

Parting Thoughts

Acts 1:1-11 (v. 8)

Introduction

Before each Olympic games, a torch is lit in Olympia, Greece, the site of the original games, and carried by a series of runners to the site of the current games. The last runner climbs the steps to the official Olympic torch in that stadium and lights it, signifying the start of the games. From this we get the phrase “passing the torch”, which means to pass on the responsibility from one generation to the next. This is what Paul was doing with Timothy, as he mentored him in being a pastor (read **2 Timothy 2:1-2**). This is what Jesus was doing when He ascended to heaven. Jesus had accomplished His primary goal for coming to the earth; He had purchased atonement and won salvation for us. But there was more work to do. The Word must get out. The Gospel must be proclaimed to all the nations. But Jesus is going away. No longer will He be here to do the work face-to-face. By the Holy Spirit, He will be acting through His disciples, who are now apostles. They are graduating from learner to ambassador. They will be His witnesses to all the earth.

The Call (v.2)

You don't take applications for a protégé. A protégé is called, chosen by the master, the mentor. Luke tells us that Jesus chose His apostles. He called men from different lifestyles and different regions, from fishermen to tax collectors to zealots, from Galileans to Judeans. He didn't call them because they were great men. He called these men so He could do great things through them. It's comforting for us to know that God calls ordinary people like us to do extraordinary things through us.

The Training (v. 3)

While He spent the last three years teaching them what they needed to know, He spent the last forty days since His resurrection training them and preparing them for the task at hand. Luke said *He showed them many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3)*. This is what it's all about, the kingdom or reign of God. The first time Jesus came, it was to inaugurate His kingdom. When He ascends, it will be to take the throne. The apostles will be “minding the store”, working on building the kingdom by spreading the Gospel while He's away. When He returns, He will establish His kingdom, His reign in power and glory for all eternity.

The Order (v. 4-5)

Jesus doesn't *suggest* they wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit. Luke says He *ordered* them to do that. This is vital to the mission. They are inadequate for the job. They must not try to do anything on their own. They must wait for the Holy Spirit.

The Question (v. 6)

It may seem odd that the order to wait for the Holy Spirit would cause the disciples to ask a question about the kingdom. However, the Holy Spirit had long been associated with the coming Day of the Lord (read **Joel 2:28-29**). Their reasoning was that if the Spirit is coming, this must be the Day of the Lord, the day of judgment. Is this the day when Christ will establish His kingdom?

The Correction & Promise (v. 7-8)

However, their question showed they still didn't understand the Kingdom of God. They were still equating it with the nation of Israel. Israel had rejected the King. They could no longer be His kingdom. As Jesus said in the parable, the vineyard will be given to other tenants (**Luke 20:9-18**). The disciples were also still trying to get a fix on the date of Christ's return. Once before Jesus had addressed this issue (read **Matthew 24:36**). Then, in His state of humiliation, before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus did not know the day or hour either. In His glorified state, He no longer says He doesn't know, for now He shares all knowledge with the Father. He just tells the disciples that it's none of their business. But He redirects their attention where it should be. The Holy Spirit is coming to give them the power to be His witnesses. That's all they need to worry about now.

Departure (v. 9-11)

With these words, Jesus was *lifted up* (v. 9). Just as the Father raised Him from the dead to show the world the sacrifice was valid, He now lifts the Son to heaven to give Him His throne. The disciples still had questions. They weren't ready for Him to leave. They wanted Him back. They wondered about heaven and the kingdom. Then the two angels appeared to jog them back into reality. Like when our granddaughters become so engrossed in a TV show that we have to shout their names two or three times to get their attention. The angels called them back to task. "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up?*" (v. 10). Jesus will return the same way He left. But you have other things to concern yourselves with."

Carrying On (Luke 24:51-53)

(Read Luke **24:51-53**). Once the angels got their attention, the disciples worshiped Jesus and went back to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. And while they waited, they continued to worship Jesus in the temple. Jesus had not really gone away. He was still with them, like He promised, though it wasn't physical. It wasn't virtual, either. Though not face-to-face, it was real. And He's still really with us.

Are We Ready?

We don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit at Baptism. Then, for the rest of our lives, He works within us through the Word and the Sacrament of the Altar, bringing His power and the presence of Jesus into our lives. If Jesus had not gone away, the Holy Spirit would not have come, and we would not be able to believe. But since we have the Holy Spirit, we can say, "Alleluia! Christ is risen!"

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
