

Living in the Light of Christ's Return

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[0 : 01] Picture a relay race and you have the baton and you are running as fast as you can around that track and you're carrying it for a portion of the race and you're waiting for the next runner as you come around and you hand that baton off to the next runner.

And as they run, they keep their eyes on the finish line, knowing that when that person crosses, your whole team crosses together, if you will, and trusting that you win the race.

In our journey as followers of Jesus Christ, one with eternal implications, we're part of a team bound together by one person, Jesus Christ.

And as we have been placed into that body of Christ and the Apostle Paul talks about this Christian life being a race, today's message is going to be about exploring the ascension of Jesus Christ and his ongoing ministry and his ultimate return for his followers.

And we know that he is going to be setting foot on the Mount of Olives one day. And we are today, our mission is to advance the kingdom of God in making disciples, sharing the gospel, and teaching what Jesus Christ has taught.

[1 : 38] And we hopefully expect this until Jesus Christ returns. So this morning, we're going to delve into the very powerful passage of Acts chapter one, verses nine through 11.

So get your Bibles ready. And this morning, we're going to be going through some different verses today as well as we look at studying this particular passage.

So as we look at it, let's remember the inevitability of the return of Christ. He is coming back. But also that we would be encouraged to faithful service as we are waiting for him to return.

We're going to read in the book of Acts in just a moment what was told to the disciples and what they were to expect. Now, just a little review from last week. And by the way, Larry helped you out this morning because he reviewed with you.

So as we review last week, the main things that we need to remember, the book of Acts really is about the acts of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 46] Jesus Christ, Luke, which Acts is volume two of what the book that Luke began with. And he says, all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.

He says, oh, Theophilus, I gave you in my previous treatise. But the book of Acts is about the continuation of not only all that Jesus both began to do and to teach while in his physical body.

The book of Acts is what Jesus continued to do through his spiritual body, the church and everything that we're doing today in the power of God's Holy Spirit and done for his honor and done for his glory is a continuation of what Jesus did.

So the Holy Spirit fills us with the Holy Spirit fills us with power. Power. And I was reminded this morning that someone is going to be teaching in the book of Acts to, I guess, tomorrow.

Is that is that or something you're teaching something? No, I got it all wrong. OK, so how to use the concordance.

[4 : 02] But what I was told this morning, I was reminded of the fact that the word power appears in the book of Acts 71 times.

Power and the Greek word. Can someone tell me the Greek word for power that's primarily used in the book of Acts? Anybody remember some of you Greek scholars? Dunamis.

Yes, yes. Yes, the word, the Greek word from which we get our English word dynamite. All of that power packed into a very small package.

And so the Holy Spirit fills us with power. The Holy Spirit gives us a purpose. Very good. Our purpose is to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples.

And the Holy Spirit gives us a plan. Jesus said, you're going to be my witnesses. So the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall receive power to be my witnesses.

[5 : 08] That's our purpose. And he said, beginning in Jerusalem. And he says, and then all Judea, Samaria, ultimately to the far ends of the earth.

That's our plan. It starts where we are. It starts in your own family. It starts on your own street. It starts in your neighborhood. And it continues on, ultimately, all around the world.

So let's take a look at verses 9 through 11 of Acts chapter 1. Verse 9 says, Now when he had spoken, when Jesus had spoken these things, while his disciples were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

And while they, you can imagine. While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand? What are you doing? Why are you staring? Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? I would have probably been staring too. This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven.

[6 : 27] And this is the glorious hope that you and I have. That he will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.

Jesus is what? Coming back. Now, we know that this is a reference to the bodily return of Jesus on the Mount of Olives when he comes back bodily.

Now, for us who know him, those who are dead in Christ will rise first on the day we call the rapture. Then those of us who are alive and remain shall be caught up together in the clouds.

The Bible says, So shall we ever be with the Lord. Now, we have that to look forward to. But ultimately, Jesus Christ, at the end of the age, Jesus Christ is going to come back and he's going to set everything right.

So he says, Why are you staring? Jesus is going to come back just like you saw him go up. And he's going to come down and he is going to set foot on planet Earth. And he is going to make everything right.

[7 : 35] But the main point is, Jesus is coming back. Whether it's at the end of the age or whether it's for us in this age that we, those of us who know Jesus Christ, the point is, Jesus Christ is coming back.

So what's Jesus been doing all this time? It's been 2,000 years. So what's Jesus been doing after he was taken up into heaven?

And what is he doing today? That's what we're going to be looking at this morning. And then the third question is, how does it affect us?

The first thing we can do is we can find strength in Jesus' ongoing ministry. Life is tough. Isn't that right? Life is hard.

Life is harder on some than others. Life has been very, very hard on followers of Jesus Christ. There is a new book that is out.

