

121. To be continued...

May 6, 2018

September 6, 2015, we started to study the Harmony of the Gospel in chronological order. 2 years and 7 months later, we are about to finish it in the Book of Acts.

Why the Book of Acts? For 2 reasons:

- 1) The first chapter of Acts explains the Ascension of Jesus in more detail than any Gospels.
- 2) The Book of Acts is, in a way, still being written by our lives as the disciples of Jesus.

Jesus didn't go up to heaven and let us somehow survive in this anti-Christian world. Before He ascended to heaven, the Lord Jesus gave two assignments to all of us – witnessing and making disciples. He expects us to do them instead of sitting on our hands.

A. WHAT IS THAT TO YOU?

John 21:20-25 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." 23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. 25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

Let's face it, folks. We know what Peter was doing here. He was comparing his future with John's future. That is how the fashion world makes a living. But in the spiritual world, comparison is extremely hazardous for our spiritual health.

We need to mind our own spiritual business. What other Christians were commanded to do by the Lord does not require any self-appointed supervisor. They don't report to you or me. I am responsible for what I am told to do by the Lord and I report to Him and the same goes for you individually. There always are spiritual busybodies who make other people's spiritual business as theirs. Here is the command from the Lord to you if you are a spiritual busybody, "What is that to you? You follow Me."

To be distracted by ourselves, our circumstances, or by other Christians, is to disobey the Lord and possibly get detoured out of the will of God. Keep your eyes of faith on Him and on Him alone.

This does not mean that we ignore others, because we do have the responsibility of caring for one another. Rather, it means that we must not permit our curiosity about others to distract us from following the Lord. God has His plan for us; He also has plans for our Christian friends and associates. How He works in their lives is His business. Our business is to follow Him as He leads us.

B. THE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE BELIEVERS

Acts 1:4-8 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The disciples didn't understand the main reason for Jesus' physical presence on earth while He was with them before His death; they still didn't understand it after His resurrection. That's why they asked Him when He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Their mindsets were in the physical realm while Jesus' was in the spiritual.

When you are on Harbor Boulevard in Anaheim and see the Disneyland sign, it means, "You are gonna spend a lot of money." The famous Las Vegas sign means, "You are gonna lose a lot of money." Signs have meaning.

While we can't pinpoint when Jesus is going to come and get us out of this world that is known as the rapture, we can see signs of the times that say it is getting very close. What are these signs? We read them in the headlines every day or hear them on the news or see them on TV. I am not a prophet, nor am I a son of a prophet. The signs of the times are plainly recorded in Scripture.

Biblical prophecy provides some of the greatest encouragement and hope available to us today. Just as the OT is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's birth, so both testaments are filled with references to the second coming of Christ.

One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the OT, where 17 Books give it prominence. In the 7956 verses of the NT, there are 318 references to the Second Coming of Christ, an amazing 1 out of every 25 verses. 23 of the 27 NT Books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first arrival as a Babe in the manger, there are 8 which look forward to His Second Coming as the King of kings and the Ultimate Judge!

In the meanwhile, we all have a job to do – taking the Gospel of Jesus to your family members, your neighbors, friends, coworkers, even strangers you come across in your walk of life. You may say, "I don't know how. I don't know much about the Bible." Don't worry. That is where the Holy Spirit comes. You really don't want to evangelize without the Holy Spirit. Because it will be a nasty crash and burn.

But when the Holy Spirit opens the door and leads you and He will fill your heart with His power. What you will say about Jesus to them will be impossible to stop, impossible to ignore, impossible not to be heard, and impossible to resist.

The same power that energized the first-century believers is available to us today. Have you been empowered by the Holy Spirit? If not, you can be. Ask God to fill you with this power to change your world. It is not about emotion. It is about fact. God wants to fill you with His power.

Rather than focusing on when Jesus is coming back, because He will come back according to His divine schedule regardless of our calculations, we should focus on what we are to be doing as we await His return.

C. THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

If I were Jesus, I would go right back to the Chief Priest and the Pharisees with the resurrected body that allowed Him to go through the wall, just to scare the snot out of them. But Jesus didn't waste His time like that. Rather, He showed Himself to those who would believe and need the Living Hope.

