

## **Living In Expectation: The Acts 1 Church Part 4**

We continue our series about the Acts 1 Church Living in Expectation. Before we read from Acts 1, tomorrow is Memorial Day, a day originally established to honor the memory of those brave men and women who, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, gave “the last full measure of devotion” on behalf of our country. I want to take a moment to acknowledge that sacrifice. Could we stand for a moment of silence in honor of those who gave their lives for our freedom. If you have served or currently serve in the armed forces, as everyone else is seated, would you remain standing. Let’s show our appreciation to all who have served or are serving.

Now to Acts 1. **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...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 “taken up before their very eyes”. Luke says he was taken up into heaven. We call this the Ascension. This past Thursday was Ascension Day, also known as the Feast of the Ascension. It marks the day, 40 days after Jesus’ resurrection, when he ascended bodily into heaven. The Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church among others have observed this day in the church calendar for centuries. Sadly, most evangelical and Pentecostal churches seldom mention it. I admit I was guilty of that until several years ago I discovered the significance of Jesus’ ascension and since that time I have tried to make sure we paid attention to this important event. The Ascension of Jesus plays a vital role in the ability of

the church to live in expectation. This is one of those sermons I'm willing to repeat year after year to keep this essential truth before us. The Ascension is part of the Apostle's Creed and at the core of Christian belief. "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." This is part of our Christology, our understanding of the nature of Jesus. Does it matter? What difference does it make that Jesus ascended bodily to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father? The bible indicates it makes a world of difference.

To start let's go back to a Psalm. I've asked this before, but do you remember which Old Testament verse is most often quoted in the New Testament? Psalm 110:1. **"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"**  
**Psalm 110:1** One source says it is quoted or referenced 23 times in the New Testament.

Why did the New Testament writers keep coming back to this verse in referencing Jesus? They wanted to drive home this essential fact about Jesus: Not only had he been bodily resurrected from the dead and bodily ascended to heaven, but he had been exalted and seated at God's right hand. He ascended to heaven AND "ascended" to the throne where He now rules and reigns as King and Lord of all. When a prince or princess becomes king or queen, we say they ascended to the throne, right? Jesus not only ascended, went up to heaven, but he ascended to the throne, to the rightful place of authority as King of Kings. His earthly ministry was completed and now his heavenly ministry had begun!

Psalm 110:1 was understood by the Jews of Jesus' time as a reference to the Messiah. Just fifty days after his resurrection and ten days after Jesus' ascension to heaven, Peter stands with the other disciples on the Day of Pentecost and preaches to the crowd. "You all know what happened with Jesus of Nazareth. You know he was crucified and buried." Then Peter says, **"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'" Acts 2:32-36.**

Peter quotes Psalm 110:1. He wants the people of Jerusalem and us to know Jesus is the one to whom David was referring. Jesus is the one to whom the Father was speaking when he

said, “come sit at my right hand” and the New Testament writers kept coming back to this theme, to this verse, because it meant Jesus now rules and reigns, seated at the right hand of God.

Get the significance of that image. The right hand is the highest place – the place of highest honor. Paul writes, **“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...” Philippians 2:9** He is at the highest place which is at the Father’s right hand. But that’s not all. It’s not only the highest place, it is the resident place of power and authority. Throughout Scripture God’s right hand is synonymous with power and strength. For instance, after God parted the Red Sea for Moses and the Israelites, they sang, **“Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.” Exodus 15:6** The image is of God’s mighty strength revealed in his right hand. **“You who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.” Psalm 17:7**

Consider this. We use the term “right hand” to refer to someone who is like a close assistant to a person. “He’s the president’s right hand man.” “She’s his right hand.” The person is not literally, physically a part of the president, but it’s a metaphor indicating power is delegated to that person to carry out the will of the President, to assist. But Jesus is not assisting the Father, at his right hand. In a way beyond what we can understand or articulate, Jesus is one with the father. The Creed says He and the Father are of the same substance or essence, Very God of Very God. Jesus is not only at the Father’s right hand, but in some way He is the Father’s right hand and Jesus, the Father’s right hand, saves and delivers those who take refuge in Him!

The Psalmist declared, **“Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.” Psalm 89:13** You get the idea. Jesus is ascended and exalted AT the right hand of the Father and AS the right hand of the Father with all power and authority and from that position he stands at our right hand to defend and rescue us. **“For He stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.” Psalm 109:31** Can you see why Jesus’ ascension to heaven, which means his ascension to the Father’s right hand, is so important?

