Which meant people could and often did drive very fast on that road which drove my dad absolutely nuts. And he reached that stage in a man's life where he starts instinctively blaming everything on teenagers. I don't know if you know what I'm talking about. Uh but I remember hearing him saying things to my mom at the dinner table like, "Kathy, one of these days I'm going to go out there and build a speed bump on the middle of the street and watch these kids just go airborne." You know, I just thought, "Okay." Well, my mom, thankfully, talked him out of that. But he had another idea and he said to me, "Daniel, come out here. I've got a fun experiment that we're going to try." I was here for it. I had no idea what we were going to go do. So, we get in his car. And he drove a grand, Grand Marquis which we jokingly called his cop car because that was the same model that police in my hometown drove. So, he backs the car out of the carport, drives it to the edge of the driveway, and he's got snacks, he's got magazines, and he gives them to me, he turns on the radio, he gives me then a baseball cap and some sunglasses. He says, "I want you to sit right here, buddy. You can listen to the radio, you can eat these snacks, you can listen to whatever you want to listen to, you can read all this. I've just got one more thing I need to give you." And he hands it to me, and I can't figure out why. And he says, "You can do whatever you want in the car, but whenever a car drives by you, I want you point this out the window. And he hands me my mom's hair dryer which looks an awfully lot like a radar gun. Y'all I felt like a magician. Seven-year-old Daniel's just out here whenever a car drives by, I point this thing out the door. Suddenly, the noses of these pickup trucks start dipping. I feel like I'm shooting like slow down rays on these people. Brakes start squealing and the only other sound that I hear is the sound of my dad sitting on the front porch just laughing. Having a great time. And you know, as that was going on, I'm I'm a little nervous now because I don't know what the statute of limitations is for impersonating the law enforcement official. But what I realized now is that little seven-year-old Deputy Daniel gave quite a few people a little bit of a scare that day. Because when they saw this Grand Marquis was something sticking out of the door, I'll go out on a limb and say, some of y'all know that feeling. When you come across a speed trap driving a little bit faster than the law or sanctification would otherwise allow you, you feel caught. You feel a little nervous, so I'm told. Um and you, you're wondering, looking into the rear-view mirror, what's next? What's coming after this? And it, maybe you, maybe you're a great driver and you've never had this experience, but you've had some experience where something unexpected happened in your life and you didn't know what was about to come next. And that feeling is exactly what we're confronted with in this passage this morning. A moment that defies the apostle's expectations, that leaves them wondering, what is next. And what I want us to see is that this text that we're looking at answers the question, what's next for the entire universe and for your individual life. And if you'll let it, I am convinced there is almost no other moment, no other passage of Scripture that will give you as much courage and as much comfort as this one will. That's because the supernatural moment of Jesus' ascension connects us to a supercharged movement of Jesus's people that are guaranteed to prevail.

But for this text to grip our hearts to the way that it's designed to, there are three things that we need to do. So, if you're the type that takes notes, the first thing that I want to call our attention to is that we need to expect the unexpected in God's upside-down plan. Expect the unexpected. Because the unexpected is exactly what we're dealing with in the ascension, isn't it? And the unexpectedness, it starts with the apostles. So, this passage begins with a question, "Lord, will You at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?" Now, why are they asking that? Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, actually answers that question, starting a few verses ahead. In verses 3, he talks

about everything that Jesus was doing from the time He was resurrected until 40 days later, which is where we are in the text this morning. In verse 3, it says,

³He presented Himself alive after His suffering, appearing to them and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And then, in verse 5, Jesus says to the apostles,

