

WE BELIEVE WAIT SURRENDER

Luke 24:44-53

Intro

The ascension of Jesus (when the resurrected Jesus is lifted from this earthly plain to the heavenly one) is one of those events that the greater protestant church has tended to minimize in the greater church calendar. For example, how many of you know that Ascension Day was this past Thursday? Exactly! One person. It's an occasion that, to our ears, feels more like close encounters of the third kind (where humans are carried up into the sky by some indescribable vehicle), then it does actual events that we are able to hold up and say, "yes, this is what I believe!".

So, instead of trying to justify and rationalize what may have taken place on that day of ascension (which is not something that we are able to do: we weren't there), let's instead look at what the gospel writer is trying to say to us.

The way that Luke sets it up, the ascension of Jesus takes place on the same day as Easter. Now once we get into Acts (which was written by the same author as Luke), there is an understanding that at least some of these events were spread over a larger period of time. But what we have before us when we read chapter 24 puts it all into the context of one dawn to dawn cycle. In one day the women meet the angelic messengers at the empty tomb, the risen Lord greets the two believers on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appears before the disciples to show him his wounds and eat a piece of fish, and then is lifted to the heavens. Obviously, a day to remember!

It is in the context of this amazing day that Jesus utters his final words. He says, "I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Jesus is letting his disciples know that the power of God will not end once he is gone.

Instead, what we will ultimately come to know as the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, will empower the disciples to move beyond the city gates of Jerusalem so, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed ...to all nations." Even before the church was established, there was already an understanding that believers needed to go out, supported by the Spirit of God. But before that was able to take place, they need to wait. Thought of another way: they needed surrender to the leading of God. The scripture reads this way.

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

“We Believe Wait Surrender”

What a glorious day that must have been. Think of all of those miraculous events occurring one after the other. Each hour revealing yet another layer of God’s majestic plan to bring humanity back into relationship with God’s self.

As far as I am concerned, it is no wonder that the disciples left Bethany “and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” in their hearts. They were riding a wave of emotion that they had never experienced before and at the end of the gospel of Luke they are clearly at the peak of that wave.

However, as all of us know, these sorts of waves don’t last forever.

Eventually, they come into contact with forces that cut them down until it reaches the point that there is really no wave at all. As much as we would like to believe that the disciples were able to ride the wave that they were on for the rest of their lives, in the back of our minds we end up wondering what ultimately slowed them down.

That’s what we’re taught will happen to others. For most of us, that’s what we believe will happen to us. We carry with us the mentality that no matter how good things are right now, something will come along and knock us right back down. And the way that many of us hear that ends up creating a mentality that perpetually sees life through the glass half empty...which so often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I can hear different voices from my life and the church as well, saying “let’s not get too excited about the good things that are happening, because something bad is bound to show up: and probably sooner rather than later.”

Why do we do that? Why do we poison our minds into believing that our lives aren’t blessed by God, even when the days of trial are before us? Why do we instead insist that our lives will actually get worse? Why is it that we struggle with surrendering to the leading that God will place before us? God has shown us through countless biblical examples and very much through our own life (you know, when we are willing to be honest about it!) that when we wait upon the Lord and surrender to Him, not only will the next steps be revealed, but the blessing of the Lord will be there, and that is regardless of how difficult the day may be.

And it’s not as if it’s new.

Think of Thomas, one of Jesus chosen twelve. A few weeks ago we heard from another gospel account that Jesus appears while he is not there. When Thomas finally arrives, he refuses to believe what his friends are telling him until he himself is able to see the wounds and put his hands in his feet and side. He refuses to believe that his life is blessed by God...even in that day that seems so dark. In that moment, Thomas did not wait upon the Lord, he did not surrender to the Lord. He looked at the world and said, ‘no way...prove it.’ Yes, he was stuck in the negativity of the crucifixion but because he had not surrendered himself to God he was not able to see the truth that God would never stop working for the benefit of humanity until it was literally right in front of him in the form of the risen Christ.

We look at that story of Thomas and we shake our heads saying, ‘why wouldn’t he trust what his friends were saying? Why wouldn’t he trust in the God whom their master had taught them about? Why wouldn’t he wait in the Lord trusting that the promises that had been made by Jesus were coming to

fruition and his friends were able to confirm that it was happening? Why wouldn't he surrender to the One who had shown him so much?'

And yet are we any different? When hard times confront us, when our job is changed or eliminated because of technological advancements; when we don't know how we're going to pay bills because what was once affordable has started to become a growing pile of debt; when your child is looking at you like you're the enemy rather than the ally (Happy Mother's Day, Mom!), do we trust that God is with us, supporting us through the difficulty, even blessing us? Do we surrender to God and actively wait in Him (and on Him)? Do we trust that God will reveal that next step...which will guide us to the step beyond that?

