

Recently a friend **ruined a TV show for me**. You see...I don't like one-off TV shows, I like the kind of TV shows that are a part of a series that builds on the other stuff that has already happened. **It's more fun**, you get to know the characters and it feels like you are watching a **10-hour movie**.

My friend and I were talking about this TV show, and **he started to tell me** some stuff and I was like "**woahh...waa... (waving hands)..STOP** I haven't gotten that far yet...you're way ahead of me." And like seriously one minute after that he "forgets" what I said and **blurts out the exciting ending** of the season. Telling me...BLEEP...sword...bleep...right after...bleep..." And now I know how the WHOLE thing ends! **Well I watched the rest of the season anyways**, and it was still really fun. And that guy and me, he knows who he is, are still friends.

But the real point here is I like shows where it makes sense to **start the show by saying "last week on ...such and such..."** Generally if a show begins by reviewing what happens the week before, then it is likely to be the type of show that I like.

And the Book of Acts has **just such an opening**. And I hope that you were with us last week, when I invited you **to read through the first two chapters of Acts**, cause it does a decent job reviewing what happened in Luke's previous work, the Gospel of Luke, and after he gets done telling us what he just got done doing, it begins to hint at what is going to come next.

Now if you are like me and love **serial style TV shows**, where you know what happens in say...episode 5 is going to build on not just what happened, the same storylines, in episode 4, but also the **same thematic material**. The same undercurrents and themes that were important in say episode 2, are still going to be present because it's part of on **larger unified work**. And here Luke makes it clear that this will also be the case in this book.

That there will be **narrative continuity**, while also there will **also be thematic and theological continuity**.

So this week's Bible reading challenge is to go back and watch...er read...particularly the ending of the Gospel of Luke, knowing that this text is the preview and introduction to the next episode in that same series. **Go look** for the easter eggs that might point to **what is being built** towards in Luke's narrative.

But in case you don't do my reading challenge, you'll need to know that Luke tells us that his account **ends with a mockery of justice**, which lead to Jesus being crucified, when there was **no reason** to crucify him. Jesus didn't do anything wrong, he wasn't violent. He taught things that **religious authorities** found threatening. So they found a way to use the **power of the state to have him executed**.

A major theme, in especially the last third of Luke, is **Jesus' innocence**. Which is important to know heading into the book of Acts.

We get the first **hint** of that here in Jesus ascension where he was lifted up, into heaven. You see, a first century audience that would have been fully aware of the religious context here. They would have obviously understood that **Jesus must have been innocent because guilty people aren't lifted up** by God, only innocent ones were.

But I think the biggest thing about our text this morning in terms of its larger context is that it seems that Luke is going to spend this entire second season of his story telling us that **while these Disciples are going to be the main human characters**, while **God will take on a new form**, yet **remaining** the central **character** of this story.

Just before this Luke tells us another important detail: 40 days. For the original audience and likely some of us, that might have us recall the story of when it rained for 40 days and 40 nights while Noah and his family were safely aboard the ark. Or when the Hebrews wandered the Sinai wilderness for 40 years.

Perhaps most familiar, we might recall Moses or Elijah (Exod 34:28; Deut. 8:2; 1 Kgs. 19:8) because both Moses and Elijah went into the wilderness for 40 days and nights to discover the will of God. And of course, we know that Luke told us about Jesus full of the Spirit of God, prevailing over the temptations of the devil at the end of his own 40 days in the wilderness.

Some themes could have and likely should come to mind: Moses, Elijah, and Jesus went (1) **alone** into the wilderness to discover the (2) **power** of God, all 3 (3) **fasted** in preparation for (4) a **coming mission**, and displayed the major concept of (5) **God with us**.

Moses revealed God through the **throwing down of the Torah**, the giving of God's Word. Elijah proclaimed **God's prophetic justice**, and Jesus preached the good news of the **coming reign of God**.