⁵...you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So, when Jesus mentions the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately think, “Oh, buckle up. The end is near.” Why do they think that? They think that because they know their Bible. And they think they, or they think they know what's happening because in the book of Joel, the prophet outlines what the end times will look like. What the day of the Lord, what judgement, when God comes back to make all things right to make good on His promises. And Joel 2:28 gives us a vision of the future. And he says, God, when He comes to bring all things to their completed end, to usher in the kingdom, it shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. That's Joel chapter 2. So, if you're the apostles, this isn't a crazy question. Jesus has literally just come back from the dead. Just imagine the adrenaline rush of all this. This is the biggest mic drop in the history of the universe. And you're in this little entourage with Jesus going around, showing the world, “I'm alive, I'm real, and the kingdom is coming.” I mean, and then, you hear this sign. You hear this word from Jesus saying, “You'll soon be baptized by the Holy Spirit.” That's like me telling a football coach, “You will soon be showered in Gatorade.” If you hear that, you're not expecting, “We're going to lose the game.” You're expecting good things here. So, the apostles hear that and they think, “Okay, let's get this party started. Jesus is now the time?” And what does Jesus say? “It's not for you to know the times or the seasons, but you'll be given authority and you'll be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria, from Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth.” In other words, basically, Jesus says, “Hey, good question. None of your business.” And if you're the apostles, you're thinking, “What? Like, You brought this up, Jesus.” Like, they just got Jesus juked by Jesus Himself. Like and this is pretty impressive like you're the one who said, Holy Spirit. You're the one who have been talking about the kingdom for the last 40 days. What's going on here? What's going on is Jesus is saying to the apostles, “You're asking, is the end near? And the answer is yes. But not the way that you think.” And once again, God's plan defies our expectations because no one would have drawn up the plan that we see in Scripture, including sending the Son to die. No one would have expected that. And here Jesus is saying to the disciples, “You're asking when the end will come. But the question that you should be asking is how the end will come.” And that's the question that Jesus answers here and He does it by weaving together all of these promises from the Old Testament in a single sentence that is so easy to miss that I want us to focus on here. Because Jesus is doing something absolutely masterful. And I want us to see it by thinking about the book of Isaiah for just a minute. Because Isaiah was a prophet in the Old Testament who God gave a vision of the end. This is what the kingdom of God will look like when God comes to judge, when God comes to reign. This is what the promises of God will look like. This is the hope of Israel as they are languishing under these foreign empires that are holding them under their thumb. And part, a major part, of the promise that Isaiah foretold was an empowering of the Holy Spirit. And that's exactly what Isaiah 32:15 says. It says, a true king will reign forever in righteousness and on that day, the spirit of God will be poured out on high. But it's not only that, Isaiah says in chapter 43 and chapter 44, that God will send a Savior for Israel

and that Savior will say to His people, you are my witnesses. Those people are to bear witness, to see, and to tell, and to embody the way of life that they see in the Savior. And when that happens, this hope that a true and living God will rescue his people, what happens is that somehow salvation will then extend, we see in chapter 43 and 44. Salvation will extend to the ends of the earth. This, these texts are the promises that Israel clung to. This was the hope all throughout the Old Testament. And what does Jesus say to the apostles in verse 8 as the answer to the question about the kingdom? Just like in verse 32, He says, "The Spirit will be poured out when the Holy Spirit comes upon you just like in Isaiah chapter 43 and 44." He says to the apostles, "You will be my witnesses. And as you go witnessing to me, to my way of life, you will go from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth, going across lines of geography, an empire, and ethnicity. And the promises of God will find their fulfillment through you because you are being empowered by the Holy Spirit." And the thing is, when you see all this together, we don't know whether the apostles heard these words and it immediately clicked. They immediately heard, "Oh, this is Isaiah. He's mashing up all of the Old Testament and saying, we are the people. The people who are following after Jesus, are the ones who are going to be a part of this next stage." We don't know if they understood that immediately. And it's not hard to imagine a universe where the apostles ask a question of Jesus feel like they get slapped on the wrist, hear this mysterious sort of answer, and honestly feel a little confused or maybe feel a little even disappointed by Jesus. And no one in this room would say this. But I am confident there are some of us that on occasion may feel the exact same way. A little disappointed in Jesus and how our lives are going. Because it's, I'm, some of you have maybe made a deal in your own mind with God. I want to know that You're real. God, bring me that spouse. God, restore that relationship. I can just see it. God, I, it would bring You so much glory if You act in a way that I want You to just like this, just like now. And you may not even be wrong for wanting that. These could be good things. The apostles wanted the kingdom to come. And you'll notice, they don't actually get scolded for asking the question. Jesus isn't slapping them the wrist. They're right to want the kingdom of God. The problem is, they had a vision of the kingdom that was too small for God to accomplish everything that He intended through their vision of the kingdom. And in the same way, sometimes you and I have a vision and a hope for our lives that is too small for what God actually intends to do in and through you. Such that, if God were to give you what you are asking for right now, it might eliminate the possibility of God doing through you what He intends that is greater than what you could ever imagine. So, this is not Garth Brooks theology up here, me saying some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers. What this is, me saying, is that this text is saying to you, that is, that some times, God will give you exactly what you are asking for, exactly what you are praying for but in a way and at a time, that you don't expect. That's what happened here. And this passage gives us the resources to guard against disappointment because it can teach you to expect the unexpected in God's plan that sometimes feels so upside down. But it could sound almost like I'm saying, alright, brace yourself because you never know what our crazy Savior is going to do. That's not what I'm saying and that's not what this text is saying. Because this passage continues on and it's designed to build enormous confidence in you when you see the incredible way that God is moving and bringing about all of his plans.

