

STORIES and LESSONS

1. The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Acts 1: 1-11, Luke 24:52

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke, the physician and companion of Paul, told his friend named Theophilus that in his first book he wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up to heaven.

Now after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, he had shown himself to these men and given many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. There are two particular appearances we want to mention.

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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

On a second occasion the apostles asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, suddenly, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into Heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." The disciples worshiped Jesus and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy and awaited the promised Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Do you ever worry about anything in your life? Think of a time when you were unsure of what would happen in your life. How did you feel? (Maybe you were scared or afraid?)

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- How does Luke introduce the book of Acts?
 - What do the words, “do” and “teach” show us about Jesus and his ministry?
- So what does Luke say happened between when Jesus’ resurrection and when he ascended to heaven? 1) List each occurrence and 2) tell why it is important to the early church and even to us.
- Why do you think they were asking about the Kingdom of God? What kind of kingdom do you think they were expecting?
 - How did Jesus’ response improve their understanding of the kind of kingdom they should expect? What promise did he give them that would impact this kingdom?
- What were the promises Jesus made to his followers? How can these encourage us?
 - How can we be sure we are effective witnesses?
- Jesus’ ascension into heaven. How would the disciples have felt in the moment? How would this help strengthen the early church?

Summary: Commandments or examples?

- Do not leave Jerusalem. Wait for the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.
- Be my witnesses in 1) Jerusalem 2) Judea & Samaria, 3) Ends of earth.
 - What is a WITNESS?
- Trust in the fact that Jesus is coming again!
- Do and teach!

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- The story spoke of how the ministry of Jesus was teaching (speaking) and doing (deeds). He also promised the disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses . . .” In light of this information, how do you think our churches today could improve our witness? In believing? In speaking? In doing?

Personal Application:

- How do you want to improve in both doing and speaking as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can the good news be comforting even when we fail, to know that we are forgiven and can continue to be witnesses because we worship a risen and ascended Savior?

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **How does Luke introduce the book of Acts?**
 - Told them that this was the second of two books and that in the first one he told all about how Jesus had begun to do and teach things during his ministry before he died and was raised to life, and that through the Holy Spirit he had given commands before he ascended to the chosen apostles.
 - Then he explains some of what happened between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension.
 - **What do the words, "do" and "teach" show us about Jesus and his ministry?**
 - The ministry of Jesus was a ministry of both word and deed.

- **So what does Luke say happened between when Jesus' resurrection and when he ascended to heaven? 1) List each occurrence and 2) tell why it is important to the early church and even to us.**
 - Jesus showed himself, gave many convincing proofs of being alive, and appeared repeatedly for forty days - -
 - He proved his resurrection over and over. He knows our weaknesses and tendency to doubt.
 - He needed to reassure the disciples in their doubts
 - Jesus is a risen Savior. We worship a living God.
 - He spoke about the kingdom of God -
 - never stopped teaching. The new life is a kingdom with a king who rules and cares for his kingdom and its purposes
 - He ate with them -
 - did real life with them, showed his full risen humanity, spent time
 - He commanded them
 - to not leave Jerusalem
 - should not go off in your own power and confidence.
 - but wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit that the Father promised them. Promised they would be "baptized" with the Holy Spirit
 - The Spirit would empower them
 - Apostles asked about when the kingdom of Israel would be restored.
 - Jesus responded with a warning and a great promise.
 - **Why do you think they were asking about the Kingdom of God? What kind of kingdom do you think they were expecting?**
 - They expected a return to the old nation of Israel on earth with Jesus in charge and them helping him.
 - **How did Jesus' response improve their understanding of the kind of kingdom they should expect? What promise did he give them that would impact this kingdom?**
 - They were focused on the wrong thing. Jesus wants them to focus on trusting God and his timing and on being faithful to his commands and growing the kind of kingdom He wants.

- Jesus is the one who began it and completed it. The gospel and church is about what Jesus has done, and not what we have done.
- **What were the promises Jesus made to his followers? How can these encourage us?**
 - Will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them.
 - The power for kingdom comes from the Spirit. We do not need to work in our own strength.
 - The Spirit is the power behind the church!
 - Will be his witnesses locally, regionally, all over the world.
 - When we repent, believe, and are saved, we are automatically his witnesses.
 - **How can we be sure we are effective witnesses?**
 - **How can we as a church more effectively testify to our neighbors? To the world?**
- Jesus' ascension into heaven. **How would the disciples have felt in the moment? How would this help strengthen the early church?**
 - They were eyewitnesses and could testify to the church. This would make his promises seem real - promises to be with them in the Holy Spirit, to empower them, to make them witnesses
 - The appearance of angels encouraged them with the promise of His return.
- They went back to Jerusalem and waited as Jesus commanded for his promise of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled.

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Do not leave Jerusalem. Wait for the gift of the promised Holy Spirit.**
 - We obviously don't need to sit in Jerusalem! But the principle of waiting for the Holy Spirit to give us strength and guidance is very important for us today.
 - Rejoice that this is a promise! The Spirit is in every believer and is always ready to help us.
- **Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.**
 - Our Jerusalem or Judea may be different from their's but the commandment is absolutely for the church today.
 - Jerusalem & Judea- our own home, church, or community
 - Begin where you are!!
 - Samaria- a place full of strangers, not our people..
 - The ends of the earth- all tribes, tongues, and nations.
 - **What is a WITNESS? How can the promise that we WILL be witnesses encourage us?**

- one who testifies to what he has seen, heard, and experienced
 - It does not say, “You will save people.” Even if we are not able to win arguments about faith, God promises to use our plain testimony. This takes the pressure off of us. We leave the job of saving to the Holy Spirit!
 - We are indeed witnesses. Are we satisfied to poor witnesses? It encourages us to better equip ourselves to be effective witnesses.
- **Trust in the fact that Jesus is coming again!**
 - This is so true for us now! It assures us that He is coming in strength and will crush the head of the serpent completely. The sting of death/the venom of the serpent has been taken away by his death and resurrection, but ultimately he will finish him and all his works completely when he returns. This allows the church to live in confidence and strength and not in fear.
- **Do and teach!**
 - This was the example of Jesus and still applies to us today. Our witness must be characterized by clear teaching of the Gospel of repentance and faith. It also must be characterized by deeds of love, holiness, and faithfulness that bear witness to the change Jesus has brought to our lives and to the love he has for the world.

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

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