

Acts 1:6–14

# Introduction

According to [Acts 1](#), For forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ministered to His disciples and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God.

I've mentioned before that there is a tendency in the evangelical church to treat Jesus' crucifixion as the only important event of the gospel narrative. But, as we study the scriptures closely, we find that all the major events of the gospel narratives are integral to the "good news". Moreover, these events are all driving toward a crescendo that is displayed in Jesus' ascension.

One of the reasons why Christians often overlook Jesus' ascension is because we miss-read the story that God is telling in the Bible. Throughout the biblical narrative there is a hope that, one day, God's messiah would be enthroned as king over the nations. Wrapped up in this hope are all the blessings that we associate with the message of the gospel.

Blessings like the forgiveness of sins, the ending of injustice, and the restoration of the entire creation are all things that would be realized when the promised messiah showed up and ushered in his kingdom.

This is the reason why Jesus' ascension played such a central role in the message of the apostles. It is a coronation of a king. It is the moment when the king is recognized for who he is.

These are the matters that Jesus and His apostles discuss in our passage from [Acts 1:6-14](#) which also gives us the account of Jesus' ascension.

Our passage breaks down into three parts:

1. In verses 6-8, Jesus speaks to His Apostles about the Kingdom and the Power they will receive.
2. In verses 9-11, Luke describes Jesus' ascension to show that Jesus is the "Son of Man"

3. In verses 12-14, there is a connection between Jesus' ascension and the apostle's devotion

## The Kingdom and the Power (vv. 6-8)

In verse 6, Jesus' apostle's ask Jesus, "**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**"

The "kingdom of God" is one of those phrases that you hear often but might have little meaning. However, for a Jewish person in the first century, the phrase "kingdom of God" had a very clear meaning. God's kingdom was God's rule in the world as it was supposed to be.

Ever since the fall, there has been the promise that God's kingdom would be restored. But this restoration was waiting on the arrival of God's promised messiah. The "seed of the woman" that would crush the head of the serpent. The offspring of Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed. David's Lord, under whose feet the nations would be made a footstool. All of these promises represent the anticipation of the arrival of God's kingdom.

Moreover, when God's kingdom arrives, certain things would arrive with it. God's people would be restored and God's messiah would rule over the nations and the wickedness and oppression that characterizes the nations would be no more under the righteous rule of the messiah.

In first century Israel, this hope took a very concrete form. God's people were under the oppression of the Roman empire. Thus, when the Jewish people hoped in the coming of the God's kingdom, it often focused on how the messiah would put an end to the Roman occupation of the land and how Israel's messiah would become a great king over all nations.

In our passage we see the disciples struggling to reorient their kingdom expectations around the facts of Jesus' death and resurrection. A **crucified** messiah was not in the normal list of things hoped for. So the followers of Jesus needed to reorient how they understood God's kingdom in light of the crucifixion.

The disciples were wondering if their expectations be fulfilled now that Jesus had been resurrected. Was **now** the time that Jesus was going to set up His kingdom and kick out the Romans?

In verses 7 and 8 Jesus continues to force His disciples to reorient the way they understand the kingdom. In verse 7 Jesus essentially tells His disciples that they need to be patient.

This is a common theme in the Bible. Jesus' disciples would only need to wait a few more days until Pentecost, but the spiritual fruit of patience is something that God is keen to grow in His people.

- › Practically speaking, the most common ways that God cultivates patience is through our relationships. Parents grow in patience through parenting children. Children grow in patience through obeying their parents. Husbands grow in patience by bearing with their wives as the weaker vessels and wives grow in patience by honoring and submitting to their husbands.
- › I've heard it said before that God **always** answers prayer. Whenever you ask God for something He **always** answers. And God gives one of three answers: Yes, No, or not yet.
- › Sometimes it is often that third answer that is the hardest for us to take. Think about some of the things we tell ourselves along these lines: "If I just had an answer, then I could make it through this season." "The hardest thing is not knowing."
- › As we operate in God's economy, we must be content to practice patience in all the areas where God is pleased to keep us in the dark.

But it is in verse 8 that Luke gives the most surprising remark to His apostles. **They** are interested when **Jesus** is going to restore the kingdom. But Jesus' response insinuates that the implementation and restoration of the kingdom is something that **they** are going to be involved with.

