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**The Mountain of Exaltation****Acts 1:6-12****Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

Have you ever had a moment when you realized a chapter of life was ending and something new was about to begin? It might have been when you left home to go to college, into the military, or begin your first job. It could have been when you got married, or when a child was born, or when you took your first child to college. It might have been when someone you loved died. All these moments are significant, impactful, and memorable. The ascension of Jesus is that kind of moment for the disciples — the earthly presence of Jesus ends, but a new mission begins. This moment is not just about Jesus leaving, but about what comes next. Someone's last words can carry great significance. Some of us may be able to recall the last words of a loved one before she or he died, and we're grateful for them.

The last words of the risen Christ, before his ascension, are in **Acts 1:6-12**. “So when they had come together, they asked him, *‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’* He replied, *‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.’* When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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.’* Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away.”

According to **Acts 1:3**, the risen Christ has been “*appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*” We heard about one appearance last week – on a mountain in Galilee, when Jesus gave the Great Commission. After hearing Jesus teach them for more than a month, **about the kingdom of God**, the disciples asked, “*Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?*” The disciples were Jewish. They spent a lot of time with Jesus, heard him teaching about the kingdom of God, and saw his miracles. Yet, they still didn't get it. They're

anticipating that Jesus will become king of a restored and independent nation of Israel. The disciples were still thinking in terms of the kingdom of Israel, rather than the kingdom of God. They still hadn't grasped the breadth of God's gift in Jesus – that he's for people of all nations, not just one nation. Jesus came for everyone, for the world (*John 3:16*).

As disciples of Jesus, we move beyond nationalism to being part of a worldwide community of faith called the church, or the family of God, that supersedes all barriers of nationality, ethnicity, and culture. The Book of Acts demonstrates how the disciples struggled to grasp this truth, and the Holy Spirit had to lead them to a new understanding. We heard how Jesus answered their question, (*Acts 1:6-8*), *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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."* **The entire Book of Acts is the unfolding of Acts 1:8.** Acts tells the story of the Holy Spirit coming upon the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, filling them with courage and boldness to witness and testify about Jesus to other people – and how the good news about Jesus spread all the way to Rome in a relatively short period of time.

Christ answers the disciples' question by saying, *"That's not for you to **know**, but this **is who you are to be.... you will be my witnesses.**"* A witness is someone who has experienced something. A witness is someone who has seen and heard things that he or she can tell others about – it may be an event, a person, or circumstances. This is exactly what the first disciples are going to be. For three years, they lived and traveled with Jesus. Soon, after being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they're going to be different people. Until now, they've lived in their own strength, and if you read the gospels, their performance isn't too impressive. They fail repeatedly, particularly in moments of pressure or crisis. Soon, the Holy Spirit is going to give them the ability to accomplish what Jesus wants them to do – that they couldn't do on their own. They're going to be the Lord's witnesses, and they're going to represent him first in Jerusalem.

**Jerusalem** is important because it's the location of the Temple, and it symbolizes the hope of the people of Israel. According to Luke, they've been in Jerusalem for more than a month. They're to begin being witnesses where they are. An

easy place to start, right? Hardly. How has it gone when you've shared or tried to talk about your faith with people in your family, or with someone who knows you well? Sometimes there's no one we have greater difficulty communicating with about our faith than our family. Jerusalem is also where the crucifixion took place not even a month and a half before the ascension, so the starting point for witnessing is a hostile environment, but at least it's a place with which they're familiar. It's like starting at home.

After **Jerusalem**, they'll go to **Judea**. Jerusalem was the city within the larger province called Judea. It's like saying you'll move from the city where you are, out into the surrounding towns, and the rest of the state – which isn't too far, and a logical next step. However, then Jesus says they'll be his witnesses in **Samaria**. That's when their facial expressions and body language would have changed. The three provinces central to the apostles' experience were: Judea in the south, Galilee in the north, and – in between – Samaria. Jews didn't like Samaritans. *John 4:4* says that Jesus had to go through Samaria. He was in the south, and he wanted to go to Galilee, in the north. Most Jews, at that time, would have said, "You must not go through Samaria." Instead, they would have crossed the Jordan River to the east, gone up the east bank of the Jordan, and eventually crossed the river again west into Galilee, because, as *John 4:9* explains, "*Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*"

But in *Acts 1:8*, Jesus says that he wants his followers to go into the place they would normally avoid. It was bad enough that Christ told them he won't be restoring the kingdom to Israel, but he tells them that one of the places they'll be his witnesses is Samaria – to people they don't respect, don't treat well, don't like, and don't regard as equals. That's hard for the disciples to grasp or accept, but God isn't interested in supporting our petty prejudices. To put yourself in the disciples' sandals, just hear Christ telling you that you're to be his witness to people you don't respect, don't treat well, don't like, or don't regard as your equal.

If going to Samaria doesn't sound difficult enough, Jesus adds, "*to the ends of the earth.*" Can you imagine being part of only 120 people given that responsibility in the days before the airplane and the Internet? Yet now there are more than two billion people on the planet who claim the name of Christ, thanks significantly to the bold witnessing of the first generation of disciples. If we're following Christ, we'll be

witnessing to others, and inviting them to a relationship with Christ and into the beloved community that God has created that has blessed our life in countless ways. Contemplate what would have happened if the earliest Christians had done no more to share and spread their faith than we have. And there are more of us than there were of them. The truth is that the disciples could not do what Jesus was commissioning them to do **without prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem until they're clothed with power from on high. Waiting, as Tom Petty observed, is the hardest part. With Jesus leaving them, being exalted in his ascension and disappearing from their sight, the disciples are encouraged to pray and wait.

