

Sunday, March 30, 2025 | Filled

Week 2 | Acts 1:6-11 | “The Ascension”

Last week, we embarked on a journey through the Book of Acts by starting a new series titled 'Filled.' This series is designed to help us understand the profound influence of the Holy Spirit in the early church and in our lives today.

Jesus told the disciples that just as 'John baptized with water,' he'll 'baptize' them with the 'with the Holy Spirit.' John's water-baptism symbolized being cleansed of one's sinfulness; it prepared the hearts of men to receive the coming king. Jesus's Spirit-baptism, on the other hand, is not the sin-cleansing type but the Spirit-indwelling type.

Just as John immersed people in the waters, Jesus immerses believers in the Holy Spirit, empowering and securing them. After being baptized by the Holy Spirit, Christians are 'clothed with power from on high' (Lu. 24:49). Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ are no longer dressed in sinfulness and fragility but are outfitted with God's righteousness and vitality. This means that the gospel's effectiveness doesn't rely on human capabilities but on the power of the Holy Spirit. Because Christians are **immersed** in the Holy Spirit, they're **outfitted** for gospel ministry.

READ: Acts 1:6-11 (ESV)

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this **time** restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is **not** for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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 end of the earth.”

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ 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.”

Today, we'll be talking about the ascension of Christ. Three passages described this event: Mark 16:19, Luke 24:50-51, and Acts 1:6-11, with the last being the most comprehensive. The ascension should not be *undervalued*. It marks the official end of Jesus' earthly ministry and validates everything the Lord did during those years (cf. Heb. 10:12-14).

Additionally, much was accomplished when Jesus returned to his former glory (cf. Jn. 17:5). Principally, because of the ascension, God the Spirit now *mediates* God's presence to believers. In other words, Christians become the temple of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). And this indwelling of the Spirit would not occur if Christ did not ascend to the Father (cf. Jn. 16:5-15).

Consequently, through the Spirit, God imparts *gifts* to the church. Believers are "washed," "sanctified," and "justified" by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11). The Holy Spirit fashions ministers for the explanation of the Scriptures (cf. Eph. 4:7-16). The Spirit cultivates "fruit" in the hearts of believers (Eph. 5:22-23). God the Father "seals" believers with God the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22), ensuring their salvation is eternally secure. The Christian need not be anxious about the future because the Holy Spirit leads, guides, and directs their paths (cf. Rom. 8:14). Even in times when a disciple does not know what to do or where to go, the Spirit prays on their behalf (cf. Rom. 8:26-27).

This list could go on. Suffice it to say, the benefits of the Holy Spirit are beyond compare. But if not for the *ascension* of God the Son, God the Spirit would never have *descended*, leaving the church utterly destitute.

In today's passage, the apostles had two problems:

i. Vs. 6-8 – They were too nationally focused.

Vs. 6 – The apostles asked Jesus if he was going to “[restore the kingdom of Israel](#).” Israel was under Roman rule, and these Jews wondered if their subjugation was over. And considering that the Lord was the heir to the Davidic throne, this was a fair question. Judaism taught that once the Messiah came, the end was near. All the nations would bow before him (cf. Isa. 9:6-7), and Israel would once again flourish (cf. Jer. 23:8; 31:27-34; Ez. 34-37; Isa. 2:2-4; 49:6; esp. Amos 9:11-15).¹ This was a major theme in the Christmas story (cf. Lu. 1:69-74; 2:25, 38). With the promise that the Spirit would descend, the disciples naturally thought God's program would conclude, and, as the Scriptures foretold, Israel would be vindicated.

Vs. 7 – Jesus does not give them the answer they wanted. He says, “[It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority](#).” What the apostles thought would occur soon would take much longer. In fact, a significant amount of time would

¹ Bock, Darrell L., Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 61.

pass between Jesus' inauguration and his consummation. As it is, the interim has lasted over 2,000 years and counting.

To be clear, this wasn't a denial, as if to say that God would never restore the kingdom of Israel. Someday Israel will be restored (cf. Rom. 11:26). Jesus wanted his apostles' focus to change. Rather than worry about nationalistic restoration, he wants them to focus elsewhere. God has "fixed" the "times" and "seasons." In other words, the Lord knows when he'll restore Israel; let him worry about such details.

Vs. 8 – Instead of being hyper-fixated on the nation of Israel and the timing of its restoration, the Lord would have the apostles meditate on the fact that they “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon [them], and [they] will be [his] witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

The word “power” is the Greek word δύναμις (*dynamis*) from which we get the word "dynamite;" it is a keyword in Acts, showing up 10 times (cf. 1:8; 2:22; 3:12; 4:7, 33; 6:8; 8:10, 13; 10:38; 19:11). By being endowed with *explosive* power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believers will be so emboldened that they'll testify about Jesus in the lands of Israel and beyond. This is illustrated by Paul when he says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

Jesus said they'd be “witnesses.” This is yet another key term in Acts, showing up 13 times (cf. 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 6:13; 7:58; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:10). A witness is someone who can verify a claim because they observed what occurred. The apostles were called to testify to the life of Christ. This is what Jesus told the disciples in the upper room.

READ: John 15:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Their experience with Christ qualified them to speak about Christ, while the indwelling of the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak boldly about their experience.