In this verse, the word "Go" has a continuing tense in Greek and literally means "as you are going." In other words, "As you are going to the grocery store; as you are going to school; as you are going to work – wherever you're going – share the Gospel of Jesus." In other words, the Great Commission takes on a much broader perspective. We're to be sharing and teaching wherever we're going, whatever we're doing.

Some people ask me, "Which one is more important? Evangelizing or discipling?" I answer to them, "Both." You cannot neglect one from another. We need to evangelize to the people around us to bring them to Jesus. After they come to Jesus, they must grow in the Lord through the Word of God. Then, by growing in the Lord, people will go out to tell about Jesus to others. That healthy circle should be repeated all the time.

Somewhere along the line, we have separated evangelism from discipleship. But there is no such distinction in Scripture. The idea of the Great Commission is not just to pray with someone to receive Christ and say, "See you later. God bless you." That would be like a mother who gives birth to her baby and says, "God bless you, my child. It's a rough world out there, but here is a box of Pampers. Now get out of here." A little baby needs to be nurtured and cuddled and cared for and loved and taught. A new believer requires the same.

Our objective, our vision, and our mission are to make disciples. We must strive to get new Christians up on their feet spiritually and help them acclimate to the church and learn what it means to be a Christian. Only then we are truly fulfilling the Great Commission.

Acts 9:26-27 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

After Saul's (or Paul's) conversion, there was great doubt among the believers as to whether he had really put his faith in Jesus Christ. After all, he had been a relentless persecutor of the early church. Some even thought his alleged conversion might have been a scheme to infiltrate their ranks.

So God spoke to a man named Ananias and instructed him to go and visit Saul according to the Book of Acts chapter 9. Ananias probably couldn't believe his ears: "Are we talking about the same Saul here? Are you talking about Saul of Tarsus?" Then God brought another man into Saul's (or Paul's) life. His name was Barnabas, and he personally introduced Paul to all of the other disciples and reassured them that his conversion was sincere.

Now many of us would like to be a Paul. We would love to turn our world right side up. But the question is, how many of us are willing to be an Ananias or a Barnabas?

You may not be the next Paul. You may not be the next Billy Graham. But you may have an impact on the one who will be. That person you take under your wing could shake his or her world. What Barnabas did is a good illustration of true discipleship, because discipling is not just teaching; it is also being a friend.

The Sunday morning service in our church has two purposes: to evangelize and to teach. Our Midweek Service on Thursday night is more for studying the Word of God in depth. Then we have 3 Discipleship Classes – 2 New Believers' Classes for Men and Women, as well as a discipleship class that I teach for those who feel the call of God.

D. THE ANGELIC ASSURANCE OF JESUS' RETURN

Acts 1:9-11 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Our Lord Jesus' ascension into heaven is very important to us. I am sure that His disciples felt that they were left behind all alone with a horde of bad guys all around who wanted to persecute them in any way they could.

1) If Jesus didn't return to the Father, He couldn't have sent the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

2) The Savior is our interceding High Priest, giving us the grace that we need for life and service.

3) He is also our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins. The exalted and glorified Head of the church is now working with His people on earth and helping them accomplish His purposes.

These two men, in my opinion, they are angels, told the disciples to put their attention in the right place – obedience to Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem, not in wondering where and how Jesus went. Jesus told them to go to the ends of the earth, but they stood gazing up into heaven with open mouths.

Please note what these two men said in v11":

Acts 1:11b This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

What did they mean? I find three important things to think about:

1) He left physically and will so come in like manner.

Whether it is the rapture or the second coming of Christ, He would come down from heaven physically.

2) He left visibly and will so come in like manner.

When Christ comes down to get His believers out of this world in the rapture, only the believers will be able to see Him. But for the second coming of Christ at the end of the Great Tribulation, all the unbelievers will be able to see Him.

3) He left from the Mount of Olives and will so come in like manner.

This only applies to the second coming of Christ. When He returns with His believers, He will come back to the Mount of Olives.

My brothers and sisters, please remember this: Jesus is coming back soon when NO ONE is expecting. Pray for His return and do what you are told to do in this world – witness to the unbelievers and make disciples of Jesus with your life and words.