

50 Days of Wonder: He Ascended Into Heaven: 3

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Date: 13 July 2014

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. If you're wondering where Aaron is the last couple of weeks, he's making headline news at Qualicum Beach, literally.

His picture was on the front page of Qualicum Beach newspaper with one of his daughters, which is awesome. Aaron transforms any place he goes to.

Keeps things fun, so it's great. If you looked in your bulletin and you saw the title, I just wanted to point us to the title today. We're in a series called 50 Days of Wonder, The Ascension of Jesus Christ, Round 3.

Now, any title that can get two colons in it, I find pretty impressive. Or maybe it should just stop eventually. But our passage today, right in verse 9 of Acts chapter 1, has the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we've been talking about.

And when he said these things, Luke tells us, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. But notice how Luke gives only one verse to actually describing the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 12] He doesn't give a lot of detail and time to it in this particular passage. In fact, his emphasis lies elsewhere. So I'm not even going to spend most of my time talking about the ascension.

And we're going to spend 20 minutes here talking about verse 8. Verse 8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. These are the final words of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on earth.

And it's been said often of people that a person's final words convey what they most truly and deeply care about. And here we get this beautiful window into the final words of our Lord and Savior.

And it's as if Luke is revealing to us, giving us a glimpse of Jesus' heartbeat for the nations and for his people. But before we get into verse 8, let's back up just a little bit and run at this thing with a bit of context.

[2 : 19] Jesus' words are a response to a question from the disciples. Look at verse 6. The disciples ask him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Now, the disciples' question is a bit misguided. They have nationalistic aspirations and political hopes that are clouding and distorting their vision of the kingdom of God.

So there's a sense in which it's misguided, but there's also a sense in which the disciples' question is completely understandable. I mean, think that just 40 days ago for the disciples, Jesus Christ had been, he was crucified, and he was laid in an empty tomb and a rock was covered him in that darkness.

And it seemed like the one that they had been following for three straight years devoting their life to was dead in the grave over. At the end of the Gospel of John, we're told the disciples despaired so much that they just went back to their day jobs.

I mean, what are you supposed to do? It's over now. Let's just continue on with life per usual. But Luke tells us in chapter 3 that Jesus rose, I mean in verse 3, that Jesus rose from the dead and he was presenting himself to them alive after his suffering with many proofs.

[3 : 40] Jesus was appearing to the disciples in his resurrected glory. And then in verse 3, we see that Jesus was speaking to them about the kingdom of God, the reign of God breaking into the world through this resurrected Messiah.

To make things even more intense in verses 4 and 5, we find out that Jesus is promising them that he will baptize them in the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you're the Jewish disciples at this point, you know your Old Testament scriptures. And you know that Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Joel prophesied that there would be a day when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on God's people in a way that had never been seen before. And that that would be the great day when the kingdom of God finally broke in and God's reign was established on earth as it is in heaven. So you can imagine for the disciples how exhilarating this must have been.

They thought the kingdom of God was coming. And you note the sense of excitement on their lips as this excitement burns deep within their hearts. Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[4 : 50] But notice how Jesus responds in a striking way. Verse 7, Jesus issues a gentle rebuke. He says to them, It's not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

That's not the point, says Jesus. Then in verse 8, Jesus issues some powerful promises. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Verse 8, this glorious, powerful, little verse.

For those of you that like structure and order like I do, I'm going to hit verse 8 through three angles. The nature of Christian mission, the extent of it and the power of it.

The nature of it, the extent of it and the power of it. Look at that phrase right in the middle. Jesus promises, you will be my witnesses. Now if you're anything like me, when you hear the word witnesses, your eyes start to glaze over, your mind goes numb because you've heard that word so many times before, you feel like you know what it means, you don't really need to think about it.

[6 : 09] And because we don't think about it, we don't really know what it means. So what does it mean to be Jesus' witnesses? We hear it a lot, but what does it actually mean? Now I think this word, and this is something I discovered this past week that just blew my categories.

This word shows up in three places in Isaiah, the book of Isaiah, very, very significantly. And I think Jesus is actually drawing on that. It's Isaiah chapter 43 verses 10 to 12 and 44 verses 6 to 8.

It shows up three times in those two passages. Flip to Isaiah 43. I'm going to read that one for us, but not the other because of time. And this part of Isaiah is one big courtroom scene.

