

## **Living In Expectation: The Acts 1 Church Part 6**

We are continuing our series. Next Sunday is Father's Day and I'm giving myself a Father's Day present and taking the week off and having Pastor Sarah preach for me. Two weeks from today I hope to finish the message I'm starting today. This is sermon number 6. We've been talking about the Acts 1 church and the fact they were living in expectation, expecting the promises of God to be fulfilled in the life of the church. Last Sunday was Pentecost and we examined the way in which the Lord's promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit met and exceeded the expectation of the Acts 1 Church. Look once again at 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**

### **The Acts 1 Church lived in expectation that Jesus would return!**

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. It's been 2,000 years since the angels told the disciples Jesus would return; 2,000 years. The Acts 1 church lived in expectation that Jesus would fulfill his promise and baptize them in the Holy Spirit which he did 10 days later on Pentecost. Likewise, they expected Jesus to fulfill the promise the angels shared as he ascended to heaven. The Acts 1 church believed he would return just as each successive generation has believed it.

How much more should we be living in expectation? We are 2,000 years closer to his return. We believe he is coming again. Are you ready?

Billy Graham told the story of President Dwight Eisenhower visiting Denver, Colorado on vacation. He happened to see a newspaper article about a six year old boy in Denver named Paul Haley. Paul was dying of cancer and had said his one wish was to meet the president of the United States. Seeing the article, Eisenhower suddenly decided to grant the boy's request. Without any warning on a Sunday morning in August, a limo pulled up in front of the Haley residence, and the president stepped out, walked to the door and knocked. Dale Haley, the boy's father, in old blue jeans, a faded shirt, unshaven and just half awake, came to the door and opened it. Can you imagine the shock? It's the president! Eisenhower came in, met Paul and shook his hand, visited with him, took him outside to see the presidential limousine and then left. After he left, the father said, "Those jeans, the old shirt, the unshaven face. What a way to meet the President of the United States." "He regretted he didn't get up earlier and shave and be better dressed, but the president showed up unannounced, unexpectedly and the Dad was unprepared."

Either directly or indirectly, the New Testament speaks over 300 times about another unexpected arrival: the return or coming of the Lord. 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. Jesus is coming and though it will be sudden, it shouldn't be unexpected and we don't have to be unprepared. We should be expecting his return. Exactly what are we talking about when we speak of the coming of the Lord?

The Apostle's Creed makes a simple statement, "He shall come to judge the living and the dead." That's the extent of the Creed's doctrine of the end times. The Assemblies of God teaches there will be a rapture of the church, a sudden catching away of believers. Paul writes, **"The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we, who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 After the rapture we are with the Lord, celebrating the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is a time of tribulation here on earth and then Jesus will return with the saints of God in what we refer to as the second coming of Christ. (The rapture is for the saints, the second coming of Christ is with the saints.) He will then establish his kingdom here on earth. While we hold to this

doctrine, there are others who just as sincerely believe the bible indicates only that Jesus will return at the end of time, at the second coming to establish his kingdom and there is no rapture. There are all kinds of theories and interpretations of the bible when it comes to end time events. It can be fascinating, but we need to be cautious lest we become so preoccupied with trying to figure out when the Lord is coming and what all the signs will be and who the players will be that we neglect our mission and take our eyes off of Jesus. Likewise we need to be cautious that we don't become so complacent and satisfied with this life that we stop expecting the coming of the Lord. There are reasons why his coming is so important and why our expectation and anticipation of his return is essential to the health of the church and to our completing our mission. Steven Seamands in his book, *Give Them Christ* writes, **“We must hold tightly everything pertaining to the second coming that is clearly revealed in Scripture and has been consensually agreed upon in the church...To reject or reduce that clear teaching fundamentally alters the significance of Christ’s redemptive work and the message of the gospel. As a result, human redemption (the redemption of our bodies) and the redemption of all creation (new heaven and earth) are forever left unfinished.”**...Steven Seamands In other words, if Jesus isn't coming back, whether you believe in the rapture or merely in the second coming without a rapture, too much is left unfinished. If Jesus doesn't return, redemption is incomplete. N.T.Wright said we can't relegate the message of the Lord's return “to the margins of our thinking, our living, and our praying; if we do, we shall pull everything else out of shape.” The Lord will return. That's the promise and the Acts 1 church was living in expectation of his return. If we stop believing and expecting, it pulls everything else out of shape. From what we read in Acts 1, what do we know about his return?

**The same Jesus will return.** That's what the angels said. The same Lord Jesus, the one who lived, died, rose again, ate and talked with them and taught them, the one who ascended, will come again. This is not some mystical doctrine. Not a spiritualized version. He is not coming back in the flowers that bloom in the spring, not coming back in the robins that sing, not coming back in the voices of the children, not coming back through his word or the bread and cup of communion. Jesus is coming back, bodily, just as he ascended. Jesus said to his disciples, **“I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:3** It was personal. The New Testament church believed the same Jesus was coming back for them, their generation. I think it would help us if we made this personal. Jesus is coming and he's

coming back for me! Think about it: Jesus is coming back for you! It's personal and it's wonderful!