So, the second thing I want to call our attention to is our need to find yourself in God's awe-inspiring story. We find ourselves in God's awe-inspiring story. Because this passage is packed to the brim with detail that is easy to overlook but is incredible in all that it brings together. And when you begin to grasp the fullness of what God is in this verse and this event, it is designed to leave you absolutely stunned and in awe of God's masterful strategy and skill and grace and mercy.

But it's a bit counterintuitive when you think about God's plan and Scripture, isn't it? I mean, if you were to just not know anything about the Bible and they were to, someone was to lay out, "Hey, this is what God's going to do. Step one, the eternal Son of God, sitting in heaven, is going to take on flesh, become a human, and come down to earth. You think, "Whoa." Step 2, He's going to live a perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, incredible life where He's doing miracles, He's teaching with authority, He's astonishing people. You say, "Amazing. I love it." Step 3, He is going to be a substitute for your sin. He is going to die on the cross in a way that delivers a fatal wound to sin and satan. You think, "Okay, I'm not sure about this whole death part but keep going." Step 4, He comes from the dead and says, "Hey, satan, how do you like me now?" And He shows He is triumphant over all the principalities and powers of the universe." You think, "Okay, I am here for this." Step 5, He goes around the world and He's showing people, "I'm alive, I'm real, I'm physical, look at the holes in my wrist, look at the holes at my feet, I have risen from the dead, and that means I am God and I am king." "Yes, keep going. I love this." Step 6, out of nowhere, He disappears. What? This is not what you are expecting. All the momentum, you've got all of the stuff going and then suddenly, why? This is the time. Bring in the kingdom. This is the moment. What's going on? What's going on is something that we may miss because the ascension of Jesus is the moment where Jesus is being crowned as king and ascending to heaven to rule over all the earth. This is the formal ceremony in which He is being crowned and designed and shown to be King. Why? And that's why, for example, you just think about what is a coronation. Just a few weeks ago, months ago, we had King Charles of England and the United Kingdom. He had a internationally televised coronation. Now, King Charles was king of the United Kingdom. The moment his mom, Queen Elizabeth died. But months later, they had this coronation service because there's something about the crowns, the scepters, the robes, the majesty, all of the the pomp that is a nation's way of sort of flexing before the watching world, saying, "Look at what we can do, look at our power." It is a ritual demonstration of strength. And what's going on in the ascension is Jesus flexing before the entire universe and showing to satan, "Hey, satan, you have been striving to become a little prince over this world. You've been striving to supplant My authority. You've been striving to be king in your own way. But look at Jesus ascending and sitting down, the throne is occupied and you are doomed." He is showing to the world something powerful. And this passage is absolutely determined for us to get this. And it's putting all of these little details in here to make sure we don't miss it. So, I want to look at these.

The first thing that we see all throughout this passage is language of eyesight. You see, five times in the matter of just a few verses, things like, as they were looking, out of their sight, while they were gazing. Luke keeps bringing this up. And this language is designed to do two things. First, it's designed to show the ascension actually happened. Uh they didn't have too many mushrooms with their fish and and and just imagined this out of nowhere. This actually physically happened in history. But second, it's pulling together all of the story of the Old Testament. Because think about Moses. What did he ask of God? When Moses ascended on Mount Sinai, Mount Sinai in Exodus 33, he said, "Lord, show me. Let me see your glory." Following an ascension, he wants to see. Think about the prophet Elijah. Before he is ascends, he does not die. He is ascended. He's brought to heaven. But before he gives the reigns to his successor, Elisha, Elijah says, "Give me a double portion of your spirit." And what does Elijah say in 2 Kings chapter 2? "You've asked a hard thing from me, Elijah says. But if you see me as I ascend, then my spirit will come to you." If you see me ascend, my spirit will come to you. Does that sound familiar? But what would also sound familiar to the readers of this passage are some of the most important texts across the entire Old Testament. That these were passages that spoke of a coming King who would

ascend to a high place and rule over the world. Passages like Psalm 2 that say, I've set my king on my holy hill. Ask and I'll give the nations to him and he will rule. Psalm 110 that says, sit at my right hand on a throne. And the Lord will rule high from Zion with his mighty scepter. Daniel chapter 7 talks about a figure called the ancient of days. And it says in Daniel 7 that he took his seat on high and to him was given authority and power to rule over an everlasting kingdom.

