

Living In Expectation: The Acts 1 Church Part 3

We are continuing our Living in Expectation series, looking at some of the characteristics of the Acts 1 Church. If you look at the opening verses of the first chapter of the book of Acts, you see a church living in response to the presence of and the instructions of the risen Lord and also living in expectation of more to come. Jesus' resurrection and ascension wasn't a final chapter, it simply led to a new chapter and they were expecting more to come. Once again let's read these first few verses. **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." Acts 1:1-8**

All of this sets the context for the church living in expectation. Everything Jesus says to them heightens their sense of expectation. His miraculous ministry, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his appearing to them, his continuing instruction and his promise of Spirit baptism. It built this incredible sense of "what's next?" It made a difference in their lives and I want that sense of expectation for us. "What's Jesus going to do next?"

In previous weeks we pointed out the church of Acts 1 believed Jesus was continuing to do and teach through his body, the church. He was still speaking and they expected to hear. The Acts 1 church knew he had chosen them and that filled them with purpose. They knew they were called to follow the Lord and they were convinced of his resurrection. We emphasized last week that the church had a fresh encounter with the risen Christ. His resurrection led them to live in expectation. Notice a couple of other things about the Acts 1 church, both then and now.

The Acts 1 church takes Jesus' commands seriously. The disciples spent three years learning the importance of obeying Jesus. They learned they could trust him. When he asked them to do crazy things, like roll the stone away from Lazarus' tomb, or have 5,000 people sit down on a hillside and then handed them fish and bread and said, "start passing this out to everyone" they learned to trust and obey. Now, as Jesus gives them final instructions to wait in Jerusalem for this gift the Father promised, there was no question as to their obedience. They had surrendered their lives to Jesus when he called them to follow him. Following meant obeying, serving, living for Jesus. Why? Because they recognized who he was and what he had done for them! We recognize the same thing. He is God in flesh, Savior and Lord. We acknowledge he died for us and the logical response is to live for him!

We all have sinned and the bible says the soul that sins must die. We face judgment and death for our sins but Jesus steps in to save us and give us new life. He redeems us from the kingdom of darkness and death and brings us to his kingdom of light and life. He did this by the sacrifice of his own body and blood. The bible says, **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect." 1 Peter 1:18-19.** We weren't redeemed by inconsequential things like silver or gold, things of little value when compared to the life and blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Consequently, the bible says, **"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

It's that simple. We are not our own. He redeemed us and we belong to him so we live differently. We don't live to please ourself but to please him because in doing so, we become the most complete and best version of ourselves. He created you and knows your potential. Obeying him and living for him is the way to an abundant life. We live as obedient children of a wise and loving Heavenly Father. Peter writes, **"As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" 1 Peter 1:14-16**

Peter said we used to live in ignorance and when we did we conformed to or gave into evil desires. What were we ignorant of? We were ignorant of God, ignorant of his wrath against sin, ignorant of his mercy and willingness to forgive us if we turned to him, ignorant of his greatness and goodness, ignorant of his holiness, ignorant of his power and purpose and plans for

us. But now we know him and as a result, we freely choose to obey him. Because we know he desires the best for us, we desire what he desires. We choose to live in holiness, to bring our whole life into alignment and harmony with Jesus and his nature and character. Do you hear what I'm telling you? The disciples, the Acts 1 church, recognized that obeying Jesus was the way to live. They took his word seriously. Disobeying Jesus leads to emptiness, a poverty of soul and life, but obedience to him leads to an abundant life. But how can we do it? How can we obey him? **The disciples knew obedience intersects with God's provision.** They knew if they obeyed, Jesus would provide. He would fulfill his promise. He would supply all of their needs and even equip them with power to live and serve him and be his witnesses.

They knew to take Jesus' commands seriously. These weren't suggestions. "Do this!" Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift the Father promised, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are going to talk specifically about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, but suffice it to say his command, his desire for them and for us, is that we be empowered by the Holy Spirit. His desire for us is more. He wants all of us to have a deeper experience, a more intimate knowledge of and relationship with God, a greater sense of God's power at work in and through us. Jesus states this as a command, consequently we should be obedient and open to this promise of the Father and this work of the Holy Spirit in our life.

The disciples were living in expectation of this promise, of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, whatever that meant, living in expectation of this added power to be his witnesses. That power didn't just mean the ability to speak as his witnesses, but to live as his witnesses. Power to live holy lives that affect the lives of others! We too need that power. Expect it!

Notice their response to his command, to wait in Jerusalem for this gift. Verse 14 says, **"They all joined together constantly in prayer..." Acts 1:14** Their response is to pray. It's worth noting, **The environment, the atmosphere of anticipation is nurtured by prayer.** They were waiting, hungering, seeking and I think their anticipation just kept growing. If you've stopped anticipating the blessing and provision of God, pray! Nurture that atmosphere of anticipation by praying. "Lord, I'm expecting to see your hand at work." The Acts 1 church knew what to do. They were expecting something from heaven, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, an outpouring of spiritual power, so they began to pray into that.