[8 : 36] How many of you have ever read Fox's Book of Martyrs? Some of you. It's an older book. It's been around for many, many, many years. And it chronicles the experiences of many followers of Christ as they were beheaded, as they were tortured, as they were skinned alive, as they were burned.

All of these things just because they named Jesus Christ as their Savior and they did not want to follow the current religion of their day or where they were.

And I forget the title of this new book, but it's kind of in the similar vein of Fox's Book of Martyrs. And it chronicles the current experiences of people who are still being martyred throughout the world simply for their faith in Jesus Christ.

And so life is hard. We have issues. We have problems. We have health problems, emotional problems, relationship problems, job problems, financial problems, all kinds of problems that you and I have.

Some are worse than others. But the thing is, we live in a broken, sin-cursed world. We have to work hard by the sweat of our brow to make ends meet.

[9 : 54] And so we can find hope in the fact that Jesus has an ongoing ministry for you and for me. And the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven allowed him to continue his ministry in the presence of his heavenly Father.

As our high priest and as our advocate. So this truth has some profound implications for you and for me. Just imagine Jesus as our high priest.

What was the purpose of a high priest in the Old Testament? The people came to him, brought their sacrifices, which represented the sacrifice for their sin.

And the high priest was the one who took care of that sacrifice. And he acted as that mediator between the people of God and God himself and did that in their place.

But Jesus, as our high priest, has direct access to God because he is there with him and he intercedes on our behalf. Let's take a look at Hebrews chapter 4, verses 14 through 16.

[11:06] Verse 14 says, Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

What did Jesus do? A cloud received him up into the sky. He ascended up into the clouds. Seeing then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

Jesus, the Son of God, he says, Because of this, stand firm. Let us hold fast our confession. You say you believe in Jesus being the Son of God who died on the cross in your place?

He said, Don't let anybody move you off of that conviction. He says, Stand fast. Hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.

Think about that. There is a thing today called peer support. We have it in the military.

[12:05] We have it in first responders. The hospitals do the same thing. And when you go through something difficult, you want to talk to someone who has what? Who has been there.

Who knows what it's like. They've walked in your shoes. And so they can say, Yes, I know what it's like when that happened to me. This is how I got through it.

And so we have a high priest who knows what it's like to be hungry, to be tired, to be mocked. He knows what it's like to be rejected.

Jesus knows he can sympathize with our weaknesses. He says, But what was in all points tempted as we are. We know what happened when Satan came to him and he gave them all of these options.

But Jesus Christ chose not to succumb to Satan's temptations. He says, Yet without sin. And he says, Because of all of this, the writer of Hebrews says, Let us therefore come how?

[13:08] Come boldly before the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Now you and I have need all the time. So we can come boldly before the throne of grace.

So what's Jesus doing? What's Jesus been doing for a thousand years? What is he doing today and how does it affect us? We have a great high priest who ascended, who was caught up through the clouds.

And he's sitting at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us. He knows what it's like to be a human being. And so we can therefore come boldly before his throne of grace. And that we can obtain mercy and find grace to help when we need it most.

He understands our weaknesses, our temptations. So, in light of Jesus' role as our high priest, how can we apply it? What difference does it make in our life?

We can approach God with confidence. Because we know Jesus, our great high priest, is with God the Father. And he will take what we give to him and he will intercede for us as our great high priest.

[14:17] Just like a high priest in the Old Testament interceded for the people, went into the Holy of Holies, and sacrificed that animal. Blood was sprinkled on the altar. God accepted that sacrifice for another year.

But God be praised when Jesus Christ breathed his last on the cross. And we sang about it just a moment ago. Jesus cried out, It is finished.

What was finished? His payment for our sin. And so we can come boldly. When we face challenges, turn to Jesus. When you face difficulties, turn to Jesus. Why?

Because he is our advocate. As our advocate, Jesus pleads our case before God the Father. That's what he's doing. And that's what his ascension into heaven allowed him to do.

Let's take a look at 1 John 1, verse 9 through verse 2 of chapter 2. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[15:22] If we say that we haven't sinned, think about it. We make God a liar. Because the Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. Chapter 2, verse 1. God loves to speak to his readers like that in a language that referred to his readers as children.

He says, my little children, these things I write to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have a what? We have an advocate.

Like an attorney who pleads your case. But even more than that, it's someone who has a relationship with the one with whom he is pleading. As a child, did you ever go? Now, I know in my family it's like this. When I wanted something that dad probably wouldn't have given me, I went to mom. And she pleaded my case for me. Usually, well, sometimes it worked. [16:24] And so, we have Jesus who is related to the Father, who always wants what's best for us. And he is our advocate with the Father.

Jesus Christ, the righteousness. And he himself is the propitiation. That's a big, fancy word. All it means is Jesus' death on the cross satisfied the wrath of God and the payment for our sin. Jesus Christ propitiated. He became the sacrifice. And that sacrifice pleased God the Father. And it was effective. But not for ours only.