And so it's not just this eyesight language. It's not just these Old Testament texts. You also have clouds mentioned right here in the passage. And clouds in Scripture represent the divine presence of God. There was a cloud that followed the people of Israel around the wilderness covering them by day and leading the way, or covering them by night and leading the way by day. And in the New Testament, these clouds keep showing up at key moments in Jesus' life. At His baptism, when He was being marked out as a King, a cloud descends like a dove, signaling this person is the King. At Jesus's death on the cross, when He is acting as a King for us, making peace on our behalf, clouds block out the entire universe, blotting out the sun while Jesus is as a king for us. At His transfiguration, when the veil is lifted and glory shines forth from Jesus showing a glimpse of who He is, Matthew describes it as a cloud overwhelming Jesus. And once again, right here, we see clouds mentioned in the text coming around Jesus and lifting Him up to heaven. Whenever Jesus is acting as a king, these clouds show up. Do you see what's happening here? When you pull all of these pieces together, Luke is showing us that in the ascension, all the promises of God are coming true. Jesus is ascending to heaven to rule over all the earth and that's the reason why the ascension is mission critical for your life and mine. Because if you're on the Earth, you're looking and you see Jesus leaving and this feels maybe a bit like a departure. But the truth is, the ascension of Jesus is not a departure, it's an arrival. It is Jesus formally and fully stepping into power. And that is why this passage right here about the ascension is sandwiched between two different passages before and after it about the Holy Spirit. Because while Jesus is on the Earth, this is why the Ascension is good news for you. While Jesus is on the Earth, in His human nature, He's in a body. He's in one place at one time. When He ascends to heaven, He sends His Holy Spirit, the spirit of Christ that moves with His power and He begins to wield the fullness of His power from the throne of heaven by unleashing the Spirit across the world with a power that is present, not just where Jesus is in his incarnate body but everywhere. Everywhere. Wherever the word of God is proclaimed. And don't miss this. Because what this means, the Holy Spirit coming to you after the Jesus ascends to the throne, is that the ascension means that Jesus rules but He does it through you and me. He does it through those who are designated to be His witnesses. Those who are invested and indwelt with His royal power. You are deputies of the King of the universe and you are designed to embody it in your life. You're designed to show it. You're designed to share it. You're designed to speak it. And when you do, you are doing nothing less than unleashing the power of the King of the universe who has designated the Holy Spirit to live in you and work through you. That's good news for you on so many levels. And if you'll let it sink in, there's almost no more comforting truth that what happens as a result of Jesus' ascension. In Scripture, what we see is the ascension shows us for one, it shows you the future of the world. And what I mean by that is we are witnessing in this moment the beginning of the end. The beginning of the end of sin. The beginning of the end of Satan. The beginning of the end of suffering. And what we see is the moment of Jesus' ascension connects you to a movement that cannot fail and is designed to fill you with hope and courage and grit and tenacity because you know the future of the world. But it's not just that you know the future of the world. You also know the future of your own life. Because what we see in the ascension, what happens to Jesus is what will one day be something that you experience. What happens here is, previously no human could be in the

presence of God and not be killed and not be destroyed. Think about Moses when he asks to see the glory of God, he has to be hidden in the cleft of a rock because the all-consuming glory of God will kill broken, sinful, humans like us. But what we see in the ascension is that right now, at this moment, there is a man, a human being sitting on the throne of God who is not destroyed by the presence of God but is welcoming you into it. What we see in this moment is a man, a human being, Jesus in a resurrected body, in a transformed body, in a restored body that is indestructible, that will never be broken, that will never again face death. And there are some of you in this room who are grappling with pain that won't go away. Or an illness or a disease that is advancing. And what we see in the ascension is a human reigning over the Earth that is Lord over every joint, that is Lord over every cancer cell, and rules and reigns with authority, can heal, can move. And when you are looking at the ascended, embodied Jesus, you are looking into your own future of a God who is making all things right in the end. Of a God who is making all things beautiful in their time. Of a God who is making all things whole in eternity. And you are looking at the promise of what God has and will do for you in this life or in the resurrection and in your eternal future. And our lives in this world and God's plan in this age can seem upside down, but we're given this awe-inspiring view of God's power, of His strategy, of His masterfulness, of His kingdom, of His power on the throne that is designed to fill us with hope. The God who orchestrated the most impossible and most intricate victory in the course of the universe is powerful enough to conquer sin, satan, and suffering and he's powerful enough to move in your life too and He will. That's the promise of this passage.

