

“Preparing for the end times”: Acts 1:6-11

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – November 21, 2021

Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Scripture reading – Acts 1:6-11

“⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ⁷ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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.’ ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘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.’ ”

Brief review: What happened at Christ’s first coming?

- In the fullness of times, Jesus was born as a Jew in fulfillment of God’s many promises of salvation to “national Israel,” the physical descendants of Jacob (Gal 4:4). Jesus was referred to variously as the king of the Jews, the Son of David and the Son of Abraham (Mt 2:2; 27:29, 37; 1:1).
- Jesus’ preaching/healing ministry was confined to national Israel (Mt 15:24). He similarly restricted the apostle’s ministry to national Israel during his earthly life (Mt 10:5-6).
- He inaugurated his reign as king in a very limited and relatively inconspicuous way during his time on earth (Lk 17:20-21; Mk 4:11-12).
- At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the New Covenant, which includes national Israel together with every other ethnic group on earth (Mt 26:27-28; Jn 10:16; Jer 31:27-34; Eph 2:11-22). Jesus himself was the fulfillment of the previous covenants made between Yahweh and the physical descendants of Jacob, including the “big three:” Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; Exo 19-24; 2 Sam 7:12-17; Lk 1:30-33). The seal of this New Covenant is the Holy Spirit living in the hearts of all

covenant members (Eph 1:13-14) symbolized by water baptism (Matt 3:11; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 12:13) and evidenced by the Spirit's character and work (Gal 5:22-24; 1 Cor 12:7).

- Jesus gave his life as the one final, permanent sacrifice for human sins (Heb 10:10-14), then his body was buried while his spirit descended to *sheol* in the underworld, the place of the dead (1 Peter 3:18-19; cf. Lk 16:14-31).
- The third day, he resurrected from the dead (1 Cor 15:3-4), and forty days later he ascended to heaven, where he was coronated king to reign at the right hand of the Father, the place of sovereign authority and power (Phil 2:9-11; Mk 14:62). Because believers are "in Christ" (joined via his Spirit), we too reign with him in a very real sense, with authority over evil principalities and natural diseases and phenomena (Eph 1:20-21; 2:6; Jn 17:20-23; 14:12; Lk 10:17-19).
- Before leaving the earth, Jesus promised to send his Holy Spirit to infill and empower his followers to expand his mission to every nation (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Acts 1:8), thus "re-inheriting" the nations disinherited after the Ziggurat of Babylon incident (Gen 11:1-9; cf. Deut 32:8-9; Ps 82:1-8).
- In the present age, sometimes called the "Church Age" or the "times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24; Rom 11:25; cf. Rev 11:2), we are called to be his faithful witnesses, anticipating his glorious return to complete God's plan of salvation (Acts 1:8; Titus 2:13-14).

Brief preview: What will happen at Christ's second coming?

- 1. We "overcome." With words and actions, we bear witness to the one true God and his Son, Jesus. As we tell others the Good News of salvation, many will respond in faith, and God's kingdom (his reign) expands. At the same time, many other people will hate and persecute us with escalating intensity. (Mt 24:9-14.)**

- Jesus said that in this world we would have *thlipsis*, "tribulation" (Jn 16:33) and that, together with blessings of following Christ, we should expect "persecutions" (Mk 10:29-30; Mt 24:4-25; cf. 1 Thess 3:3-4).
- Toward the end the present age, certain things will happen:
 - The tribulation and persecution will intensify. There will be terrible times in the "last days" (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; 4:3; Jude 18-19; cf. Matt 24:6-13).
 - The Gospel will be proclaimed to "every nation" (Mt 24:14).
 - Many ethnic Jews will be saved. The "times of the Gentiles" provokes them to jealousy (Rom 11:13-32; cf. Matt 21:43-44).
 - The "antichrist" (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:2-3; 2 Jn 1:7) or "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3) will be permitted to deceive and oppress and kill many (Dan 7:21; 8:24; Rev 11:7; 12:17; 13:7; 17:14).