The New Testament writers essentially chose three Greek words to describe Jesus' return. The words meant appearing, unveiling, and one that referred to his actual presence. He is coming and we are to be prepared for his actual arrival. Are you ready? Have you prepared to receive him, to welcome him? Have you renounced sin and you're living a godly life, a holy life? The New Testament speaks of being prepared so that when he returns we will have no reason to be ashamed before him. **“And now little children, abide in him so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.” 1 John 2:28** Be prepared so you won't have to try to hide from him at his return.

**Jesus' return will be visible.** The angels said Jesus would come back “in the same way you have seen him go.” He disappeared from their sight but at his return he will reappear. Remember one of the words the writers used means appearing. Paul writes **“...keep this command...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Timothy 6:14.** John writes, **“But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2** He disappeared from their sight at his ascension, but He will appear again and we shall see him as he is. How glorious! In fact, that's the next point...

**Jesus' return will be glorious and powerful.** At the rapture of the church, although his coming will be sudden like a thief in the night, and unexpected by the world, understand we aren't sneaking away. Jesus is coming in glory to catch us away. He is coming with a shout of victory, a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God. Paul says at his return the righteous dead will rise first! He isn't referring to the general resurrection of all the dead. That happens later at the “day of the Lord.” This is the resurrection of God's people, those who died in the faith, trusting in Jesus. The grave will give up the dead. Talk about something glorious and powerful. The same Spirit and power that raised Christ from the dead will cause these bodies to rise up and meet the Lord. We were buried in corruptible bodies but we will be raised incorruptible, raised in triumph, sharing in His conquering of death and the grave. The Apostle Paul refers to the resurrection of Jesus as the firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15. He says Jesus is the first but when he comes, then comes the resurrection of all those who trusted in and found new life in him. The dead in Christ, the rest of the crop of which Jesus is the firstfruit, they rise first, then in glorious power we who are alive will be caught up together to

meet them, the resurrected saints of God in the air. This won't happen in secret. Not many noticed when Jesus was born, some shepherds and some strangers from the east. Not many paid attention when he hung on the cross for our sins, not many saw him after his resurrection comparatively speaking, but when he returns in power and glory, when the church is caught away, the world will take notice. The writer of Hebrews tells us, **“So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28** Jesus is coming, in glory and power, to bring salvation to all who are waiting for him and living in expectation!

**Jesus' return is certain, but no one knows the day or the hour.** We are living in expectation. We're certain he is coming, but we are uncertain as to when he will come. Jesus purposefully tells us we are to remain watchful, expectant, anticipating his return. **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Matthew 24:36-44**

We are to live in light of his return. We will talk more about this in a couple of weeks, but His return should affect the decisions we make. Not like, “there is no point in going to school because Jesus may come tomorrow.” The coming of the Lord is not an excuse to withdraw from life or to stand gazing into the sky waiting for his return. The angels rebuked the disciples in Acts 1 for doing that. Jesus is coming again, but you need to get busy doing what he told you to do. There's work to be done. Jesus' return motivates us to holiness in our living and our lifestyle and moves us to action, to work while there is still time and opportunity.

Much has been made in the last couple of years about the signs of Jesus' coming. While Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour, he went on to describe signs of the end. Many of the signs he described are not just specific to the last days but in fact mark the entire age. We've been living in the last days since Jesus rose from the grave and what we've seen is evil intensifying. We are closer to the last day, whenever that will be, than ever before. But Jesus told us not to go running after signs, “Here is the Christ!” “There he is!” but instead we need to busy ourselves doing the work of the kingdom. We are to be telling others about Jesus, taking the

message of the gospel to the whole world. We are to be caring for the poor, healing the sick, bringing Jesus to a lost and dying world while there is still time.

Jesus is coming. You've heard it all of your life. Have you heard it so long and so often you've stopped believing? Are you expecting his return? Are you living like you expect his return? Like Dale Haley, the man in the story I told, are you unprepared for the coming of the Lord? If Jesus returned today, is there doubt in your mind about whether you are prepared and ready to meet the Lord? Would you be one of those trying to hide, wishing you had another minute to repent of sins, to get things out of your life that you know don't belong? Jesus is coming. Is that good news for you? If there's a question, if there's a doubt about whether you are ready to meet the Lord, about whether you are prepared for his coming, I want you to come forward and let's get this settled today. Even if Jesus doesn't come back today, or this week, he might be coming for you. You have no guarantee, you have no idea, that's why Jesus told us to be watchful, to be prepared, to be ready. Jesus is coming and we should be living in expectation.