Which is why the third thing that I want to call our attention to is the way that this text tells us to discover your true calling in God's world-changing mission. This passage shows us how to discover what we are actually fully designed to be. And we see this first in the way that the apostles witnessed Jesus ascend and then these two men just show up. And this can be confusing if we don't know what's going on. But this event is so beautiful and so significant because it takes us right back to the first chapters of Scripture. Because what is going on with Adam and Eve Eden is portrayed in Scripture as a mountain top paradise. It's a high place where the people of God have fellowship with the presence of God. Adam and Eve rebel. They're banished from that garden and what happens? They're sent out east from Eden and two men, two angels block the garden with flaming swords saying, humanity cannot come near the presence of God. And what we see in this passage is that Adam had to descend from the presence of God and we have the great reversal of that here where Jesus is ascending to the presence of God. Two men come back down to make an announcement that while for thousands of years, the way to the presence of God has been blocked, has now been broken wide open by Jesus who is entering into the presence of God and is asking you to come with him, to be welcomed by God's grace. It seems like we've just completed the whole story of Scripture. But there's a little bit more to come. We're not quite finished because the announcement that these two men make is that we see in verse 11, this Jesus who was taken up from you, bodily, will come back in that same body. That means the story isn't quite done. And the story involves you. And I want you to see that right here in this text. Because the two men almost seemed to scold the apostles. In verse 10, they say, why do you just stand there looking into heaven? Now, the apostles aren't wrong for being amazed. The problem is they need to get busy. You see, the ascension means that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God in heaven on His throne, ruling over the church and expanding His rule over the Earth as people come to pledge their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He will build His church. He will usher in His kingdom but He'll do it by the power of the Holy Spirit through those who bear witness to Jesus as Lord and Savior. And what Jesus is doing is saying, "I will return and I will do so at a

time in the future that you don't know. But until then, I am providing a time before I return for people to hear of this new King and that happens if the witnesses of this King are faithful to tell the message of that King.” And so you look at the ascension and if you're the disciples, you naturally ask, what's next? This passage gives us an answer. What's next is mission? What's next is action? What's next is sacrificing for something greater than your own comfort? And this passage gives you an answer to the question, what's next? And that's one of the reasons that we as a church have been using that word, next, a lot. Because as we approach our hundredth anniversary as a church, we want to be a place that answers the call to action that this text is compelling us to do. That's why we've spent months developing strategies, developing plans that will unveil in the weeks ahead that are designed to extend the witness of this church to our risen and ascended King. And that can be things, whether that's making our facilities better to reach our community more fully. Whether that's investing in critical ministries that are designed to extend the Gospel all around the world. What we are doing is trying to make absolutely sure that our focus is not on making this place a marginally more comfortable megachurch, but making it a multiplying force for the Gospel, the way that this text has commanded us to be. Bearing witness to Jesus who is ascended and over our hearts and one day will rule over the entire universe.

So, while we come to a passage like this and naturally ask, what's next? This passage has a question of its own for you. And you see it in the angel's question to the apostles. These angels asked the apostles. What are you doing? What are you doing? You have seen the ascension. What are you going to do about it? What are you doing? The implication of this question is, if you truly see this moment of Jesus' ascension, it will connect you to this movement of Jesus' people who leverage everything they have, who are willing to sacrifice for the message of the ascended Lord. What does that mean for us? It means different things for different people. For some of us, it will mean we need to give. Maybe more than we've given. For some of us, it may, it will mean we need to go. We need to go further than we've ever gone before. But for all of us, it means pressing down on the gas of our witness. Building on ramps to the Gospel. Not being slowed down by the speed traps of our own comfort.

Let's pray.

God, we come to You just in awe of Your good plan that moves in ways that we would never expect, that overcomes problems that we can never solve, motivated by love that we don't even deserve. And God we ask Your Spirit to move in our hearts. We come to You seeing a passage that talks about the way that Jesus has ascended to the throne and sent His Spirit to be the power by which He rules over the Earth from heaven. Let that same spirit rule over our hearts. Here by the power of your word, we ask the Spirit to seal this word to our hearts. We ask You to work in it to drive us to whatever You would have us do. And whoever You would have us be. And we ask this in the name and for the glory of our ascended Lord and King, Jesus. Amen.