Thus, by asking about the restoration of Israel, the apostles weren't thinking big enough. They were worried about Israel's fate when Christ was concerned with the fate of the world. **The scope of the movement that Jesus was starting wasn't national but global.** Or, as Jesus put it, his kingdom would start in “Jerusalem,” hit “Judea,” impact “Samaria,” and spread to the “end

of the earth.” These geographical labels outline the progress of the church throughout the Book of Acts. Acts 1-7 occur in Jerusalem. Acts 8-10 centers on Judea and Samaria. And while we return to Jerusalem in Acts 11-12, afterward, we'll move toward Rome, the proverbial “end of the earth,” from which the gospel can spread even further.

So, what's the takeaway? The Christian's primary concern should not be the times or their tribe but their testimony.

As a bike is meant to be mobile, the church is meant to be missional. A church that is not mission-minded is not a church. A Christian who is not a witness for Christ is a lame Christian. Disciples are supposed to be disciple-makers. As I said last week, Christians are outfitted for gospel ministry because they are immersed in the Holy Spirit.

These few verses warn against the tendency among believers to be too focused on the end times and/or their tribe. It is good to be aware of what the Bible says about Eschatology, but we mustn't be so fixated on the future that we ignore what needs to be done today. While it is good to care for one another in the church, we mustn't circle the wagons. Our primary concern isn't eschatological or ecclesiological but evangelistic.

ii. **Vs. 9-11 – They were too heavenly focused.**

Vs. 9 – Luke tells us that as the apostles “were looking on, [Jesus] was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” The “cloud” mentioned here is God's glory (cf. Ex. 16:10; Psalm 104:3; Dan. 7:13; Lu. 9:34-35; Rev. 11:12). This is what is known as Christ's ascension; we'll talk about its significance in a moment.

Vs. 10-11 – Luke says that Jesus' ascension had the apostles mesmerized. He says they were left “gazing into heaven as he went.” The term “gazing” is ἀτενίζω (*atenizō*) and, yet again, this is another one of Luke's favorite words; of its 14 occurrences in the NT, 2 are found in Luke's gospel (cf. 4:20; 22:56) and 10 are in Acts (cf. 1:10; 3:4, 12; 6:15; 7:55; 10:4, 11:6; 13:9; 14:9; 23:1). *Atenizō* means to give significant attention to something (e.g., kids with tablets).² And, considering it is being used as a present active participle, this “gazing” was a continual actual. Essentially, these men could not take their eyes off the sky.

Now, while they gazed up into the sky, “behold, two men stood by them in white robes.” These “men” were, of course, angels (cf. Mar. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). Referring to the apostles as “men of Galilee,” they said, “Why do you stand looking into heaven?” This mild rebuke is reminiscent of another mild rebuke that occurred during the resurrection. At the tomb, two angels asked the

² Bock (2007), p. 68.

women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (Lu. 24:5). In both instances, the angels were pointing out the futility of a person’s actions. With the women, had they remembered Jesus’ words and believed what he said, they would’ve never gone to the tomb that day, looking for him. Likewise, had the apostles understood what Jesus had just said about them being “witnesses” for him in “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the world,” they wouldn’t have stayed there gawking up at the sky. Essentially, the angels were saying, “Why are you daydreaming? You’ve got work to do. Get to it!”

Moreover, the angels reassured the apostles that though he's gone, he'll return. They say, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." In other words, they won't miss his second coming. When Jesus comes back, he'll arrive the same way he left—i.e., riding a cloud for all to see.

So, what's the takeaway? The ascension of Christ enables Christian expansion through the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

READ: John 16:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Because Christ ascended, the Holy Spirit is sent to Christians the moment they believe. By the Spirit's coming to and indwelling believers, Christianity bears witness to the gospel, convicting the world of "sin," "righteousness," and "judgment." And through that testimony, the church expands.

Firstly, though every sin makes us guilty before God, truly, the only “sin” that sends anyone to hell is a failure to “believe” in Jesus Christ. The “unforgivable sin” is referred to as “blasphemy” against the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 12:31-32). But, make no mistake, this sin is nothing more complex than a persistent resistance to the Holy Spirit’s call to repent. The only sin that God cannot forgive is the one that we refuse to repent. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin to repent of their unbelief.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit works to convince a person that their so-called “righteousness” is about as good as a soiled diaper when compared to God’s righteousness (cf. Isa. 64:6). Christ’s ascension is proof that Jesus’ righteousness was accepted, which means, our

righteousness won't be accepted. This is why we should never play the comparison game with each other but with Christ. If we play the comparison game with each other, we're bound to find someone whose sin is more severe than our own (e.g., Hitler), thereby justifying ourselves. But if we play the comparison game with God, we're bound to say, as Paul said, that no one is righteous, no not one (cf. Rom. 3:10). The conviction that we cannot earn salvation through good works is one of the Holy Spirit primary objectives. Realizing that humanity is inherently evil and not good is something that only God the Spirit can do.

Lastly, the Spirit works towards convincing the world that they stand, not as a liberated people but as a *condemned* people. Unbelievers are under judgment "because the ruler of this world is judged." Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn. 3:16-18).

The witness of the believers consists of proclaiming the gospel. As the gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of "sin," "righteousness," and "judgment." Through this work, the church explodes.

Video Description:

Filled | Week 2 | "The Ascension" (Acts 1:6-11)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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