At his incarnation, Jesus willingly laid aside the prerogatives of heaven, the glory and omnipotence and became a man. Paul said, **“Christ Jesus...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:7-8**

But at his ascension the fullness of the glory of God, the fullness of communion and union with the Father was restored. The bible says, “[God’s power] raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...” Ephesians 1:20-22

Do you hear what the bible says? Jesus is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion! He is not just above, he is FAR above them all. There is no comparison, no competition, no rival, no equal. There is no danger of him being dethroned. He can’t be outsmarted, tricked or manipulated because he is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. He knows what the devil is up to, what every evil scheme will lead to because he is far above them all. He can’t be wearied or worn down, He doesn’t slumber or sleep. He is incomparable in every way, far above every title and position that can be given. He is head over all things in this present age and also in the age to come. God has ultimately placed all things under his feet. Enemies like death and the forces of hell are still struggling against him, but it’s only because they know the verdict has already been determined, they’re just waiting for the sentence to be carried out at the last day. God has already declared that every enemy will be under the feet of Jesus. Every enemy, every last trick of the devil, every last sin and addiction and disease, every last source of sorrow and pain, every tear and every heartache will finally and ultimately be under his feet!

God declares Jesus to be Lord over all. That just about covers it, but, if that’s not enough for you, Ephesians 4 says, “**He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.**” Ephesians 4:10. The Jews taught there were seven heavens, but Jesus is higher than all seven. Paul says Jesus fills the whole universe -- with himself, with his glory, his might and power. He fills the whole universe with the blessings and wonder of his grace, with his unmerited favor and the benefits of his triumph on Calvary. He died and rose again and ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father and from there he rules and reigns until the whole earth is filled with the fragrance of his victory over sin and Satan, and the knowledge of his mercy and grace.

His ascension to heaven and to the right hand of the Father, do you see why it matters? Why it’s so important? It means he rules and reigns. Do you see why it mattered to the Acts 1

church and to us? It meant whatever they faced, they knew he was at the right hand of the Father, they knew he was Sovereign and Lord over all. But they lived in the real world of the first century Roman Empire. They lived in the tension between the now and the not yet. Jesus now rules and reigns but not yet does he rule and reign without opposition. Sin and death and injustice still hold sway in too many places, too many lives. That's why I say the Acts 1 church lived in expectation. That's where we live now. We expect the Lord to help, to deliver, to heal, to intervene because he rules and reigns at the Father's right hand. We live in the light of that kingdom to which we now belong through faith, through our salvation and baptism. We live in expectation of the miraculous because Jesus holds the keys and we know the Father ultimately has all enemies under the feet of Jesus. But at the same time we know those enemies are still fighting, they are still rebelling, refusing to submit. Jesus is Sovereign and King, but not every power and principality bows and submits to him, yet. Jesus is Lord, but not every knee bows, not every tongue confesses that he is Lord, yet. But his ascension to the throne, to the right hand of the Father, guarantees it will happen. It causes us to live in expectation. It fills us with hope. It motivates us to faith and to trust.

When we see events like what happened in Uvalde, Texas this week, 19 children gunned down, it sure looks like hell is in control, Satan is winning, hatred and evil seem to have the upper hand, but we are an Acts 1 church. We live in a broken world, but we are part of a heavenly Kingdom where Jesus rules and reigns and we live in expectation. We know Jesus ascended to the Father and is seated at his right hand "in the heavenly realms, [remember] - far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet..." Ephesians 1:20-22 And what does that mean? That means in spite of the brokenness and the loss and violence and fear and death, we still live in hope, in expectation, because a day is coming when Jesus will right every wrong, justice will prevail, hatred and violence and death itself will be swallowed up by Jesus and his victory. The verdict has already been rendered. Jesus reigns and hell loses. Jesus reigns and although we are living in a broken, fallen world, we live in expectation because redemption is coming and all things will be made new.

Someone needs to hear this word today. **There is another chapter of your story to be written.** We can't imagine it. Those grieving families in Texas can't imagine it, not today, but there is another chapter to be written. Jesus gets the final word. He has the final say. John in his

vision heard a voice from the throne saying, **“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Revelation 21:3-5**

The Acts 1 church was living in expectation that a day was coming when Jesus would make all things new, when the old order of things would pass away. They were expecting a day when God himself would wipe the tears from their eyes. There was another chapter to be written and Jesus would have the final word, not the devil, not sin, not injustice, not sickness, not brokenness. Jesus! The Acts 1 church saw their leaders arrested, disciples executed, brothers and sisters scattered through persecution, but they knew Jesus was at the right hand of the Father, they knew they could trust him even when all hell was coming against them. It's how they made it. It's how we make it as well. He rules and reigns. He has the final word and his word is trustworthy and true! We don't live in fear, we don't run and hide, we live already in the Kingdom that is coming. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven” is our daily prayer! We pray and live in expectation and in hope because Jesus ascended and is seated at the right hand of God, far above all. Trust Him! There is another chapter to your story that he is writing and he will have the final word. Put your hope in Him and keep expecting. He reigns!