For the 120 disciples in Jerusalem, or in our own lives, waiting and praying can be key elements in receiving the power that Jesus promised. Praying together can create unity. Fresh vision comes through prayer. The strength to care comes through prayer. The discipline of prayer enables us to experience the power and love of God.

Jesus says we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, and we will be his witnesses. In the 1992 movie, "My Cousin Vinny", which is on TV all the time, Marisa Tomei won an Academy Award as Mona Lisa Vito, an unemployed hairdresser who is called to testify as an expert witness in general automotive knowledge. In the court room, the prosecuting attorney is questioning whether she's qualified to be such a witness. When Mona Lisa Vito makes it clear she knows automobiles, the prosecutor says, "She's acceptable." How about us? Would people say we're acceptable witnesses for Jesus? Are we familiar with who he is, what he's done, who he calls us to be, and how he tells us to live? Have we received the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to live as Jesus' faithful witnesses?

Someone may be thinking – who is the Holy Spirit? What is this power that Jesus promised? If you haven't experienced the power of the Spirit in your life, you may need to offer yourself totally to Christ first, so that God will give you the Spirit, eternal life, and power for living as Christ's follower. Oswald Chambers noted (May 5, "My Utmost for His Highest"), "The moment we recognize our complete weakness and dependence upon him will be the very moment the Spirit of God will exhibit his power."

Jesus wouldn't ask us to be his witnesses without giving us the power to do so. A guy went into a hardware store early one morning and told the salesman he needed a saw that could cut down thirty trees in a day. The salesman pulled out a heavy-duty

chainsaw and told him it would do the job with ease. That evening, just before the store closed, the man returned – completely soaked with sweat, his hands blistered and bloodied – and dropped the chainsaw heavily on the counter. He snapped at the salesman. “You said this saw would cut down thirty trees in a day. I worked all day and barely got through one tree. I want my money back.” The salesman apologized profusely, picked up the chainsaw, and started it up – and it roared to life. The astonished man leaped backward and said, “What’s that noise?” Power makes a difference.

Did any of you watch the launch of NASA’s Artemis II mission on April 1? I’m still amazed that human beings can do things like that, and I respect the courage of the people who sit on top of all that fuel and fire to go up into space. The crew traveled inside the Orion spacecraft on a 10-day mission, flew around the Moon and returned safely to Earth, marking the first crewed lunar flyby in over 50 years. When people watch a rocket launch, they stand in awe as it disappears into the sky. But eventually, the watching ends; there is nothing more to see, looking up from the earth – but the mission continues. The launch is only the beginning of the mission’s purpose. **Worship and wonder are important, but the Christian life moves beyond observation into participation.** The ascension of Jesus is not His absence — it is His exaltation, His reign, and the beginning of the church’s mission.

It’s not enough for Christ followers to stare into space, looking at where Jesus ascended. Jesus hopes his followers will remember his last words, and be an active part of a witnessing, loving, caring, praying, Spirit driven community, where we learn how to be in right relationship with God and other people. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, so we have power to be his witnesses and to remember all that Jesus taught. God doesn’t save us just to get us to heaven, but to change us into the kind of people who impact the world with love, joy, peace, and all the fruit of the Spirit, and the virtues of the Kingdom of heaven.

“The King’s Choice” is a 2016 film about King Haakon VII of Norway refusing to surrender to Nazi Germany in April 1940. The film follows three intense days, as the royal family flees Oslo after receiving an ultimatum to capitulate or die. During one of the most difficult moments of World War II, the people of Norway watched as their king was forced to leave the country as Nazi Germany occupied it. Many feared that his departure meant the end of Norway’s independence. But the king didn’t abdicate. From

exile, he continued to lead, encourage, and represent the Norwegian people. Radios secretly carried his voice into homes across the country. His absence didn't mean defeat — it meant the struggle was still underway. And the people held on to one promise: **their king would return.** For five long years, they resisted occupation and lived in hope. Then in 1945, when the war ended, King Haakon returned to Norway. Crowds filled the streets, cheering the king who had never stopped being their king.

That moment gives us a picture, however imperfect, of what the disciples experienced on the Mount of Olives. They watched Jesus ascend into heaven. At first, it may have felt like loss. But the angels reminded them of something crucial: **Jesus had not abandoned them.** He had been **exalted.** He now reigns. And one day, **He will return.** Christ followers, today, live in that same space between ascension and return. Our King has gone from our sight. But He still reigns. He still leads His people. And the promise remains: **The same Jesus who ascended will come again.**

So, we don't stand staring at the sky. We live with hope. We serve with purpose, as witnesses. And we wait with expectation for the return of the King.

**Blessing:** As we conclude our Mountains of God series, we recall that mountains tell the entire biblical story: Creation preserved → Covenant formed → Law given → Prophets call for faithfulness → Christ reveals the heart of God → Christ redeems → Christ commissions → Christ reigns. *1 Peter 3:15 (NIV), "In your hearts revere Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."*

### Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” (*Acts 1:6*). What does this question reveal about their expectations? In what ways do we sometimes misunderstand God’s plans today?
2. Jesus tells the disciples that they will receive power and be His witnesses (*Acts 1:8*). What does it mean to be a witness for Christ in everyday life?
3. Jesus tells the disciples to begin witnessing in Jerusalem — the very place where Jesus had been crucified and where people knew them. Why might starting at home be both logical and difficult?
4. Jesus told the disciples that they would also witness in Samaria, a place they typically avoided. What barriers or prejudices might prevent people from sharing God’s love today?
5. Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. Why is waiting often difficult, and how can prayer prepare us for God’s work?
6. The angels remind the disciples that Jesus will return. How should living between Jesus’ ascension and Christ’s return shape the way we live today?