It's like a cosmic lawsuit. It's as if God has called all of the nations to come to this cosmic lawsuit. They're sitting in the courtroom.

God is the judge and he is calling his people to be witnesses to stand up and testify before the whole court about who he is. Listen to what God says to his witnesses when he calls them up in Isaiah 43 verses 10 to 12.

[7 : 26] God says to his people, you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me, no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me, there is no Savior.

I declared and saved and proclaimed when there was no strange God among you, and you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and I am God.

flip back to Acts chapter 1. So God calls his people up to the witness stand and he says, you are my witnesses and what is it in particular that God tells them they are witnesses of?

Of the fact that God alone is the Lord of the world and that salvation is found in him alone and no one else. He's the first and the last. He's the beginning and the end.

[8 : 29] And so it makes a lot of sense in Acts chapter 1 that Jesus picks up on this word witnesses and that throughout the book of Acts it shows up over 40 times because in the book of Acts Jesus' disciples are continually on trial before people.

You know this. You know that Christians in the book of Acts there's opposition against them.

They're put on trial in these dark dungy prisons and they're put on trial in the great courts of the Roman Praetorium.

And they're constantly on trial. And it's as if Jesus knows that and he's saying it's right in the midst of those times that you are actually going to be witnesses to the fact that I am the one true Lord of the universe.

And it's no mistake that in the book of Acts as well the one thing that the witnesses are told to declare over and over again is that Jesus Christ has risen from the grave. Because if Jesus really

rose from the grave then he really is the Lord of the universe.

He really is the king. So to be a witness of Jesus means to testify to the nations in all circumstances that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior of the world.

[9 : 44] Now it's important that we recognize that this is not a choice. it's not a choice to be a witness. You either are or you aren't.

If you're a Christian you're a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not like Facebook where you can be a part of Facebook and that means you're a Christian or something and then whether you want to be a witness or not depends on whether you join some special group like it's an elite class.

That's not the case. If you are a Christian you are a witness precisely because by the power of the Holy Spirit God has opened the eyes of your heart to see that Jesus Christ died for your sins and he rose from the grave to give you new and everlasting life and that he is the only Lord and Savior of the world.

And because you have seen that God has made you a witness. He's made you a witness in every aspect of life no matter where you are.

And so the question is are you going to speak when you're called to the witness stand? But there's good news for us as well. Take another look at verse 8.

[10 : 57] Notice how it's not a command. This is so often taught as a command but it's not a command it's a promise. Yes in Matthew 28 Jesus says go be disciples of all nations.

He commands us and Jesus can. Yet here Jesus promises to do something in us and through us. He will make us his witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is something Jesus is going to do. You will be my witnesses. Look at the second part of that verse.

It's the extent of the mission. You will be my witnesses where? In Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Basically the gospel is for everybody.

And if you're the disciples at this point you are absolutely astounded by the fact that Jesus said Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. I mean you're blown away by that.

[12 : 00] Because in the Old Testament the picture the vision of God's mission was that God would establish Israel in Jerusalem and they would be a glorious nation and all the rest of the nations and peoples of the world would flock to them.

But Jesus is actually reversing that and saying exactly the opposite. He's saying you are my witnesses and you're actually going to go out from Jerusalem. And if you know the gospel of Luke you know that in the gospel of Luke Jesus' whole ministry is seen as a huge journey towards Jerusalem.

In chapter 9 verse 51 he set his face like Flint towards Jerusalem and he went to Jerusalem where he died and rose again and fulfilled the scriptures inaugurated the kingdom of God. And now Jesus is saying you are to go out from Jerusalem proclaiming everything that happened in Jerusalem. It's absolutely astounding. And one of the things that really amazes me about this I was thinking about this this week is that God doesn't decide to proclaim his salvation to the world by just writing it in the sky.

You ever had somebody ask you that? Why in the world does God not just write it in the sky so that everybody can see it, right? I don't have answers to that question. But I know that what we see here is that God wants person to person communication to be the way that his good news spreads throughout the world.

[13 : 27] Because salvation is found in a person Jesus Christ. And God chooses in the mystery of his grace to send out people to be witnesses all over the world to who Jesus is.

Now for some of us this is challenging because we get tunnel vision. How many of you get tunnel vision? I quite easily do it. I can so easily focus on my own life, my own circumstances, my own place.