Or do we think that the tough spots are what happen in life and we are just meant to struggle along feeling defeated?

Our passage this morning declares in a definitive fashion that the God whom we worship is a God who wants us to go out as His representatives and share the story of Jesus Christ with the world.

But in order to do that, we need to wait on Him. In order to do that, we need to surrender these lives that we have to the God whom we have been led to know. Jesus showed his disciples, he showed us what waiting on God looked like, and we touched upon this last week. When we look at the communion table, do we see it as a place that remembers defeat (because Jesus was killed after all), or do we believe that it is a place where the victory of God is able to be celebrated (because not even death was able to contain him)? And that was able to take place because our Lord was willing to do what? Surrender to his Father. There, in the garden, prior to the betrayal by Judas, 'take this cup from me...but not my will, but yours be done.' He showed it. Jesus taught us the need to surrender by teaching us what we know as the Lord's Prayer, exhibited it in his own life, and then reminded his disciples of that reality just prior to the ascension: 'See, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; (but first) stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Wait. Jesus is telling his followers to wait, to surrender, to believe that the promises that have been made will be fulfilled.

So, do we believe the message that God is putting before us? Are we willing to take it all in? Do we really believe what Jesus has told us? Do we believe in the 'repentance and forgiveness of sins'? Do we believe in the gift of life eternal? Do we really believe in a better tomorrow? Do we believe that as we actively wait, as we surrender who we are to the Lord of all, that we will be provided the action steps that we need to live a life that is blessed and that is regardless of the sort of day that might be before us?

Or are we stuck in the mentality, are we going to surrender to the thought that regardless of any positive thing that happens in our life, an equal and corresponding negative thing will necessarily take place: we are just boats on an endless sea with no real direction let alone hope?

What do we believe (and just a quick reminder: there is a table and cross that are up here before you that invite us to recall a death. Do you see them as defeat or as the ultimate victory of God Almighty)? What do you believe? Upon whom will you wait? In whom will you surrender?

The disciples in this morning's passage were riding an incredible high as miraculous events continued to be revealed in their midst. As we continue to read Luke's words in the book of Acts we hear how these same disciples began to be pummeled with the realities of life. These realities were called rejection,

arrest, beatings, and death. These initial believers had every reason to just throw up their hands and say, 'you know what? It's not worth it! Everything good always falls apart!'

But they didn't, did they?

In the face of challenges to their faith, they stood tall and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit lived lives that said things will be blessed...even when they are hard. They continued to wait upon their God to speak and lead, surrendering who they were to a God who had promised to love, support, and lead. God has promised it and He will not abandon that promise.

They never stopped believing not only in God, but in the reality that if they waited in the Lord, that if they surrendered who they were to the God of all creation, that they would be blessed, that they would be empowered, and through that empowerment that the Kingdom of God would be championed.

That is an example that we need to emulate in our lives.

Are there going to be difficulties? Yes.

Do those difficulties have to spell the end of any positive momentum that God has granted you? Absolutely not.

Instead allow those trials to become opportunities for others, as well as yourself, to wait on the Lord, to surrender again and again to the one who has promised to be with us always, even to the close of the age (and no, we aren't there yet!).

Begin to train yourself to believe, really believe, that when we wait in the Lord, when we surrender ourselves again and again to a life of faithfulness that, here I am Lord, send me', that the blessings of God will be experienced...yes, even in the here and now.

Here's a little hook to hang that belief on. Say this to yourself: 'God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.'

Say it. This is a statement that can be used both in times of celebration when you're riding that wave of positivity, and also in those moments when everything seems to be falling apart.

When you get that job you've wanted: 'God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.'

When your loved one is sick and the doctors don't know what to do: 'God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.'

When your child finally gets the concept that they have been struggling with for weeks: 'God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.'

When you don't know if you have it in you to even get out of bed because that voice of defeat is screaming, 'what's the point?': 'God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.'

The disciples had seen so much on that day and prior to ascending into heaven he told them to wait, he reminded them to surrender so that the Spirit that was to come would be able to bless and flow regardless of the circumstance that came upon the horizon. Breathe him in, breathe him out.

‘God, I believe in You. God, I wait in You. God I surrender myself to You.’

After Sermon Prayer

God, life can be hard. So hard, in fact that there are moments when we wonder if we really believe these promises that have been made by You and Your son. God, help us in all our days, but especially the difficult ones, help us to wait in You and surrender ourselves to You. ‘God, we believe in You. God, we wait in You. God we surrender myself to You.’ Lord, let Your blessings flow...in every season of life. Amen.