

The Message of the Forty Days

Our first Sunday in the gym and it just so happens that 18 years ago today we were meeting somewhere besides our sanctuary. It was the first Sunday after the tornado and Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty had graciously given us permission to meet in their VBI building, a building that had originally been the headquarters of the T.L. Osborn Foundation. We spent twenty months meeting in that facility and God blessed us during that time with increase and growth. I'm believing the Lord will do the same for us as we meet here in the gym for the next few months. Daniels and Daniels schedule shows us being completed before the end of the year so perhaps we will be home for Christmas!

Tonight we are going to have a time of worship and communion and then I want us to pray over this gym. We are going to anoint and sanctify and dedicate this place, again, for the Lord and for his glory to be manifested in this place. I want you to bring your family and let's agree together for a visitation of the Spirit of God in this place over the coming months!

Let me take a moment to again thank some people. Chuck Marler and his wonderful crew of men built this marvelous stage for us. If you helped on the building of the stage, would you stand? To the incredible staff of Carbondale A/G. You can't imagine how many hours these folks have worked to get this room ready. Thanks to Matt Bruner. His job of set up has been multiplied many times over and he has worked tirelessly as well. Thanks to all of you for being flexible. Blessed are the flexible because when change comes they won't break!

Two weeks ago we talked about the miracles of Calvary. This morning I want to talk about the message of the forty days. Turn to Acts 1. Luke the physician is the author of the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts. Addressing Acts to a person named Theophilus, he writes, **"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."** Acts 1:1-3

For forty days after his resurrection and before his ascension into heaven, Jesus moved in and out among the disciples and others. We know from the gospel accounts that Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to the women at the tomb, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the eleven in the upper room. Paul tells us Jesus appeared personally to Peter, to James the

Lord's brother, and to more than five hundred believers at one time. These appearances occurred over this period of 40 days. So what was going on? What was the message of the forty days?

First of all, **Jesus proved he was risen!** Luke says he gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. It was incontrovertible proof. Understand, the disciples were not eager believers in the resurrection. Never once when Jesus spoke to them prior to his crucifixion and resurrection did the disciples say, "Cool! That'll be awesome!" Never once did they say, "Really? How will that be? What will that look like?" Never, "Are you serious? That's impossible!" They just acted like "That's another one of those weird things Jesus talks about that we don't really get..." Even when Mary Magdalene told them she had seen Jesus and he was alive, Luke tells us the disciples didn't believe her because her words sounded like nonsense. Even when Peter saw the empty tomb and the burial cloth laying there untouched, the bible says he left "wondering to himself what had happened."

They were skeptics. They didn't believe – not until Jesus showed up – not once or twice but multiple times, in multiple places, to multiple groups of people. Luke says he gave them convincing proofs he was alive. He appeared to them, ate with them, cooked breakfast for them, taught them, gave them instructions and promises, empowered them and ascended to heaven in front of them. They were convinced. Perhaps it took forty days. Finally, the doubts were removed and they never doubted again! Never. Not even when faced with torture and death. They never doubted again that Jesus was risen, alive and ascended into heaven.

Luke tells us another aspect of the message of the forty days: **Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God.** He used this time to speak plainly about the nature of the Kingdom of God. I have to believe, after being convinced of his resurrection and with all of his appearing and disappearing from them that the disciples must have gained a new understanding of what Jesus meant when he said **"My kingdom is not of this world."** **John 18:36**

Talk about mind altering. This man died and rose again. Things he said before his resurrection took on new significance. "So that's what he meant when he said..." Their understanding had to have broadened significantly, although even in Acts 1 they still asked Jesus if he was going to restore the Kingdom to Israel at this time. In response to that question, Jesus told 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 1:7-8 He basically was saying they needed to shift their focus from the political fortunes of Israel – that was another issue they should leave to God and his timing. What they needed to do was focus on the true nature of the kingdom of God. The kingdom was about more than physical Israel, it was about a spiritual kingdom, about a spiritual transformation that would occur in the hearts and lives of men and women of every tribe and race and nationality. They were to be the messengers that would carry the good news of Jesus, that he had come to bring salvation and eternal life to all who believed!

Jesus spoke to them of the kingdom of God. I want you to see the importance of this for your life. He revealed to them **It is a spiritual kingdom.** Listen to what I'm saying this morning. With all of the busyness of life, with all of the obligations and responsibilities and demands of life, **Don't forget the spiritual dimension of your life.** We weren't made for this life and world alone. We are spiritual beings with a body and a soul but our spirit is meant to live forever. Don't neglect the spiritual aspect of your life. You go to the gym and eat healthy, you keep your mind active, you teach your children to live a balanced life, but church and spiritual things are an afterthought, if that. Church attendance is what you do if you aren't at the lake or at the ball game. Prayer and bible reading, spiritual things are what you do occasionally, when you think about it or when trouble comes and you are frightened. Your spirit needs to be fed every day, just like your body needs to be fed. The risen Christ made it clear to his disciples and to us, His kingdom and our life must be focused on spiritual things. Don't forget the spiritual component of your life.

