

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Acts 1:4-11

“Jesus is alive!”¹

“Yea Nate, I can feel His presence. It’s like He’s watching over us. I know it’s up to you, me, and the others to keep His memory and His message alive. I just don’t know if I have the ability. I don’t know if it’s worth risking my life.”

“No Tommy, you don’t understand,” Nate insisted. “Jesus is really, physically alive.”

“What? Have you lost your mind? There’s no way He’s alive. You heard His mother described the pain and torture of His death. You know about the spear being thrown into His side, to insure He was dead,” protested Tommy.

“Listen to me Tommy,” Nate continued. “Jesus is alive! Mary Magdalene and some other women went to the tomb this morning to anoint His body. Did you feel the earthquake this morning? When the ladies got to the tomb, the earthquake had rolled away the stone, two soldiers guarding the tomb were on the ground, passed out from something, and a young man told the women Jesus was alive. He even invited them into the tomb to see for themselves. And then, as the women were leaving, Jesus showed up, talked to them, and instructed them to tell us He would meet us in Galilee. So let’s go. We have to hurry. Jesus is alive!”²

¹ The following conversation between Nate and Tommy is conjecture, loosely based on accounts found in the Gospels. Nate is short for Nathanael, and Tommy is short for Thomas, both disciples of Jesus.

² It was at this meeting, on a mountain in Galilee, that Jesus gave the Great Commission, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching

“Nate. You know how emotional women can be. You can’t trust what they said. I would be careful taking their word for it,” Tom said, reflecting the cultural bias of his day.

“Maybe so,” Nate continued. “That’s how most of us felt. But after Peter heard the news, he took off and ran as fast as he could to see for himself. The tomb was empty, just like Mary had said.”

“Somebody must have stolen His body and...”

“No!” Nate interrupted. “Later in the afternoon, Cleo and his wife³ were on their way home from Jerusalem and Jesus appeared to them. At first they did not recognize Him and assumed He was just another traveler. They asked Him to stay at their home for dinner. After dinner—Tommy brace yourself for what I am about to say—this Stranger took bread, gave thanks, and broke it—does that sound familiar?—immediately Cleo and his wife recognized the Stranger to be Jesus and worshiped Him.”

“Wow! Coming from anyone else I would have a hard time believing it, but Cleo is a good man,” Tommy admitted.

“And then, later that night, while everyone was together, everyone but you, Jesus walked right into the room. Tommy, He’s alive! I swear He’s alive! I have seen Him myself! You have got to believe me,” pleaded Nate. “Let’s hurry and get to Galilee!”

Tommy said, “Nate, I desperately want to believe you, but ‘unless I see the nail marks on His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His

them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

³ The story of Cleo (“Cleopas”) is found in Luke 24:13-35. Nothing is known of Cleopas except for what Luke says, and the Bible doesn’t say his wife was with him. That is speculation on my part. The usual title of this story is “The Emmaus Road.”

side, I will not believe it.⁴ I do not want to be disappointed again! I don't think my heart would survive if this turned out not to be true. You better go on to Galilee without me. I just can't do it. Not right now."

One week later, while all the disciples, including Nate and Tommy, were together, Jesus walked through a locked door, stood in the middle of the room, and said, "Peace be with you!...(and then to Tommy) Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."⁵

A Busy Forty Days

Jesus was killed on a Friday. On Sunday He walked out of the tomb, and over the next 40 days hundreds of people saw Him and testified that He was indeed alive.

What did Jesus do over these 40 days? Luke writes that He "gave many convincing proofs that He was alive"⁶ and taught "about the kingdom of God."⁷ Jesus came announcing "The kingdom of God is near,"⁸ and He continued that message until the day He left the earth. It only stands to reason that before we, His followers, do anything else, we must proclaim the message of the kingdom of God.

What were the "convincing proofs"? To Luke, a medical doctor, the most convincing proof that Jesus really was alive was that you could touch Him and feel flesh

⁴ John 20:25.