What are you expecting? What are you hungering for? We are going to talk about His ascension and we are going to talk about Pentecost and we are going to talk about the Lord's

return as part of this series, but what are you expecting? Trouble, violence, recession, perilous times the bible speaks of? All that is coming, but I'm living in expectation of God's provision. I'm living in expectation that as the days grow longer and darker, the light of Jesus in us will grow brighter, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us will grow stronger, the provision of the Lord will grow greater. I'm looking to him and expecting something from heaven. We may not know exactly what to expect. The Acts 1 church didn't know what to expect either, but they knew to wait and trust and obey and pray. That's what we need to do! The atmosphere of anticipation is nurtured by prayer. Let's change the atmosphere. Let's raise the temperature and raise our expectation. Let's pray and expect God to do the miraculous and extraordinary. Let's take his commands seriously and absolutely pledge to live in obedience to the Lord.

There is one other characteristic of the Acts 1 church I want us to consider. **The Acts 1 church is content to live with mystery and unanswered questions.** Not every question is answered, certainly not to our satisfaction in this life. The church found out from the beginning that there will be situations and things happening that we simply won't find answers to in this life, this side of heaven. Look at verse 6. **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."** Acts 1:6-8

There are some things that are left to God alone, some things that are cloaked in mystery. The bible says, **"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."** Deuteronomy 29:29 There is plenty of light given to us, plenty of commands and instructions that are plain as to how we should live. Don't be frustrated over the things that remain in mystery, the questions that God chooses to leave unanswered for now. Continue to trust and obey Him and His word because you know him. You know he is good and merciful in spite of the circumstances and the pain in your life that suggest otherwise. The Acts 1 church didn't resolve the questions of why some suffer and some don't. It didn't take them long before they were faced with Stephen's martyrdom. James is beheaded but Peter is miraculously delivered from prison. The Acts 1 church lived with the mystery and the unanswered questions. They weren't supposed to figure everything out, they were supposed to fulfill their assignment to be

witnesses of Jesus and take the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. They understood where their focus belonged. Jesus told them to stay in their lane. They didn't need all the answers and couldn't handle it all if they knew, what they needed was Jesus and the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Acts 1 church, then and now, needs to make sure our focus stays where it belongs. We aren't called to figure out when the Lord is returning, we are called to make sure everyone has heard about Jesus before he returns.

You know if you've been listening to me for a while that I'm not a conspiracy theory kind of guy. I don't get excited when someone writes a new book supposedly uncovering some secret revelation that's been hidden in the Scripture. The bible is not a puzzle to be worked and manipulated until we get the pieces to fall into place in some way that proves our theories or our point. It's not a code to be deciphered so we can discover the hidden things of God and his secret timing and plans. There is not some mysterious hidden knowledge to be found by a few. That's Gnosticism, that's heresy. You've heard me say it over and over again: the plain things are the main things and the main things are the plain things. The Acts 1 church knew it. We better know it or we will lose our focus and lose our way! **It's all about Jesus!**

People get lost looking for something mysterious and secret but it's all about Jesus! Are you looking for mystery? Here is the mystery the Acts 1 church knew about. It's a mystery revealed. Look at these verses from the Apostle Paul. He says **"God gave me [a commission] to present to you the word of God in its fullness- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."** Colossians 1:25-27. You want a mystery. Here it is. It doesn't get any deeper than this, that Jesus lives in us, in Gentiles, in people undeserving of forgiveness and mercy and grace! Paul writes, **"...that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments."** Colossians 2:2-4 All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus. You don't need to go hunting for secret revelations, you just need to know Jesus! **"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."** Colossians 2:9-10 What you are looking for is found in Jesus. You can be content in the mystery, content in the unanswered questions because everything is found in Jesus, in knowing him. Trust him,

obey him, live for him. Paul writes, **“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”** Colossians 2:16-17 The Message Translations reads, **“So don’t put up with anyone pressuring you in details of diet, worship services or holy days. All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ.”**

The mystery, the reality, the substance is Christ. You want to know what life is all about? You want to find wholeness and completeness and satisfaction and abundant life, real life? You’ll find it all in Jesus. He is what it’s all about. Obey him. Take his word seriously. Rest in him. If you know him you can live with the mystery, you can find contentment even in the face of unanswered questions. Instead of trying to figure out all the whys and when, focus on the who and the what. The who is Jesus. He will continue to reveal himself to you, somedays in shadow and mystery and some days with clarity, but He is always there with you and for you. Stay focused on Jesus and then focus on the what instead of the why. What is the Lord saying to you? What is his command from the word of God? What is it the Lord is calling you to do today, now, in this moment? (Maybe he’s calling you to volunteer to help with children here at Carbondale!) In light of the Lord’s return, in light of eternity, where should your focus be and what should you be doing now? The Acts 1 church knew the answer. Take God’s commands seriously, obey, pray, receive the power of the Holy Spirit, serve and spread the good news of Jesus and live in expectation of even more!