

Living In Expectation: The Acts 1 Church

We are beginning a new series today, Living In Expectation. Have you ever told a story and had people ask, “And then what?” You answer and they ask, “then what?” You tell them the next piece of the story and, “then what?” Two weeks ago we celebrated Easter and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We love to remind people that his death on the cross was not the end of the story. Then what happened? Three days later he rose from the grave in victory. Life conquered death. Hope conquered despair. His resurrection changed everything. “Then what?” “What’s next ?” What happened after the resurrection? Dr. Luke wrote the book of the bible we call Acts and gives us a bit of insight.

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. 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. 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?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or 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.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:1-11

Jesus is risen from the dead. Then what? He spends forty days meeting with and teaching the disciples, convincing them that he is truly risen bodily. Then what? He talks with them about the kingdom, gives them the command to wait for the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and then with that spiritual empowerment they are to go as his witnesses to the whole world. Then what? He ascends bodily into heaven. In the coming Sundays we will talk

about Jesus' Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost but this week I sensed the Holy Spirit directing my thoughts toward this first chapter of Acts. I just kept being drawn back to thoughts of the disciples as they interacted with the risen Lord and listened to all he was telling them. Everything he said must have created this incredible sense of expectation. I mean, Jesus died and rose again! Who knows what could happen next? Anything is possible! Jesus said they would receive power. What does that mean? What kind of power? Miracle working power? Are we getting powers like Jesus seemed to have? There had to have been so many questions, not as many answers, but an amazing sense of expectancy.

As an Assembly of God church, we often talk about being an Acts 2 kind of church. A New Testament kind of church where signs and wonders happen, where the Holy Spirit is poured out like the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. I'm all for Carbondale being an Acts 2 church, but I want us to be an Acts 1 church as well. The Acts 1 church was Living in Expectation and that impacted everything they did. What if we lived in expectation? Of what? Living in expectation of God's blessing, of his favor, in expectation of his plans being fulfilled in our lives as we live in obedience. What if we lived in expectation of his return, in expectation of his empowerment so we could be effective witnesses of Jesus in our world? What if we lived in expectation of a daily encounter with Jesus, of knowing him and walking with him in the power of the Holy Spirit? I think that's how the church in Acts was living. What characterizes the Acts 1 church?

The Acts 1 church believes the work of Jesus continues. Notice what Luke writes to his friend or benefactor, Theophilus (My New Testament Professor, Dr. Jerry Horner always commented as to where Theophilus got his name. When the doctor looked at him he said, "That's the awfulest lookin' kid I've ever seen.") "In my former book I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach..." That's it. It was just the beginning. The work Jesus began to do continues! Jesus continued to do the work the Father called him to do and to teach until he was taken up to heaven. But the bible says now we, the church, are the body of Christ.

Paul writes, "**Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**" **1 Corinthians 12:27.** In speaking of Jesus in Colossians, Paul writes, "**And He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church...**" **Colossians 1:18** If we have that understanding, that Jesus is the head and we, the church, are his body, and that the work he began in his physical body on earth he continues now through his spiritual body the church, it changes our view of the world and of our purpose and responsibility. We believe the work of Jesus continues through his body

the church. Us! Jesus said, **“Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12** We aren’t dying to save the world as Jesus did, but we are living a crucified life, living a holy life, living for others and not for ourselves, living in a redemptive fashion, i.e. what we say, how we treat others, what we do shows God’s mercy to others. We live in a way that reflects Jesus and draws others to Him. We are his body so we feed the hungry, we clothe the naked, we visit the prisoners, we give to the poor and needy, we pray for the sick and expect them to be healed, we forgive those who sin against us, we live and relate to people as Jesus, shaped and formed by the cross. Our world view is shaped by Jesus. Our self-view is shaped by Jesus. We continue to live and act and speak and love and give and serve like Jesus as we allow him to live and act and give and serve through us.

Jesus kept doing and teaching until the day he was taken up to heaven and that means the Acts 1 church expects to keep doing and working and learning and listening and teaching until the day we are taken up. Because Jesus keeps working and teaching we are to be lifelong learners and listeners and doers of his word. We never stop because He never stops!

Luke wrote that **“[Jesus gave] instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”** Jesus said, **“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:25-26** The Acts 1 church believes Jesus is still teaching. The Holy Spirit takes the word of God, the words Jesus spoke while he was with us, and the Holy Spirit then makes His word come alive in us. The Holy Spirit continues to remind us of the words and the commands of Jesus, and continues to show us how His word is to be lived out in our lives and our circumstances. Jesus is still speaking, still instructing us through his word and by the Holy Spirit. An Acts 1 church knows to keep paying attention to all that Jesus is continuing to say and do. So let me ask: What is He saying to you as you read his word? In your prayer time? Where is the Lord directing you to serve? Where is the Lord working in your life? What is he calling you to do?