Jesus taught them and us: **You have a spiritual purpose.** Jesus made it plain to the disciples that their life from then on was about more than just fishing or collecting taxes or whatever their previous job was. They had a mission and a purpose to be witnesses of Jesus and they were to take that message to the ends of the earth. You may not have a call to be a preacher, but each of us has a call to a spiritual purpose. Each of us are to be witnesses. We have all been called to go into our world, our area of influence, and let the truth about Jesus be seen through our lives, our witness, our testimony. Your life is about more than just what you do for a living. You have a spiritual purpose to honor Jesus, to share his good news, to bring hope to others, to serve the Lord every day of your life. Your mission, your purpose is important to the kingdom of God. Don't ignore or neglect your spiritual purpose. To what has God called you? How has God gifted you? How and where can you best serve God and fulfill your spiritual purpose?

The source of power is not in yourself. The disciples must have thought, “how can we carry out this commission? How can we be witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the earth? We aren’t able to do that!” You may be thinking the same thing. “I can’t accomplish anything for God. I can’t witness to people about Jesus and what he’s done for me. I can’t fulfill a spiritual purpose. I don’t even know what it is.” Listen, the source of power is not you. It’s not in your strength but in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gave them this command, **“Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about.” Acts 1:4** Jesus had promised them, **“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth....you know Him for he lives with you and will be in you... 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 14:16-17, 26.** We can’t do this alone, but we aren’t alone. The Holy Spirit is with us and lives within us. He is our teacher and he guides us into truth and he is the source of our strength and power. Jesus promised, **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses.” Acts 1:8** The power you need to live for him and be that witness is found in the Holy Spirit. Open your life to Him!

The message of the forty days: There is a spiritual dimension to your life that you must not ignore. Open your heart and life to the work of the Holy Spirit. Daily keep the spiritual purpose for your life in mind. Be His witness in word and in deed. Keep that purpose before you and rely upon the power, strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit every day!

What other message did he share during the forty days? **Jesus commissioned them to go and tell.** I’ve already pointed out the importance of the Holy Spirit in empowering us to be His witnesses. But it bears repeating that almost every post resurrection conversation Jesus had led to a commissioning, an empowering of those he spoke with to do what he said to do: Go tell! Go teach and preach, go heal the sick, shepherd the lost and wandering, encourage, fulfill the calling of the kingdom of God!

To the ten disciples gathered in the upper room, Jesus spoke peace to them and then said, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20:21** Jesus appeared to the eleven and said, **“...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [my] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:47-48** Speaking to the disciples and perhaps others with them in the area of the Galilee, Jesus said, **“Go and make**

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20

Everywhere Jesus spoke of the importance of testimony, of telling others that forgiveness of sins was possible through Jesus Christ! Go preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. Go make disciples. Go teach them to obey my commands. Notice he didn't speak about methods of organization or church structure. He didn't teach them a liturgy or service order. "Here is how to make an altar call." He didn't speak about service style or musical style or the type of building to build. He told them to go and tell, serve and obey! It's still the command for us.

Finally, **Jesus promised to be with them and to come again.** For forty days he proved he was risen. For forty days he spoke to them of the spiritual dimension of the kingdom, of the importance of their spiritual mission and the necessity of spiritual empowerment. ("Don't go out there until you have received the promised gift of the Father, the infilling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit"). Go and tell, even to the hard places, but rest in this promise: I will be with you! **"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Matthew 28:20

We don't have to be afraid because the Lord is with us. He promised to never leave us and never forsake us. And that isn't all. Not only will he be with us every step of our journey here in this life, but he is coming again. It's not just about this life. Jesus said he was going away to prepare a place for us. **"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** John 14:3 In Jesus' post resurrection conversation with Peter, when Peter asked Jesus about what he had in store for John, Jesus said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" John 21:23. The point is, Jesus told Peter he was planning on returning. It's a promise he will keep. Jesus is coming again. He said so!

At Jesus' ascension into heaven, at the end of the forty days of ministry, while the disciples were staring up into heaven, two angels appeared and asked, **"Men of Galilee, 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 1:11

He's coming back but until he returns, he won't leave us or desert us. He will be with us to the end. He keeps his word. He keeps his promise. We have nothing to fear.

Trust in the word of the risen Lord. There is convincing proof he is risen. Don't ignore the spiritual reality of your life. Pay attention to the spiritual dimension of your life, to your spiritual formation and spiritual growth. Recognize you have a spiritual mission and purpose and God has sent his Holy Spirit to empower and equip you to be an effective witness for Christ. Go and tell! Go, serve, obey, do what God has commanded you to do. And remember, he is with you and he is coming again. The knowledge he is with us gives us confidence to risk, to obey, to do whatever he calls us to do. The knowledge he is coming again motivates us to do it now while there is time and opportunity! There is an urgency about our obedience because time is running out and Jesus is coming again! Take the lessons of the forty days to heart and let's make a difference while we can!