

Watching, but Working  
June 29, 2014

Do you ever find yourself focused on the wrong thing at the wrong time? Like you are supposed to be getting ready for school and you are busy looking for something you won't need until you get home from school? Or you are supposed to be working on that project at work and you are busy rearranging your desk?

Maybe you were late getting here today because you were reading the newspaper. Perhaps one night this week supper was late because you were checking your email. Perhaps you were so involved in a big project at home you forgot to pay a bill. Perhaps you let an anniversary go by because of the other things you were focused on.

Such things can happen to all of us. Sometimes the distraction isn't an important thing and sometimes it is. You can focus on something important, but that isn't important RIGHT now. Maybe you were so focused on getting the car fixed that you let your grass get too high to mow easily, causing you to have to rake the yard which took time away from other chores that needed doing. Maybe it started a chain reaction of chores being pushed aside. You can focus on something important, but that isn't important RIGHT now.

We see an example of that in the Bible this morning. The disciples of Jesus are so focused on one thing that they miss the bigger and more important things that God was doing at the moment.

The passage we are going to look at this morning is in the first chapter of the book of Acts. Since it is the first chapter, let's start at the beginning of the chapter and see where this fits in the history of Jesus.

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

Luke is writing this book to his friend about Jesus. He finished his account of Jesus' life and ministry. Now he is writing about what happened after Jesus returned to heaven.

**Acts 1:3 (NIV)** After his suffering, he showed himself to these men 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.

What we are going to read next took place within that forty day period of time.

I'm sure those days were filled with joy, wonder, and excitement. The apostles had been with Jesus for three years, experiencing many demonstrations of God's power. Then, unexpectedly,

Jesus was arrested and put to death. But a few days later He was raised from the dead by the power of God.

Then starting with the resurrection, Jesus has been focused on three things. He is proving in various ways that He is not a ghost, but truly has been resurrected. He is teaching them more about the kingdom of God. And He is giving them the assignment to be witnesses to the world of His resurrection.

**Acts 1:4-5 (NIV)** 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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus had proven to them from the Old Testament that He was the expected Messiah. As the Messiah He had a mission for them. But they were more focused on other things. We know this because of something they asked Jesus during this time period.

**Acts 1:6 (NIV)** So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

My dictionary defines a kingdom as a geographical country ruled by a king. They wanted their country, Israel, to be ruled by a descendent of King David. Instead, the nation of Israel was being ruled by the Romans. God had promised, through the prophets, that He would one day free Israel. They believed that would happen when the Messiah came.

We can understand their distraction when we understand all that they were expecting to happen when the Messiah came. They were expecting much more than getting rid of the Romans. There were other significant promises God had made to Israel. Let me read some of these to you.

#### **Promises about Israel's Future:**

**Isaiah 60:10-11 (NIV)** "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you... Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations-- their kings led in triumphal procession.

Israel would become the most powerful, rich, and influential nation on the planet. And this would continue forever.

**Isaiah 60:18-19 (NIV)** No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD (Yahweh) will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

**Jeremiah 3:17 (NIV)** At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD (Yahweh), and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD (Yahweh).

More such promises: (Isaiah 2:4; 4:2; 9:6-7; 11:6-9; 61:5-6; 65:17; Jeremiah 24:6-7; Joel 3:16-18; Zechariah 2:4-5)

The apostles of Jesus assumed that all of these things were going to happen when the Messiah came. They now understood Jesus to be the Messiah, and so they asked if now was the time He would complete the other promises. It wasn't just about ridding their land of Roman rule. It was about initiating the glorious age of Israel.

We can understand their expectations. We would have done the same thing. In fact, maybe you have. There have been times that I've wanted to know how much longer until Jesus comes back. How much long until Jesus arrives in His glory, and we receive glory with Him? How much longer until Jesus returns and establishes His rule on the earth?

I have imagined what that will be like. Imagine Jesus being in control of this planet. Imagine Jesus solving all of the world's problems. Jesus has the power to stop the wars. Jesus has the manpower to keep our neighborhoods safe. Jesus has the knowledge and wisdom to end hunger and unemployment. Imagine a thousand years of peace and prosperity for the whole world. I'd like to know when this will happen. Wouldn't you?

So we can understand the apostles' question. But look how Jesus answers.

**Acts 1:7 (NIV)** He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

It wasn't for them to know when God would fulfill the promises to Israel. Nor is it for us to know when Jesus will return.