The Acts 1 church is a chosen church. We just quoted Luke, that Jesus gave “instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” It is not a phrase that I would use often. It feels or sounds prideful to say “I’m chosen.” But I felt directed by the Lord to make this point. You have been chosen. His church is a chosen church. Listen to me, if you

have been born again, you've made Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of your life, you are chosen. He found you while you were dead in your trespasses and sins and chose you, lifted you up and out and saved you. He found you and chose you just as he did the disciples in the gospels. Jesus said, **"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit."**

John 15:16

There is something empowering, affirming, healing, liberating about being chosen. Peter writes, **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."** 1 Peter 2:9-10

This is who you are in Christ. You are chosen. He chose you. He saw you, loved you, redeemed you, called you and he has a plan and purpose for you. Maybe you've been overlooked, ignored, underestimated, never chosen by anyone for anything but let me tell you, God chose you! You are chosen! This is one of my favorite readings from Bob Benson in his book, *In Quest of the Shared Life*. I haven't read this in a while, but let me share this with you. (Benson, page 52-53)

The Acts 1 church knows what it is to be chosen. Almost twenty years ago Winkie Pratney spoke at Carbondale. A teacher and leader during the Jesus movement, I wrote down something he said to our congregation that night. **"God has been waiting a long time for a generation like this one."**...**Winkie Pratney** There is always negative stuff about whoever the latest generation is, Genx, y or z or whatever, but Jesus is still choosing and calling disciples. He has been waiting a long time for a generation like this one, a generation who will sell out to Jesus, who will pray and seek God and obey him, who will be serious about living for Jesus or dying for Jesus. I don't care which generation you are in, God has been waiting a long time for you, for your generation.

Who God chooses may be different from those you would choose. They may not look like you, the hair and tattoos may bother you, but it's God's business and He chose them. A chosen people, that's who he says we are. We've been chosen to be the church at such a time as this. Chosen to be the church in a time of world-wide pandemic, to be the church in a time when we could be on the brink of another world war, even a nuclear war. We've been chosen to be the church in America in a time of such confusion in the hearts and minds of people, about their self

identity, gender and sexual confusion. We've been chosen to be His church in a time of deep division in our nation, division even among churches and denominations. Someone quoted a middle aged pastor who said, "the church I was trained to minister to no longer exists." For the past two years, with all that's gone on in the world, more often than not I would suspect most pastors have felt inadequate and unqualified. No one taught us how to navigate pandemics or remote services or how to deal with congregations deeply divided over vaccines and masks and politics. More pastors are leaving the ministry. I look around and think, "Why Lord? Why this? Why us? Why me? Why now? What were you thinking?" But here's the deal, God chose us! He knew what 2020 and 2021 and 2022 would be like. He knew Putin's plans and he knew who would be in the white house and who would be in the governor's office and he knew the challenges we would face in this community and in this city and state and nation and knowing all of that, He chose us! He chose us to be His church! We're just as ill equipped as those disciples in Acts 1 were facing the craziness of the first century world and the Roman Empire's dominion and its' cruelty and its crazy and wicked Emperors and all of the idolatry and sexual immorality. You think things are bad now? Read a little ancient world history. But God chose those disciples and He chose us because like Esther in the Old Testament, we were created for such a time as this! Don't run from it, don't try to deny it, don't ignore it, God has chosen you. That means there is destiny, purpose, a plan, anointing, provision for you., for us, for his church. Pray into it. Lean into it. Live into it. Live in expectation of all God has chosen you for.

We have to wrap this up. **The Acts 1 church is a convinced church.** Luke said **"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..." Acts 1:3**

The disciples, the early church, were convinced that Jesus was who he said he was because he had revealed himself to them. They were convinced he died and rose from the dead because they saw him. He was alive. They talked with him, ate with him, walked with him, listened to him teach. He gave them many convincing proofs and appeared to them over a period of 40 days. They were convinced because they had a personal encounter with Jesus. They had a personal relationship with the risen Lord. When the resurrection was questioned, the church didn't flinch. They had seen too much. They knew too much. When persecution came, when pressure was applied to renounce Jesus, to deny the resurrection, to abandon the faith, you couldn't make them doubt because they had seen too much. When executions started, martyrs

dying for the faith, they died convinced, confident and trusting in the Lord. They couldn't doubt, they had seen too much. They had seen the Lord!

I don't know what's ahead. The bible indicates there is a shaking coming, that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. I think it's happening now in many ways, but it also says we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We're part of that kingdom that can't be shaken. A convinced church, an Acts 1 church can't be shaken. Like the disciples, I've seen too much to doubt Him now. I know too much to doubt him now. He's been too faithful to me to doubt him now. How about you? Can you say the same. You've seen too much to doubt him now! Are you convinced? He's brought us too far to doubt him now. We can't doubt him because we've seen him do too much!

I think we need a fresh revelation of Jesus. If doubt has crept into your mind, if sin has crept into your life, if you've allowed compromise to get into your heart, if you've grown cold in your relationship with Jesus, you need to look to him today. He is still revealing himself to all who are looking to him. Get a fresh revelation of Jesus. If we seek him we will find him, that's his promise. If you will repent and turn to him, he will show himself to you, he will convince you again, he'll revive your faith, he will convince you again of your calling, your place, your purpose. The Lord told his people living in exile, separated from God, needing a fresh revelation of the Lord, **"Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you..."** **Jeremiah 29:12-13**

I believe if we will seek the Lord with all of our heart, we will find him. We will be convinced as the Acts 1 church was, that God is real, that Jesus is alive, that he has chosen us for such a time as this, that we can trust him in all things, that we can risk everything for him because we are convinced about Him! We can't doubt him because we've seen too much. But I believe there is more. He wants to show us more, to do more. There is something ahead, a greater revelation, renewed purpose and power. Believe it. Get convinced of it as you seek the Lord and live in expectation of all God has for you and for his church.