

As a pastor, I love to answer your questions about the Bible. And when you ask them, I feel like I'm doing the main part of my job. Questions about the end of the world seem to be coming up more and more lately. Will Judgment Day come this year, with everything going on in our society, country and world? With how things are going for us in the Middle East, or with China, North Korea and Russia, does that mean the end is near?

God's Word for us today will answer both questions, and then, also give us something much more valuable than trying to speculate about the Final Day. As we consider: CHRIST'S CONCLUDING COMMAND, he tells us: (1) You will be my witnesses, and (2) I'll be with you until I return. (Read: Acts 1:6-11)

(1) The Book of Acts is Luke's follow-up to his first book, the Gospel of Luke. Jesus has risen and he's convinced his apostles of that fact. But they still had lingering doubts in other areas: **Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**

That's both a fascinating and frustrating question. Apparently, after 3 years with Jesus, the disciples were still thinking, like many of the Jews, that the Messiah would be an earthly king, like David, who would establish an earthly kingdom, like David's.

Jesus answered: **It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.** It's not for them to know, or us, when God will complete his grand plan. It's enough to know that he has a grand plan and that he has a good and gracious will. He's marked his calendar with the day and time. That's something we can't calculate.

Since Jesus didn't want the apostles getting sidetracked by what they couldn't know, he gets them back on track to what they could know – his mission and purpose for them when he leaves.

Jesus gives a basic outline for the entire Book of Acts when he says:

- **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you** (that would be in 10 days on Pentecost – Acts 2).
- **And you will be my witnesses** (witnesses tell what they have seen and heard). Where will they witness?
- **In Jerusalem, (Acts 3-7) and in all Judea and Samaria, (50 miles in each direction – Acts 8-12); and to the ends of the earth** (after Paul's 3 mission journeys, he would eventually end up in Rome – Acts 13-28).

To sum up briefly, the apostles asked Jesus: *"When are you going to establish your earthly kingdom?"* Jesus answered: *"You're totally wrong about any earthly kingdom. But when I do come back, it will surprise everyone. So, I've got something very important for you to do until then - be my witnesses!"*

And that's where this applies so beautifully to us. We want to know when Judgment Day is coming. Jesus answers: *"Any moment now, or thousands of years in the future."* We want an earthly kingdom we can see and enjoy. Jesus says: *"There is no such thing. Look, Satan is trying to distract you from what you can know and can do. Here's what you do know: I'm your Savior. And, here's what you can do: Tell other people that I'm their Savior, too."*

Like every disciple of Jesus, you are also his witness to your own Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of our planet.

Your personal Jerusalem is your immediate family: your brother or sister, your mom or dad, or, if you're a little older: your spouse, your kids and grandkids – anyone in this group who doesn't know Jesus very well. When someone gets sick or is about to die tell them about the Bible's message and trust Jesus. That way they'll be ready for the day they die. Never quit praying for them. Never quit inviting them.

Your personal Judea and Samaria are your relatives, friends and neighbors, your classmates and coworkers. You may be the only witness for

Jesus they've got in their lives! Pray for them too and don't stop inviting them, either.

Don't forget, you're also his witness to the ends of the earth. You may have a chance to share Jesus in faraway places. But for most of us, our witnessing is all about supporting the work of our congregation and the WELS. Attend church or watch it online faithfully. Pray often and give generously. And when your church gets criticized for its stand on the Bible, just say: *"I'm glad I belong to a church that follows the Scriptures and not people's opinions."*

(2) That whole question and answer session happened just before Jesus **was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight**. Now what?

Just outside Jerusalem, Jesus removed his visible presence.

- Oh, he's still here ... according to his omnipresence.
- He's still here ... whenever 2 or 3 gather together in his name.
- He's still here ... in the Scriptures and Sacrament of Communion with his true body and blood.

As the apostles were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. The 2 angels asked the 11 Apostles a logical question: **"Why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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."**

Jesus ... taken up and hidden from their sight was a clear message that Jesus wasn't establishing any kind of visible earthly kingdom of glory. It was also just as clear that he will come back and retrieve believers and escort us all to heaven, like he promised!

That's so comforting, because it's hard being a Christian.

- It's hard admitting we're sinners. Our sinful human pride says we're not as bad as others.

- It's hard confessing Christ. The rest of the world thinks he's a myth and we're ridiculous.
- It's hard fighting our sinful desires. It's way easier to give in to them, like everyone else who isn't a Christian.

Jesus' ascension means he's coming back. And because of that it's worth repenting and trusting in our Savior and fighting our sins.

It's also comforting, because it's hard being human.

- It's hard suffering so much pain. Our loved ones do too.
- It's hard enduring so much heartache. Those near and dear do too.
- It's hard hearing so much bad news-and more of it every day.

We'd love the Judgment to happen tomorrow, or maybe even today! It may not be today or tomorrow, but Jesus' ascension means he's coming back. And when he does, he'll remove our pain, completely! He'll heal our heartache, forever! He'll fill every moment with joy in his presence.

Until then, make sure that you thank the Lord that he's orchestrated all the events in your life so that you've gotten to know him and trust him. And especially thank the Holy Spirit that he's gotten you baptized and instructed and communed so that you're a believer in Jesus and an heir of his heavenly glory.

People are looking for meaning in their lives. What could be more meaningful than knowing Christ now so we can spend forever with him in paradise?

People also want to be a part of something that's bigger than themselves. What could be bigger than raising your family to know Jesus and inviting your friends to hear your Savior's message so they can believe him too, just like you?