Yet just as if you were watching a trailer for hints of spoilers, you might have noticed our story doesn't contain all of these themes. Here in Acts, Jesus does **not fast**, in fact, Luke makes a point to show us the resurrected Jesus eating after his resurrection. Second, Jesus spends 40 days **not the wilderness but in Jerusalem**, and he does it **not alone but with the disciples** teaching them.

So notice what is left of those important themes: **The power of God is revealed towards a coming mission where we will have God with us**.

What does that sound like to you?

So we can begin to see where this is leading. And here is where we hit on the large question of this passage, which launches this whole season of what is to come

centering on the question that Disciples ask him, *“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?”* This question indicates where the disciples’ minds have been. At this point they have probably been hanging out with Jesus for these 40 days, and the thing they have been probably wondering the whole time is...**When are you going to settle the score?**

A massive injustice has occurred, and **now it was time for vindication**, maybe even revenge. So apparently the disciples finally get up the nerve to ask the question, and **they ask it in a way that sounds very religious**, but what they are driving at is a reckoning.

They say is *“Lord, at this time are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel?”* what they meant by this was likely, **are you going to settle all the accounts now?** Are you going to **judge who needs judging**, are you going to condemn what needs condemning, are you going to vindicate what needs vindicating, and now is the time that you are **going to call all of Israel to the carpet** for rejecting you? And demonstrate that you were right all along?

That little impulse that they have had for sometime, the one that back in Luke caused them to ask, **hey Jesus should we just call down some fire** to burn up that village full of people that rejected you? And that same impulse that caused **Peter to get out his sword** and go all Conan the barbarian, hacking at the ears of the people that came to arrest Jesus is still present. **Even Jesus’ closest of friends** still can’t fully divorce themselves from this recent idea of **the warrior messiah** who would come and bring reckoning and political liberation.

In fairness to them, it is a **fairly reasonable expectation**. Jesus was very much wronged, plus he said he was going to come and establish a kingdom. It makes sense that they would say ‘that’s probably gonna happen now isn’t it?’ (look around) When else would this happen?

Whether we are talking about **classical literature**, or the stories we tell each other today. It’s **very rare** that you see truly **delayed gratification** in a story. Stories have a rhythm. There is maybe an underdog, or a **character who suffers** and goes through a hard time, then **they overcome** their greatest challenge, (in this case being executed), and **then they come back and they defeat the bad guy**, they win, and maybe they get the girl. And I think maybe the disciples just remembered this story paradigm thought that this is just going to be in keeping with most stories about heroes.

Sitting here on Sunday mornings, we are too often fixed on our preconceived notions of the kingdom. For the disciples the **political reconstitution** of Israel is paramount. But perhaps ours is looking for a **kingdom of survival**. If only we had a little more money, time, energy, something, then we would have what we need to survive. Or perhaps it’s anticipating the **kingdom of activity**. We can just squeeze in one more extra curricular activity, or if we provide one more awesome program or

product or even if we find a way to help one more struggling person, then we will find fulfillment. Or perhaps you are seeking the **Kingdom of consumption**, constantly striving for bigger, better, more...so that we can all feel good about what we have...

But Jesus has **something different** in mind. Verse 7, he said to them, *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."* ...just to kind of paraphrase this...into 21<sup>st</sup> century American English... he said to them **"respectfully, none of your business."** Clearly it seems that Jesus isn't concerned with laying out every detail for his servants, and since Jesus refers to himself as a king in this new kingdom, does a king really need to give his explanation?

Now to our democratically minded 21<sup>st</sup> century American minds we might find that a little off-putting. **We want transparency**; we want to know what's going on. And we want to decide if we want to support you based on your business practices. Or join into your thing **after we determine** it is better than every other version of the thing.

Well that's **great**, in a democracy and with businesses, but with this, if this is truly the supernatural unlimited king of all kings, it kind of makes sense that we would need to adopt a **posture of humility**. And that Jesus is allowed to do things the way that he sees fit without disclosing all those details.