- The love of many will “grow cold” (Mt 24:12). Many will fall away (Mt 24:10; 1 Tim 4:1).
- The present age will end with the “nations” (“Gog and Magog”) making war against the saints and the holy city at Armageddon (Rev 16:14-16; cf. Rev 19:19-21; 20:7ff.; Zech 12, 14; Ezk 38-39; Joel 3).
- The goal of believers during the present age is to witness faithfully, endure suffering until the end, be conquerors and to not “love their lives unto death” (Matt 24:13; 1 Cor 15:58; Rev 2:7,11; 12:11).

2. Jesus returns. Jesus will descend to earth in great glory and power, visible to all, to punish the wicked and gather his people to himself. (2 Thess 1:5-10.)

- Jesus’ return is referred to in the NT as his *parousia* – “coming, arrival, presence” (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13), *epiphaneia* – “appearance” (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1), and *apokalupsis* – “revelation” (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7).
- Jesus will come “on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 24:30; Acts 1:9-11; cf. Dan 7:13).
- Various cosmic disturbances will mark his coming: the sun and moon are darkened, stars fall, the powers of heaven are shaken (Isa 13:10; 24:21-23; Joel 2:10,31; 3:15; Mt 24:29-31).
- Jesus will come with great glory, “in flaming fire” and “the trumpet of God,” “a cry of command” and the “voice of an archangel” and “every eye will see him” (2 Thess 1:8; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 1:7; cf. John 5:28-29).
- Jesus will be accompanied by “the armies of heaven:” his “holy ones” consisting of mighty angels and the “dead in Christ”, whose bodies will be resurrected and joined to their spirits (Zech 14:5; Mt 25:31; 1 Ths 4:14-16; 2 Ths 1:7; Rev 19:14).
- Those believers who are still on earth will be transfigured and “caught up” to “meet him in the air” (1 Thess 4:16-17; Matt 24:31; Phil 3:20-21).
- Believers will rejoice (Luke 21:28; 2 Thess 1:10) and unbelievers will mourn and be terrified (Matt 24:30; Zech 12:10-14; Rev 6:16-17).
- On this “Day of the Lord,” Jesus will save his people from God’s eschatological wrath and punish the “earth dwellers” who reject God, hate what is good and refuse to turn to him (Isa 13:9-11; Zep 1:14-16; 2 Thess 1:6-9; Rev 19:11-21).

3. Jesus judges. Jesus will resurrect everyone who has lived and judge them in righteousness based on their faith (i.e., their loyalty to him expressed in good works) (Acts 17:31.)

- God the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son “because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:22-29). Jesus delegates some judgments to believers (1 Cor 6:2-3).
- The righteous dead will have been raised to “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29).

- The unrighteous dead will be raised from *sheol*: “the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29; Rev 20:11-15).
- All rebellious spiritual beings will also be judged (1 Cor 6:3; 2 Petr 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 20:10).
- Christ’s judgment will be fair, final and complete (Ps 89:14; John 5:30; 1 Peter 1:17; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12; cf. Gen 18:25).

4. Jesus reigns over a renewed creation. Jesus, now reigning in heaven, will establish his eternal kingdom on a renewed earth, bringing heaven and earth together, where believers will live and reign with him and the spiritual beings forever. (Rev 21:1-4.)

- Jesus’ new, resurrected body was the “first fruits” of the “new creation” (Acts 26:23; 1 Cor 15:20-23).
- The present “heavens and earth” will be cleansed by fire, and every vestige of sin, evil, suffering, death and pain will be destroyed forever (2 Peter 3:7-10; Rev 21:1,27; 22:3).
- God will create a “new heaven and new earth” from the old ones. As in Eden, heaven and earth are merged and the “dwelling place of God” and angels will be with humans (Rev 21:1-4). This is known in the New Testament as the *palingenisia*, the “renewal, recreation, rebirth” (Mt 19:28; Titus 3:5; cf. Rom 8:18-25).
- In this re-created cosmos, there will be no more tears, mourning, crying or pain but sheer joy, unbounded love, untold beauty and immeasurable peace (Rev 21:1-22:5). We will see God’s “face” and live in unbroken communion with the Father and Son in the Spirit forever (Rev 22:4), and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).

Take aways

- **Be ready!** – Mt 24:44; Lk 12:35-40
- **Be holy!** – Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:14
- **Be encouraged!** – Lk 21:28; 1 Thess 4:18