

St. Paul: On The Same page

05.25.14 for Ascension

Day One: Acts 1:1-5

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (ESV)

This is the beginning of the first history book of the Church. The book we call "The Acts of the Apostles" is really a letter to Luke's friend Theophilus, explaining how the church began. And it all started with this: Jesus told his disciples to wait for a "gift" to arrive.

What's the most powerful gift you have ever been given? A kitchen appliance? A power tool? Maybe even a car?

When I received my first bicycle, I was also given new rules, instructions about when and where I could ride it. When I received keys to the family car, then I was also given very clear rules about their use because this new gift came with great responsibility.

Jesus promised that his disciples would soon be given a gift, a special measure of the Holy Spirit. God would live in them, and work through them, so that they could speak out and proclaim the good news, and people would come to faith, and the world would be changed!

They were to wait for a special day on which God would begin their new work. What would you do if God gave you such a powerful gift? Would you want such a huge responsibility? That's an interesting question, because he HAS!

Prayer: Dearest Savior, you sent me the gift of your Spirit too! I have been baptized with your Spirit, and the Spirit lives in me. Lord, help me show it today. Amen.

Day Two: Acts 1:6-11

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked [Jesus], “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed 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 and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (ESV)

In *Voyage of the Dawnreader* (a CS Lewis book), Lucy returns to the land of Narnia. More than anything else she wants to see Aslan, the character that represents Jesus. But he does not appear.

Lucy has frightening experiences. She and her shipmates face piracy, slavery, a dragon, a sea-serpent, and still Aslan is not there for her.

Finally, on a mysterious island, she finds a book of magic spells, and she speaks one of the spells out loud. And all at once Aslan appears!

Now she is comforted. She thinks that she has “summoned” him with her spell – forced him to come to her. But Aslan explains that the purpose of the spell was to make things visible that are unseen.

“I was with you all the time,” he says. But if he had been visible, she would have never done the things she did. She would have waited for him to do them all for her.

If you could *see* Jesus with you, would your life really be better? Would you be a better believer or servant? The disciples longed to see Jesus, but he allowed them to face their challenges – not alone – but without his visible presence.

Why do you think Jesus chooses not to be seen?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I know you're here. You promised to be here with me. But I need to grow and trust and walk by faith, not by sight. Lord, help me to trust that you're there. Amen.*

Day Three: Eph. 1:15-23

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (ESV)

That whole paragraph was just one sentence! My English teacher would have given me a low grade for that. But in the Greek language it was possible to have long sentences linked in logic and structure to share complex ideas.

We could simplify it this way: I pray that you may know God's wonderful plan, his hope for you which is so much greater than you have

imagined, but which God will now bring about because Jesus now rules over all things.

Imagine if your best friend from childhood, the person you played and fought with, had sleepovers with, shared toys with, had now grown up to be the President of the United States. Back then you had big imaginations and you made plans that you could never carry out. But now your friend actually has the power to do the things you dreamed about!

That's how we know Jesus! We got to know him when he humbled himself and became just like us. And now Paul prays that the believers will see what great things Jesus wants to do with them now that we are grown up together, now that he has all power and authority.

Now Jesus is above all things – and we know that we can come to him, with all his power, and seek his help.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, help me to see your great vision for our service together. Don't let me settle for less than all that you have planned. Fill me with faith. Amen.*

Day Four: John 17:1-11

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,"² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy

Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.
(ESV)

Jesus prayed for you. How does it feel to know that? Sometimes, when I pray for people, they are irritated if I don't ask God what they wanted me to ask. Did Jesus pray for the same things that you normally ask of God?

Here is what Jesus prayed: not that you would be rich, or safe, or comfortable, or healthy; but he prayed that you would be one with your brothers and sisters in Christ – united by honoring Jesus' name, that is, all that Jesus taught and stood for.

How high is that on your prayer list? We usually pray for our needs. We sometimes pray for other's needs. But Jesus prayed, above all, that we would remain one in his name, in his teaching. That we would follow him together.

Prayer: *Dear Father, grant that Jesus' prayer may be fulfilled in me, that I may love even those I disagree with, and that we may together be submissive to your word. Make your Church one today. Amen.*