But here we're challenged because we see that God has a heart for the whole entire world. Friends, it's amazing to read of what God is doing around the world.

I mean, if you can get your hands in some literature and find out what God is doing in Africa, what God is doing in Latin America, what God is doing in the Middle East, even in the midst of much persecution, it is astounding because God is work around the world.

and yet, mission become, mission begins in our hometown. God is at work right here. Mission begins to our own family members, with our own family members.

[14:45] Mission begins with the person that's in the apartment next door or the house next door. Mission begins with the person that's in the cubicle next to you. Mission begins with the person who's sitting in the desk next to you in the lecture hall or who's on the soccer team with you.

And one of the amazing things about living in Vancouver is that this mission at home is actually a mission to the ends of the earth. Because you think about Vancouver, one of the most diverse cities in the world, all the nations are flocking to Vancouver in a tremendous way.

They're actually in our backyard. And so the question is, are we going to reach out? Are we going to share God's heartbeat for the nations?

Once again, I want to remind you, this is a promise. Jesus says he will bring us to the nations. And it's the Holy Spirit who pushes us and leads us there.

It's the nature of mission, the extent, and now the power of mission. Look how Jesus begins. He begins with this promise. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

[15:59] The Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' disciples for ministry. Think about, when you think about the Holy Spirit, what ministries come to mind? You can think about the Bible, you think through the Bible and you think Holy Spirit is poured out and gives us spiritual gifts so that we can serve one another.

Holy Spirit is poured out and unites us with Jesus Christ and produces the character of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit is poured out and enables us and empowers us to leave sin and to walk in newness of life.

But here, the tremendous thing is that the Holy Spirit is poured out to empower us to be witnesses. And I find this to be tremendously good news.

I'm a horrible witness on my own power. I mean, seriously, I fumble over my words. I'm afraid. I have a lack of courage. Just the other day, I ran into our next door neighbor in the apartment, ran into her and she said, why are you, you know, you're coming home late.

It's like 10 o'clock. What's going on? I said, I just got done with work. She said, what do you do for work? I'm a pastor. Normally when I say that, that closes down conversation right away. But not so this time.

[17:16] she goes, oh, you're a pastor. Oh, that's great. I've been spiritually seeking and on a journey for the last three years and I would love to talk about it. And I was like, whoa, goodness gracious.

Well, this is great. So we chatted for a while. Susie and I had her over for dinner a couple weeks later and she's over for dinner and she starts unpacking over the last few years the journey that she's been on, this spiritual journey and what that looks like for her and how she's really seeking. And to make a long story story, I just botched it. I mean, during the time, I thought I was doing pretty well. I was like, oh, I'm relating to her. I'm talking about Jesus a bit.

I'm sharing some of my own spiritual journey. This is great. But as I looked back on it a few days afterwards, I realized I just botched it. I mean, brutally.

I had this wonderful opportunity to share with this woman who is really seeking, who her savior was, to tell her about the cross, that her sins are forgiven, to tell her about the resurrection and that she has everlasting life in her Lord.

[18:23] And I botched it. And I found this verse, this promise that the Holy Spirit will come upon us in power to be a great comfort, that the Holy Spirit comes upon us in power and he will continue to work on us and make us his witnesses.

And that he will continue to work on people even when we botch it up and our efforts are weak and insignificant. The Holy Spirit will come in power.

And it's encouraging because all throughout the book of Acts, the gospel never went forward in some triumphant glory. It was always resisted. There was always suffering.

There was always opposition. And we know that in Vancouver, don't we? It's not long for us to actually think about the headlines of what's going on at Trinity Western University or some of the public policies that are being developed and trying to be passed in downtown Vancouver school system.

For us to realize that there is opposition to the gospel and there are people who would much rather us just be quiet. The reality is that the Holy Spirit comes upon us in power and makes the gospel

go forward in the midst of weakness, in the midst of failure, in the midst of sin, in the midst of opposition.

[19 : 43] The gospel goes forward because Jesus has made a promise that he will empower us by his Holy Spirit. So let me remind you one last time, friends.

Acts 1-8 is not a command. It's a promise. And the mission of the church thrives and flourishes when we as Jesus' disciples cling to these promises of Jesus in every circumstance, in every area of our lives.

Jesus said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.