

## ACTS 1:1-11 TAKEN INTO HEAVEN

The story is told of a man living in New York City.

Early one morning, even before he could leave for work, he received four long-distance calls, regarding problems with his work. Each caller wanted him to get on a plane and come fix the problem.

He finally got dressed, then received two more local calls, regarding more problems with his work. Now he was supposed to go and fix those problems.

He gave up on breakfast, and as many New York City people do, he left his ridiculously expensive home and waded down a cab.

“Where do you want me to take you?” asked the cabbie.

“I don’t care,” said the man. “I’ve got problems everywhere.”

Do you know the feeling? Everywhere you look, you see trouble. In a broken world, sometimes all you can see is the trouble.

When that happens, it is good to go back to the basics. It is good to anchor ourselves again, in the core truths of our faith.

On Christmas we declare, Jesus lived for us. On Good Friday we declare, Jesus died for us. On Easter we declare, Jesus rose for us.

Now, on the day we call “Ascension Sunday”, we declare that he ascended into heaven. As we look at the Ascension, as Jesus disciples did, even with all of the problems of this troubled world, we see God’s grace everywhere.

We see grace...then. We see grace...now. We see grace...soon.

As we gaze at the Ascension, as the disciples did, we see God’s grace everywhere. We see God’s goodness to us, in a not-so-good world.

THEN. These words direct our minds and hearts back to those days, and there we see grace. We see grace in this: **THE SPIRIT CAME.**

For 40 days, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared and reappeared to his disciples. He did this to prove that he was really alive, and he used the time to give further instruction to his followers.

Still, they were confused. In verse 6 we read of them asking, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” They still seemed to think Jesus had come mostly to free Israel from the Romans.

As he often did, Jesus did not answer the question they asked. Instead, he answered the question they should have asked. In verse 7, he told them, as he had before, that God’s plans are for God to know.

Then he offered a promise in verse 8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses.”

As promised, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came. He entered into the hearts and lives of these first believers in a new way, so they might boldly and faithfully proclaim to all there, what God had done in sending Jesus to live, die, rise and return to heaven.

Jesus made the promise to the disciples, and he made the promise for all who would believe in him. The Spirit who came to them, is the Spirit who lives within all who name Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The Spirit came, **SO WE CAN SPEAK.**

Christian artist Charlie Peacock recently wrote, “Here’s what I’ve figured out for myself: My life and my art are going to tell a story whether I try to or not. They will tell a story that says, ‘This is what a follower of Jesus is. This is what he is about. This is what he believes. This is what he thinks is important.’”

Jesus says, “You will be my witnesses.” It sounds like a command, but it is really a description. With your life and your words, you will tell the story of Jesus to the people around you.

I don’t know about you, but that makes me nervous! I am not so sure I like that idea, because I know my life and words often fall far short of how Jesus tells me to live and speak.

So where is the grace here?

Listen to Jesus’ words again: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” What does Jesus mean by “power”? Does that mean Jesus will help us overpower people with our wonderful lives and words?

No. The word here refers to ability. He will make you able to live and speak in a way, that testifies well, to Jesus Christ.

The Spirit came, so we can speak. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he promised and provided his Holy Spirit, so that we can speak of him.

Do you believe that? Do I believe that? Do we believe that God’s plan for bringing people to Jesus, is the witness of words and life, by his people?

“No, pastor. That can’t be it. There must be more than that.

“I need lots and lots of training, so I can say exactly the right thing. I need to get my life perfectly

together, so that people will believe what I say. Actually, I need someone else to tell my friend about Jesus. How about you?

“We need a clever marketing plan. We need entertaining gatherings. We need more programs. We need Starbucks in the foyer.”

No. We have what we need. We have the Holy Spirit. He will help you to speak to that person you know, and he will help us speak to people we need to reach.

Who saves people? Who turns hearts to Jesus? Me? You? No. God, and God alone. When we know this, when we feel this, when this truth runs through our souls, we are free to speak, because we have the power of the Holy Spirit, to help us speak, and we trust him to do with our words and our lives, what he wants.

Again, do you believe that? Do I believe that? Could it be that God’s grace to speak is ours already, but we simply do not see it for what it truly is? Could we be looking in the air, for something that is right here?

What grace! We have the best news in the world, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to speak to others, in word and life.

See the grace then. The Spirit came, so we can speak.

See the grace, NOW. Now, THE SAVIOR RULES.

Verse 9: “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

Where is he? They wonder. Then two men appear. They may be angels. They may be the two men who appeared when Jesus rose from the dead. He is gone from here, they say. He has been taken into heaven.

Then Peter declares this reality in his sermon at Pentecost:

Acts 2:33: “Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you see and hear.”

Paul confirms this in his letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:9: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...”

The writer to the Hebrews rejoices in this:

Hebrews 1:8: “But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.’”

Jesus rules! He is the Lord of all. Nothing, and no one, is more powerful than him. In this season, evil still besets us. But Jesus has died, risen, and ascended, and he again reigns on a throne that will never be defeated.

Now, the Savior rules. SO WE CAN TRUST.

The story is told of a census taker who went to a rural area to do his counting. At the gate entering a farmyard, he saw a “Beware of Dog” sign.

He was afraid of going any farther, so he honked, and a man came out of the barn with a little, friendly dog yapping behind him.

The census taker asked, “Is your sign about this dog?”

“Yes,” said the farmer.

“But that dog couldn’t keep anyone away.”

“No,” said the farmer, “but the signs sure do.”