⁵ John 20:27, parenthesis added for explanation.

⁶ Acts 1:3

⁷ Acts 1:3

⁸ Mark 1:15

and bone; and that He asked for food and ate it in front of them.⁹ (A “spirit” or a delusion cannot be felt and does not eat.)

In addition to eating with His disciples, and teaching them about the kingdom of God, Jesus also used these 40 days to explain, through Scripture, how all the events of His life, death, and resurrection, fit together.¹⁰ On this side of Easter, looking back, everything makes sense.

But all good things must come to an end. The theological word for this end is *ascension*, meaning “to be taken up.” The *Ascension of Christ* refers to the time, 40 days after His resurrection, when Jesus was “taken up” from the disciples back to heaven where He now sits at the right hand of God.

Here is how Luke records this event: “When He had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was *taken up* into heaven.”¹¹

In Acts, Luke goes into greater detail:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand

⁹ Luke 24:37-43

¹⁰ Luke 24:45-49

¹¹ Luke 24:50-51, *italics* added for emphasis. The Ascension is also recorded in Mark 16:19.

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."¹²

To put the ascension into proper context, it is also important to remember part of the discussion Jesus had with His disciples on the night He was betrayed. Jesus was trying to comfort them. He was telling them that He was going to have to go away and while He was gone their job (and our job) was to continue what Jesus had been doing. He said to His followers, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. *He will do even greater things than these*, because I am going to the Father."¹³

Let those words sink in. Jesus said that once He was gone, a prophecy about both His death and ascension, His followers would continue doing what He was doing, only with greater success and greater impact! Greater success than healing the blind and the deaf! Greater success than casting out demons and raising the dead! Greater impact than feeding thousands of people with nothing more than a few fish and a few biscuits. Greater success and impact than He had!

I don't understand how such a thing is even conceivable, but I do understand this: *You and I have the potential within us to continue the ministry of Jesus in a greater magnitude than Jesus Himself.*

How is that possible? It is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit!

The "gift My Father promised"¹⁴ was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples, "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit,

¹² Acts 1:4-11

¹³ John 14:12, *italics* used for emphasis.

¹⁴ Acts 1:4

whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”¹⁵

On the day Jesus ascended into heaven, He blessed His disciples, telling them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, saying to them “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹⁶ And while He was saying these things He was “taken up” into heaven with a promise that He would return the same way.

Now It's Your Turn

Jesus came to earth with a purpose. He had a mission to accomplish. He fulfilled His mission and now says to you and I, “It's your turn. You have a purpose and a mission.”

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, has released you and me to be the best we can be. He has given us the authority to continue His ministry, and He has promised that we can do greater things than He did. “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen.”¹⁷

But here is the problem: On the one hand we have all this God given potential; but on the other hand many of us don't live up to that potential. Jesus wants us to

¹⁵ John 14:25-26

¹⁶ Acts 1:8

¹⁷ Ephesians 3:20-21

succeed. He wants us to reach our full potential. He wants us to be the best we can be. He wants us to live a full and abundant life.

But it doesn't happen automatically. There are some things we have to do in order to be all God wants us to be. What are those things? How do we reach our fullest potential?

1. Confess faith in the resurrected Jesus.

After Jesus was arrested His disciples ran away and hid, afraid they would be next. They only reached their potential; they only fulfilled their destiny, after they met with, and placed their faith in, the resurrected Jesus.

There are a lot of things followers of Jesus disagree about and sometimes argue about. There are other things that we believe in, thinking they are based on Scripture, when in reality they are based more on culture and tradition—like the time church should be on Sunday mornings and the length and style of the typical church service. But there is one thing that is absolutely essential to the Christian faith, and that is that Jesus actually died and actually rose again. The Bible says that one thing you must confess is Jesus is alive. Listen to the words of Paul, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”¹⁸

To be “saved” literally means “to be made whole again.” It refers to being brought back into a right relationship with God so you can live in right relationship with yourself and others. It refers to being made whole again physically, spiritually, and emotionally. It

¹⁸ Romans 12:9

means to be able to be what you were created to be, to fulfill your destiny, to be all you can be. And notice, this happens through faith in the resurrected Jesus.