**It is not our job to know when.**

It wasn't their job to know. Even Jesus didn't know. Why should His disciples expect to know. It wasn't their job to know when. Their job was to witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Their job was to explain the good news of Jesus to the world. Their job wasn't to know when God would keep all His promises to Israel.

Nor is it our job to know. It isn't our job to know when. We have a work to do for Jesus that needs doing. Knowing when Jesus will return isn't necessary for us to do our job.

**It is not good for us to know when.**

What would you do differently tomorrow if God told you today when Jesus was returning? Would you really be a better follower of Jesus if you knew when He was returning? Maybe you would be worse for knowing. Maybe you would slack off from the work He has for you to do.

Knowing when would create new temptations for you. You would be tempted to tell others. You might even convince them. Not long ago a man thought he knew when Jesus was returning and others started following him instead of Jesus. Some sold all their possessions and quit doing the work Jesus has assigned.

No, it would not be good for us to know. Knowing would distract us from the work Jesus has for us to do TODAY. That's what we see in this chapter. Jesus is focused on them being ready to be witnesses. And all they can talk about is when God will fulfill the other promises about Israel. No, it would not be good for us to know.

**It is not possible for us to know when.**

Yet men keep trying to figure it out, as if they CAN figure it out. But Jesus said, it isn't for us to know. So ignore the Bible Code, puzzles lifted from the Old Testament prophets, any kind of numbering system, or genealogies. None of that will tell you when Jesus will return because it isn't possible for us to figure it out. It isn't for us to know.

So what the word for us today?

**Be watching for Christ's return, but doing our work.**

The apostles were to be busy doing apostle work. Theirs was a unique calling, one that not all Christians share. Others too have a special calling. Some are called by God to be pastors, some missionaries, some church planters, some seminary or Bible college professors, and some chaplains and counselors. These are special callings that not every Christian shares.

But there is work for every Christian to do.

**John 13:34-35 (NIV)** "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The work of every Christian is to love others as Jesus loves us. It is not for us to know when Jesus will return. But it IS for us to love others as Jesus loves us. This is our work as Christians.

While there are many other commands given us in the New Testament, this one stands apart. Jesus gives a special designation to this one. He calls it "a new commandment". This is the priority command. It shows up in all the rest of the New Testament, more than any other subject.

It is the basis for all else that we do, even evangelism and outreach. Note that this is how people will know we are Jesus' disciples, by our love for people. Everything else we are to do as Christians is an extension of this command fulfilled.

This is our priority work. This is the work of every Christian. No matter what else you do or don't do, you must do this. No matter what else you can or cannot do you can do this.

How that plays out will be different for every one of us. But it is the work that Jesus expects of all of His followers. Let us do that work and trust that Jesus will return at the time the Father has set. Let us be watching, but working.

The apostles were focused on something important, but it wasn't the most important thing for that time. How about you? Are you focused on something important more than the work Jesus has for you to do? Are you focused on your job more than loving people? Maybe it is your family you are more focused on. They are important, but not more important than the work of loving others as Jesus loves you.

Even church work is not more important than this. Preaching or teaching is not more important than this. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul writes that even if you were the best preacher or teacher or miracle worker in the world, but had not this love of Jesus that you are nothing. Your efforts will amount to nothing.

My preaching is not more important than my work of loving you as Jesus loves me. Your work of teaching is not more important. All that you are planning to do in Vacation Bible School is not more important. The most important thing for us to do with the children who will come here is to love them as Jesus loves us.

What is standing as of first importance in your life today that should not be first? Move it to second place and put this back in first place. Jesus has a work for us to do and we MUST be focused on it at all times no matter what else we are focused on doing.

Before we leave this passage this morning, note the good news that is here. Look again at what Jesus said.

**Acts 1:7 (NIV)** He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

It isn't for us to know the times or the dates. But it IS for us to know that God, the Father HAS set such a time by His own authority. The events promised WILL come to pass. God has the power and the knowledge and the authority to make them come to pass exactly when He wants them to do so.

Jesus WILL return one day. That word comes from God.

God has also said there is a day of judgment coming, a day when we will give an accounting to God for our lives. Your only hope of a pardon on that day will be your faith in Jesus Christ.

So begin today. Put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. He is adequate to put your hope in because He died in your place on the cross.

Today receive Jesus as your Savior, and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.