Jesus says that they ***will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they will be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.***

This is kingdom language, but Jesus is saying that it is His apostles who will be doing the work of establishing and growing the kingdom, as His heralds.

Throughout the Old Testament, there was always this need to wait for God's messiah to show up and restore the kingdom because of the weakness of the people. God's Spirit would anoint key figures to lead God's people, but the people, on the whole, were weak and fearful, incapable of bearing under the leadership of God or of God's anointed.

However, now in the New Covenant, what we find is God's people being endowed with power. No longer is it a judge or a leader like Moses, or a king like David who is anointed. In the New Covenant, Jesus is the anointed one. And because we are in Christ, all of God's people are anointed as priest, kings, and prophets through Jesus' ascension and pouring out of the Spirit.

We have received power to proclaim that Jesus is Lord in the face of all evils that confront us.

## Jesus is the Son of Man (vv. 9-11)

In verses 9-11 Luke writes a description of Jesus' ascension. Jesus ***was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.***

Jesus ascends to heaven on the clouds and this is a very clear allusion to a very important passage from the Old Testament. [Daniel 7:13-14](#) states:

### **Daniel 7:13-14** ESV

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

For many Christians who have grown up in the evangelical church, hearing the phrase, "The Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" makes you think of Jesus' **second coming**. But the image in [Daniel 7](#) is not a vision of the "Son of Man" coming to earth but rather coming to God ("The Ancient of Days") and receiving all power and authority and ruling over a kingdom that shall never pass away and shall not be destroyed.

This image is not one of Jesus' return but of His ascension. Here in Acts, Luke states that this moment of Jesus' enthronement is taking place in the middle of history.

What was thought to be something that wouldn't take place until the end of history, is in fact something that has already happened. Jesus sits enthroned **now**. Jesus has all rule and authority **now**. These are not things that Christians are waiting for at the end of history. They are realities that Christians confess **now**.

This is why the early church got into so much trouble with the Roman government. They proclaimed that "Jesus was Lord" in such a way that it was clear that Caesar was not. Throughout the New Testament, the language and imagery used to describe Jesus' lordship is language and imagery that competes with and subverts the claims of the Caesars.

This reality has not changed. We still serve the king of kings and lord of lords. One of the blessings that occurred historically in the west, was the recognition of Jesus' lordship by kings and magistrates throughout the centuries. This meant that the devotion that Christians offered to Jesus was rarely in tension with the ruling authorities.

However, this was not the case in the early church and it is increasingly no longer the case now.

Unless the Lord is merciful, Christians across the western world will need to learn from our brothers and sisters in Christ in the global south and from the early church on how to proclaim the rule of our risen and ascended Lord Jesus in a world that is increasingly hostile to him.

There are many testimonies from the early church but one of the most famous and stirring is that of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and ministered into old age in the 2nd c. AD. He was ultimately arrested by the Roman authorities for preaching Christ and he was brought into the arena to renounce Jesus Christ or be given over to the beasts or the fire.

When Polycarp was commanded by the Roman Pro-Consul to revile Christ, Polycarp said, "For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Jesus is the king and we must always offer to Him our highest loyalty. And this is what we see the Apostles and disciples of Christ doing as we turn to verses 12-14

## Ascension and Devotion (vv. 12-14)

In verses 12-14 the apostles return to Jerusalem and go to the upper room where they devoted themselves to prayer with other who followed Jesus.

While these details of the narrative might seem minimal, they are worth your attention as we come to our conclusion. In these moments between the ascension of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost, we see the apostles devote themselves to their king.

They wait in obedience to their king's orders to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes upon them. The form that their devoted obedience takes is that of prayer. They offer up prayer as they wait patiently.

This draws us back to our earlier point of the Lord growing patience in us His people. It is often in and through prayer that God begins to encourage us and grow us in patience. As you begin to pursue obedience to God and wait for God patiently in prayer, you start to notice God's work in your life in more and more ways.

The devotion of prayer is directly connected to Jesus' ascension because it is in the act of prayer that we confess with our actions that Jesus truly is Lord and there is ultimately no other that we can turn to but He who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.