

What's the Message – Lesson 107

With today's lesson we study the beginning of the Christian Church.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we pray that You would enrich our lives and enable us to be effective witnesses of the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may speak out boldly, beginning right here at home, then spreading that message out to the entire world. Amen.

In our last several lessons we have studied that the purpose of the death of Jesus was to save us from the eternal consequence of sin; that His death was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham; that the cross was a victory for us; and that we can be certain that His resurrection is real, and the sign of acceptance and approval by our Creator. In today's lesson we begin to see the impact all these events had upon the little band of His followers.

So Dale, would you set the scene for us, by reading the first three verses of the Book of Acts.

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

In other words, for forty days after His resurrection, Jesus explained to them again how the prophets had spoken about His coming, His ministry, and His death. And He talked to them about the kingdom of God. Now, the idea of a kingdom was something that was familiar to them, but they kept thinking of this kingdom as a political thing like the kingdom of King David, something in which they would have prominent roles.

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. So when they met together, they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Once again we have another incident of Jesus eating with the disciples. A phantom or ghost does not eat. And what is the first thing Jesus told them to do? He said, “Wait.” Wait until they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, a power that was something beyond their experience, a dynamo they could not imagine. But after receiving it, they would understand everything better, and be equipped to be His witnesses.

For one thing, they still lacked proper understanding of the kingdom of God, that it was not a political thing, but something that resides within a person. And there is one more point in these opening verses that we need to focus on.

He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by His own authority. But 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.”

In giving us this statement, Luke provides us with an outline of the Book of Acts. They would begin their work in Jerusalem, their base. It was the same message that God gave Israel through Jeremiah (29:7), as we saw in our Lesson 75. Don't look for a better place to work, start work where you are right now! In time this work will spread out to encompass the ends of the earth.

And when He had said this, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in

white robes, and 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.”

Jesus had left them. But instead of a frightening doubt, they had a comforting assurance within them that Jesus was still with them. They could remember some of the last words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20):

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

It was a message with both a command and a promise. They were to become the blessing to the world that Abraham was called to be. But they would not be alone – Jesus promised to be with them always. Maybe they didn’t yet grasp the enormity of the assignment they had been given – to reach the ends of the earth with the message that Jesus had risen from the dead to forgive our sin – but they had taken the next great step in their preparation.

So they walked, perhaps we could even say marched, back into Jerusalem to wait another 10 days for the Holy Spirit to come into their lives. Here was the most unlikely group of men for such a task – four fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John; plus Matthew the former tax collector; Thomas the doubter; and five others the Gospels hardly give us much more than their names – Philip, Nathanael, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, and Simon the Zealot.

What could be expected from this tiny group, plus a few other followers of Jesus? Well, as we read in the first chapter of Acts, verses 12 – 14, *they went to the upper room where they were staying . . . and with one accord devoted themselves to prayer.* And the world hasn’t been the same since.

Next time we will focus on the events of Pentecost.