But also for the whole world. Jesus Christ's sacrifice paid the penalty for our sin. And today, he's continuing doing that on our behalf.

So, in times when we fail, and we will fail, know that if we confess our sin, he is faithful. He's just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[17:28] So, how do we live in light of this ongoing ministry? Understanding that Jesus is ongoing ministry in heaven, it should inspire us to cultivate a deeper relationship with him.

Because he's doing all this for us. It should cultivate that deeper relationship. And that relationship is the foundation of our spiritual growth. Because we see in John, Abide in him.

Abide in me. And I in you, Jesus says, As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, Neither can you unless you abide in me.

He said, I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. For without me, you can do, what?

Nothing. So, Jesus Christ, our high priest, ongoing ministry, he's in heaven, our high priest, he's our advocate. And so, it would behoove us to grow in that relationship with him.

[18:37] And as he said, abide in me. Make yourself at home with me. We are in Christ if we know him as our savior. And so, how do we cultivate that?

Spend time in listening to him as we read and as we study his word. Spend time in prayer. This morning, before we ever got here, we prayed for this time together this morning.

Before any of our worship team came up on stage, we laid hands on our worship team and prayed for our worship team. And they prayed for me that God's word would be proclaimed this morning. Everything we do should be bathed in prayer. And our goal is to, in everything that we do, to be able to experience the transforming power and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

So, let's encourage one another with this. And then secondly, we can anticipate Jesus' glorious return. This is not all there is.

[19:48] This is not all that there will be. And as the hymn of old, you know, we are just pilgrims passing through. We are not here.

And as we mentioned last week in the think about going through a jungle and you've been tasked with getting this group of people safely out of the jungle, back to civilization, so they don't die in the jungle.

But sometimes people get sidetracked and take little side trips and say, well, look, this is a beautiful little place. Let's go ahead and just, you know, cut some trees, build a cabin, and let's just stay here. A lot of people are doing that in today's world. They're putting all of their time and their efforts, their talents into this world like there's not even going to be another world. One day, all of that we know is going to burn up.

The Bible says with a fervent heat. And then there's going to be a new heaven. There's going to be a new earth. And we're going to live eternally with God the Father in heaven. Everything that you and I are saving up for today is going to be burned up.

[20:49] So what's the point? He says that what we're doing should ultimately be done for his honor and his glory. So we have the promise of Jesus' return.

Let's take a look at Matthew. Matthew 24, 30. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn.

And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Just as the two who stood beside these disciples, they said, Why stand you gazing up in heaven?

For the Son of Man will come. He'll return in like fashion. He will come through the clouds. He will descend. I don't know what it's going to be like. If that's actually going to be like slow motion.

I don't know. But nonetheless, Jesus is going to do it. And so he says, And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, for they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

[22 : 01] So this event, when Jesus Christ comes back at the end of the age, is going to mark the culmination of human history and the beginning of a new era where Jesus is going to be reigning as king over all creation.

So what does this mean to us? Well, let's hold fast the promise of Jesus' return. He is coming back. And we can anchor our faith in that. We trust in a God who is alive and in one who is coming back. And I think that, let's take a look. As we anticipate the return of Jesus, we need to live with an eternal perspective. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 through 18, where the Apostle Paul said, But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren.

There is something they did not know. Concerning those who have fallen asleep. Concerning those who have died prior to when Paul wrote this. Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

[23 : 23] 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.

Then we who are alive and remain with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

This means prioritizing our life with him and seeking to put him first, as Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 33, that we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things, food, clothing, shelter, job, all of these things, he says, are going to be added to us.

So let's evaluate our priorities. Let's evaluate our decisions. And every action that we take, let's evaluate it in terms of eternity.

Living in the light of eternity means every decision we make, how is this going to affect eternity? How is this going to affect? Am I, what am I doing today for the kingdom of God?

[24 : 46] Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto us. So are we investing our time? Are we investing our talents?

Are we investing our resources in eternity? Now there's nothing wrong with, with recreation. God says we need a rest.

Jesus Christ went off by himself into the wilderness. So sometimes we need to take a break, take a rest, go somewhere, but that's not all that there is.

We do it so that we can come back and continue what we're doing. So we invest our time, our talents, our resources in eternity. And then I believe that in light of Jesus' return, we should stay spiritually fit so that we'll be ready for his return.

Stay alert. Stay prepared. Look at Matthew with me. Matthew 24, 42 to 44. Now I realize that we're looking at different moments in time.

[25 : 57] A lot of the writers, especially the Old Testament writers, were looking at prophecy, almost like when we look at through binoculars or through a telescope.

