

DON'T JUST STAND THERE!

Acts 1: 6-14

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The disciples still did not understand: In Acts 1: 6 we read, "So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel"? We know at the time that the people of Israel were under Roman occupation, and it was brutal. The disciples of Jesus had witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection, yet still did not understand that Jesus did not come to be a military Messiah of an earthly Kingdom. Rather, Jesus was the Messiah (Saviour) of a spiritual Kingdom of unconditional love and forgiveness to include all of His people—not only the Jews.

As Christians today, it is important for us to put our life's emphasis on advancing God's Kingdom of Grace, and not be preoccupied with our Kingdoms on earth. Security is important and we need to discern these issues, but in obedience to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, when we see our brothers and sisters in trouble, our priority is to help them. Fear cultivates cynicism, distrust, and irrational suspicion of our brothers and sisters; thus paralyzing our ability to reach out to them. Christ's Kingdom is about Grace and not fear.

Do not be concerned with time and date. In our scripture reading today, Jesus answers his disciples saying that it is not important for them to know the date or the hour when Jesus will return. Though Jesus' words are clear, we often do not listen. Consider this story:

In the 1800's there was a group of Christians known as the Millerites. They were led by a man named William Miller. He was a Baptist preacher who predicted in 1831 that 12 years later - sometime between March of 1842 and March of 1843, that Jesus would come back.

His announcement caught on and many people became his followers.

When Jesus didn't come, there was a huge disappointment. The followers were totally disillusioned. Then on August 12, 1844, during a camp meeting in New Hampshire, one of the men in attendance stood up and declared that he had received a message from God: he said, "Jesus is coming...and He was coming that year on October 22nd.

His announcement hit a chord. The entire movement exploded with excitement. As the day of Jesus' return came closer, a Philadelphia store window displayed a sign which read: "This shop is closed in honor of the King of Kings who will appear on the 22nd of October. God ready, friends, to crown Him Lord of all."

A group of 200 people left to prepare for His coming.

Most of the Millerites quit their jobs during those last days. Farmers just left their crops in the fields, and workers left their work unfinished in their shops. October 22nd finally came, but Jesus didn't.

We are not to speculate on when Jesus will return. It is important to be aware of the promise that he is coming, but not to be preoccupied with speculation about when that will happen.

Be concerned with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is saying to his disciples not to be concerned with minor things, but be aware of the Holy Spirit's power which will come upon them with power! The Holy Spirit was a gift which they were to receive soon. In Luke 11: 13 Jesus makes the point that his disciples can count on Jesus' promises – *'if you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?'* In other words, though we are not perfect human beings, and still know how to give our children good gifts, how much more will God (who is without sin) give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?' The Holy Spirit is promised to be with us as our guide and counselor - for each one of us – 24/7!

Why do you stand looking up to heaven? After Jesus gave the promise of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were watching as he was quickly raised up to heaven and two men in white robes were standing beside him. Then these angels said in verse 11a: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" In other words, the angels said "don't just stand there, do something, and don't worry he is coming back in the same way you saw him go up to heaven". This was an important message for the disciples to hear. The disciples were overjoyed that Jesus rose from the dead. Now, he is leaving again, and they sadly viewed his departure. At that time, they still did not fully understand the implications of the coming of the Holy Spirit. One can therefore understand why they lingered as they witnessed Jesus ascending to heaven.

The Christian faith is about doing something useful, not wasting time on things of little consequence. The disciples received instructions not to just stand there, so they did what they could do - they prayed! How often have we been saddened by a loss, a disappointment, an illness, and were at a loss of what to do? You can pray!

Prayer confronts fear. We all heard that Satan hates prayer. Prayer is our conversation with God. We know that when people have good communication, their relationship gets stronger. In the pre-marriage course I facilitate with couples, the first topic we cover is 'communication'. Communication is the first order of business! The same is true in our relationship with God. When we pray, we open up the communication with God. And prayer is not only us speaking to God, but prayer is also about us listening to God. A relationship with God through prayer is a relationship of genuine love. In this relationship with God, we gain confidence that we are not alone (we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit) and nothing in this life, not even death can separate us from God's love. Certainly, prayer works uniquely in each of our lives, but what we have in common is that God works through prayer to bring growth and joy to our lives.

"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God" (William Carey). Eighteenth century missionary to India, William Carey wrote these words. We can expect great things from God because of what he had done through Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What is stopping you from attempting great things for God? Are you preoccupied with things of this world and playing it safe? Have you gone out of your comfort zone and done something for God? As a disciple of Jesus who follows his example, are you leaving a legacy of inspiring faith for your family and friends? Don't just stand there, start by praying and follow it up with action. If you are open to the Holy Spirit's prompting and power, you can do great things for God. Amen.