

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW: Watching or Witnessing?

May 29, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world begins awakening from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Easter season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Acts 1:1-11 (NIV) *In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering^[a] he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying^[b] with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[c] the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

This Week: Acts 1:1-11

In this passage, Jesus warns the assembled apostles not to leave Jerusalem, the center of all divine activity for Luke, but await the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which will follow, as promised, John's earlier baptism by water. To their question about the possibility that at last the "kingdom of Israel" is about to be restored, Jesus retorts tartly, "The times and the seasons that the father has reserved to his own authority are not yours to know" (Acts 1:7). Even after the resurrection it is apparent that the earliest followers of the faith are in danger of asking the wrong questions! God has God's own time for restorations, says Jesus. We have other work to do, as will now be made clear.

Jesus then gives them, and us, our marching orders. "You will receive a power from the Holy Spirit, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And Luke follows that general geographical outline as he tells his series of dramatic tales, beginning with the Spirit's fall in Jerusalem (Acts 2) and ending with Paul's open preaching in Rome (Acts 28), the "end of the earth" of the Roman world in which Luke lives.

But do they, or we, head off to fulfill the command? Hardly! We are too enamored of the ascending Jesus, our necks strained as we peer upward, hoping for a further sign, for a magic act, for a cloud spelling out "I love you." Suddenly, two men "stood near them." Just as in the gospel where two men attempt to explain to the women who are looking for Jesus' dead body that they are looking in the wrong place, since living beings are not to be found in graveyards, so now two men tell the stiff-necked (in more ways than one!) apostles that their eyes are not looking in the right place. "Why do you stand looking into heaven?" Did you not pay attention to him just a few moments ago? He said, 'Go,' and you are rooted on this spot, looking longingly for some further word from him. He will come back in the same way that he went, but you need ask no further questions about when, they imply. The real question is who? Who are we called to be? We are called to be witnesses, not watchers.

-Commentary by Dr. John Holbert, online commentary, *The Text This Week*, Acts 1:1-11

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Why do you think the last question the disciples asked Jesus before his ascension was "*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*" How did Jesus respond to their question and why?
2. After Jesus ascended, two men in white robes chided the disciples for standing there 'watching.' Why do you think this word to them was necessary?

3. Jesus offered his disciples power to be his witnesses. Where did the power come from? (see Acts 1:8). From what you know of how the disciples later witnessed for Christ, what would the job description of a witness be?
4. What is one thing that would change about your life if you took being an empowered witness for Christ more seriously?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Pray for how God's will can be done through us in the Bright Hope for Tomorrow campaign.
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: *Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*