We see the things that are in the distance almost look like they're close together or almost like they're together and they might be miles apart. And it's kind of the way with prophecy. Jesus Christ is going to come back for his own, for us, and what we call the rapture.

Then Jesus Christ is going to come back, set foot on planet Earth, and he's going to usher in the thousand-year reign. So what we're reading today is a little bit of rapture, a little bit of his ultimate return, but I'm kind of compressing those in the fact that Jesus is coming back.

And we just need to be ready. Watch, therefore, verse 42 says, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

He says, therefore, you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. And by application, the same holds true.

[27 : 12] For when Jesus Christ comes back for his church, it could be in the middle of the night. It could be during this message. It could be on your way home.

The point is, as Scripture says, redeem the time. Buy back every minute that you can to do things for his honor and to do things for his glory.

So be ready. Be alert. It's like when your spouse or when someone goes on a trip, maybe on a business trip, and you expect them to come back at any moment.

You want things to be ready. You want things to be prepared. You know, I remember years ago when Catherine would get on a flight and she would go visit her sister or she would go somewhere, and I wanted to make sure that when she came back, the dishes were all clean, washed, and all put up.

The floor was vacuumed, and everything was ready. I didn't want her to come back and see a mess. And so it's just like that with our lives. Do we want Jesus to come back and see our lives in a mess, or do we want to be drawing closer to him and be ready and be alert and be prepared when he comes back for us?

[28 : 29] And so as we anticipate the return of Jesus, the return of Jesus, we can find new hope. We can find motivation and purpose in our lives because he hasn't left us alone.

He is coming back for us. And then we are to serve faithfully in the light of his return.

We need to be working. As we eagerly await the return of Christ, it should be coupled with a deep commitment to serve him, a deep commitment to be doing what he, to be obedient, doing what he told us to do and recognizing that we have a limited time on earth.

Yes, we've had 2,000, over 2,000 years. You might have had 40 years. You might have had 80 some odd years. But the thing is, that time is limited when you consider eternity.

It's a short amount of time. So as we close, number one, I think we are to be faithful stewards.

Faithful stewards. Luke 12, 34 to 40.

[29 : 36] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Our attitudes, our passions, all of these follow our money, follow our resources.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Luke 12, 35. Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning, and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master when he'll return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately.

This is talking about a wedding during this period of time, and it was totally different from the way we have weddings today. He goes on, blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.

Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch or come in the third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants.

But know this, that if the master of the house had come, had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

[30 : 49] He says in verse 40, Therefore, you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at the hour you do not expect. Now, Jesus gives a whole lot of parables about stewardship, about how we use our resources, our time, our talents, our testimony.

And as we, as we wait for Jesus to come back, God wants us to be investing our lives in his kingdom.

Just like we invest money, we want a return. We want a good return on our money. The better the return, the better. I mean, 5%, good. 7%, better.

8%, wow, we get 8% today. We'd be, we'd be, we'd be good, right? And so we invest in order to gain a greater return. And as we invest our lives, how do we do that?

We share the gospel. We, we show the love of Christ to others. And we invest our lives in his kingdom. And that is what he wants us to be doing.

[31 : 56] Let's examine our lives, ask ourselves if we're truly being faithful stewards of the gifts he's given you. And our worship team is using the gifts he's given to them. Our Sunday school teachers using the gift he's given them.

If he's given you a gift of service, of, of, of, of helps, of administration, are we using those to accomplish the mission that God has left us with?

And then sharing the gospel. Use our resources as good stewards, but then are we sharing the gospel? Let's be intentional because really, what did Jesus say?

You will be my witnesses when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And then encouraging and supporting one another.

Therefore, verse 11 of 1 Thessalonians 5, therefore, comfort each other and edify, build up one another just as you also are doing.

[32 : 57] We need to be intentional about investing ourselves or investing into the lives of others. Make disciples, encourage, comfort as we watch one another grow.

Let's be good faithful stewards of the gifts He's given us by living with eternity in mind, living in the light of eternity. Let's be spiritually alert and be prepared for His return.

And as we go, as we go out from here, let's remember we're entering the mission field. That's really what we're doing when we go out from here. We are entering the mission field.

And as we await for the glorious return of Jesus Christ, let's find joy and purpose in that Jesus Christ is coming back for us in like manner, just like you saw Him go up.

He will again come back one day. So may God bless us, may God keep you, and that may we live each day with anticipation that Jesus Christ in His return for us it might be today.

[34 : 05] Let's pray. Father, we come to You today. We lift up our praise to You. We're so, so very thankful that You have come for us.

May we be able to live every moment of every day in the light of Your return. That You may return tomorrow. You may return today. Let us be prepared.

as we are filled with joy and anticipation because we know You're coming back. And so Father, I pray that You help us to be busy and be prepared.

We thank You for what You're going to accomplish. For it's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.