The “signs” of our times and our lives, enslave us to fear. Isn’t it so? Does it ever seem to you that this world, or your world, is out of control?

We live beneath the wearying weight of the 24/7 news cycle, where we can fixate on a new disaster, every hour, and learn all the graphic details.

We live beneath the wearying weight of issues in our lives, or the lives of people we love, and we cry to the Lord, wondering why it must be this way.

The Savior rules, so we can trust. While we see and experience hard realities, we embrace this reality: the Savior rules. We trust him, for we know that every event of world history and our history will work toward the completion of God’s ultimately glorious purposes. Even beneath the wearying weights of this world and our worlds, we know God is our Father, and he will care well for us, in this heavy place.

Today, how do you need to be reminded of the rule of Jesus, in whom you can trust?

Maybe you are stricken and sickened by the images of suffering you see around our world.

Maybe you cannot stop feeling, the weight of the verbal abuse that was heaped upon you last night.

Maybe you are weary of the mere act of getting out of bed, because of the pain in every part of your body.

Maybe you face another week, without the one you have loved and lost.

Maybe you are a teenager, and you truly seeing the hard realities of our world, for the first time.

He ascended into heaven, and rules from the highest throne. Now, the Savior rules, so you can trust him.

See the grace then. See the grace now. See the grace SOON.

Soon, THE SAVIOR WILL COME.

In verse 11, the two men declare to the disciples, “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.”

The disciples need to hear this. Are they about to see Jesus again? He has appeared and disappeared and reappeared. Is he about to reappear?

Eventually yes. But as Jesus has told them, it is not for them to know when. But it is for them to know this: he will come again.

Soon, the Savior will come. How “soon” is soon? We do not know. “Soon” to us and “soon” to God may be very different.

But we know this: the next great event of salvation history, after the ascension of Jesus, will be the return of Jesus. He will completely destroy Satan, and he will establish his kingdom for all to see.

Soon we will worship and serve Jesus forever - without sin, without pain, without suffering. The glory of creation will be made new, in a place we call “the new heavens and the new earth”, where righteousness dwells.

Soon, the Savior will come, SO WE CAN HOPE.

Pastor Maurice Roberts writes,

“If the Christian is to live above his fears and above his feelings, he must learn the art of seeing his life in the light of its last chapter. Well did a good old Puritan say, ‘He who rides to be crowned cares not about the rain.’

“We are riding to be crowned with Christ. We ride on the King’s Highway toward privileges which beggar all our thoughts. If our path is rough and the weather rainy, it cannot spoil our hope of sitting on Christ’s throne at last...”

We trust now, but even as we trust now, we hope for later. If we can only trust Jesus in this life, what good is it? What grace do we really have?

But these men declare, and these disciples testify, that Jesus will come back, and we cling to that hope, even in this world where we see problems all around us.

We do not dismiss this life. We do not reject this life. We are not just wasting time, waiting for the end. Right now matters. Jesus is redeeming all things. Part of our call is to join him in bringing his good, into this world of so much evil.

But our lasting hope is not here! Our lasting hope is the day of Jesus, when he returns in the same way in which he came.

Think of how you see God’s grace, as you see this hope.

\* You are dying. Your body is slowing wearing down, or wasting away. It may take a while, or it may take a moment, but you know it is coming.

You reflect on dashed hopes and dying dreams. You also remember the good days, and the great blessings.

But it is almost over. The days before you here, are far fewer than the days behind you here.

There is hope in Jesus, for he has died, risen, ascended, and will come again. You may go to be with him first, but when he comes, you will receive life forever. That is grace for today!

\* You are dying, inside. Maybe your body is fine, but your spirit is shriveling.

Maybe you are a young person, overwhelmed by problems and pressures.

Maybe you are at the peak of life’s responsibilities, and life’s havoc, as you care for younger children and older parents.

Maybe the crushing realities of a world of sin, are simply crushing you.

Maybe you just want to crawl in a hole, and never come out.

There is hope in Jesus, for he has died, risen, ascended, and will come again. A day comes soon, of perfect hope, perfect joy, and perfect peace. Death will be no more. Life will be unimaginably great. Your work will work well. Your loved ones will love well. Your Savior will be with you forever.

That is hope! That is full, rich, overflowing hope! That is grace.

Sometimes we see problems everywhere. But here is my heart for you today.

First, I hope and pray that you know Jesus as Savior and Lord. All of these words are only for those who have truly turned away from their sins, and turned to Jesus for forgiveness and new life. Receive God’s grace.

Then, I hope and pray that the simple truth of Jesus’ ascension will help you see that in a world of problems everywhere, there is grace everywhere.

In Jesus, there is the grace of the power of the Holy Spirit, to help you live and speak for him.

In Jesus, there is the grace of trusting in his reign, as you live in a world that seems out of control.

In Jesus, there is the grace of glorious hope, as you remember that soon he will come, and bring you to eternal joy and peace.

On Mother’s Day evening, the men went outside to shoot the bow and arrow. Breaking the quiet, was the sound of a small plane.

We tried to find it. We looked straight up and all around. We never saw the plane, but we saw the deep blue sky, painted by the Creator in a delicious display of beauty. In every direction, as I grew dizzy from looking up, we saw the splendor of God’s grace.

We see grace in creation. We see grace in incarnation. We see grace in crucifixion. We see grace in resurrection. We see grace in ascension.

Even when the clouds are thick, and the problems seem to be everywhere, may we see God's grace, in Jesus who ascended into heaven.