Jesus says in so many words, **"nope, it's not for you to know when that stuff is going to happen."** But he does have something that he expects his disciples to be working on instead, which he goes on to tell them in verse 8.

He said *"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

So really it's a **two-part answer** to their question. **Part one** is verse 7, **you don't get to know** when that reckoning is going to come and don't worry about it. **Part two** which is verse 8, is **the job I do have for you is** for you to go tell the story of what you have seen and heard, locally, regionally, and all the way to the ends of the known world.

Which is what we are going to see for the **rest of the book of Acts** of the Apostles, which might be more aptly named the Acts of the Holy Spirit. **Jesus isn't going to go bust up the temple or pick a fight with the Jewish authorities**; instead he is going to engage in self-control. He's not going to go all **Karate Kid** and throw in a dramatic flying crane kick to their head. Instead he's going to engage in a posture of **patience and redemption**. The disciples wanted the thing settled right now; even knowing there would be some casualties along the way. Jesus takes a much longer view and is prepared to see this thing out for the long haul to maximize the effectiveness of his redemption.

This is a **monumental moment** in the relationship between God and humanity. At this moment the parameters of everything that has happened since the death and resurrection of Jesus to right now, are set in place.

And those parameters are: that God **isn't going** to come along like Muhammad Ali and **dole out the fight** of the century against Joe Frazier. **Instead God** is choosing to **extend God's grace** through Jesus' followers **to everyone throughout the world**.

So what this means is that **this story**, the one of the early church, these followers in the way of Jesus, **is not going to turn out like all the other stories do**. This story would be the equivalent of an action movie where the hero gets wrongly accused, beaten, imprisoned, but then when the tables are turned rather than going and using the last ten minutes of the movie to beat up the muscle creatively and then chase down the main villain. **Instead** for the equivalent amount of time as three extended cut trilogies worth of movies the hero would go around looking up the people who wronged him, forgiving them, and offering them existential completion as human beings...

Maybe it's because this narrative of this age of the Holy Spirit and the church that we are talking about today is so different from the stories we tell each other, that it makes it difficult to wrap our brains around...but **this is a very different type of story**.

Maybe that seem presumptuous for one guy to make a global proclamation about how all things are going to be forever and ever until the end of forever. But that's where the **whole ascension thing** comes into play. Because this is **our reminder that God chooses this man**, Jesus Christ, to be resurrected and then lifted up.

Which leaves those disciples his friends standing **gawking up at the sky**, watching like Jesus was that helium balloon you accidentally let go that one time, and then you stared at it until it got so small that it passed out of sight.

Which I think is a reminder, that unlike our peers, by whom we do not like to be told what to do, this man, this **Jesus is not our peer. He is different than us, and by different I mean better**. God describes himself as limitless in all things, and even here in the act of the ascension, God seems to be demonstrating Jesus has the authority to say how things are gonna be.

And while the disciples, rightfully gawk; **two men dressed in white interrupt them**. These are presumably angels... although Luke doesn't use that word...saying, *"Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"*

Which is essentially, God reminding all the disciples, "SNAP SNAP, ehheehh...**now go do the thing I just told you to do.**" The message from these angels is... "yea, you've

seen some mind blowing thing from this Jesus, but we don't want you to just stand here looking back. Jesus gave you a job to do, now it is time to go do it."

So church, **are you ready to pick up where this passage leaves off?** Are you ready not take the rest of your life just musing about the things that Luke tells us that Jesus said and did, and are you ready to tell others about what you have seen and heard, there is no indication that anyone needs to be threatened or compelled or forced in any way. But just that telling the story and the teachings it will be enough.

**God is building something that is flat out good, and it is going to take some time to be accomplished, and we are the objects of that redemption, and yet we are not just objects of that redemption but we are also participates in it.**