2. Seek reconciliation with others.

Once you have been brought back into a right relationship with God, you have the responsibility to seek reconciliation with others. In fact, you cannot be *right* with God and *at odds* with someone else.¹⁹

Jesus illustrates this fact beautifully in an event that happened between His resurrection and ascension.

On the evening Jesus was betrayed He prophesied that Judas would betray Him. But He also prophesied that Peter would betray Him. Judas betrayed Jesus once. Peter betrayed Him three times. After his third betrayal, Luke writes, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown Me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”²⁰

There is no doubt Peter was remorseful for what he had done. He, maybe more than any of the other disciples, hurt when Jesus was killed. I am sure he wished he could have one more conversation with Jesus. Just one chance to say he was sorry. He was going to have to live with this guilt his whole life. Maybe this is why he bolted from

¹⁹ The point I am trying to make here is that, *as far as it is in your control you cannot be at odds with other people*. You have to be willing to forgive and to reconcile. If the other person refuses to receive it, there really isn't anything you can do.

²⁰ Luke 22:61-62

the house and ran to the tomb when he heard that Jesus wasn't there. He desperately wanted Him to be alive.²¹

Have you ever had an argument with someone you loved, or wronged a friend, or had a good relationship ruined over a disagreement or misunderstanding? In those situations, even when you want to be reconciled, it's hard to go back to the way things were, isn't it? Sometimes it's difficult to even be in the same room with the other person. I imagine Peter desperately wanted to make things right. He just didn't know how, and when he was around Jesus, he didn't know what to say. The relationship with his dear friend was strained.

Then, one morning, after a wasted night of fishing, from the shore Jesus told His friends to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. They did, and caught more fish than they could handle. Jesus then took some of the fish they had caught and prepared breakfast.

After breakfast, Jesus had the following conversation with Peter.²²

"Peter, do you love Me more than fishing?"

Jesus asked him this question because Peter, along with some of the other disciples, had decided to go back into the fishing business.²³

"Of course I love You. You know that," Peter said.

"Then give up your dreams for your life for My dreams for your life," said Jesus.

After a few moments had gone by, Jesus again asked Peter, "Do you really love Me?"

²¹ Luke 24:12

²² The conversation is based on John 21:15-19.

²³ John 21:3

Peter again said yes and Jesus replied, “Then give up your plans for your life for My plans for your life.”

A few moments later, Jesus asked for the third time, “Peter, are you sure? Do you really love Me more than anything else in life?”

Hurt that He asked again, Peter said, “Jesus, You know everything. You know my heart and you can read my mind. You know I love you more than anything else.”

Then Jesus said, “Then live your life according to My purpose for you. Fulfill your destiny. Be all you can be.”

As much as Peter wanted to reconcile with Jesus, Jesus wanted to reconcile with Peter even more. In this conversation Jesus was forgiving Peter, and placing Peter back into the same position with Him and the other disciples before the betrayal took place. Now He and Peter were completely reconciled!

In order to be truly free to be all God wants you to be, not only must you receive God’s forgiveness, you must also do your part in forgiving others, seeking reconciliation to the best of your ability. Simply put, you and I are commanded to forgive others in the same way Jesus has forgiven us.

3. Receive the Holy Spirit.

The first thing Jesus did the first time He met with His disciples after His resurrection was give them the Holy Spirit.²⁴ Then, just before His ascension, He tells them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit.

Why should they wait to receive something they have already received?

²⁴ John 20:22

From the time Jesus walked out of the tomb until this present day, every person who believes in the resurrected Jesus receives the Holy Spirit. But there is a difference in Holy Spirit presence and Holy Spirit power. It's a difference, not in *quantity*—the moment you believed you received all the Spirit there is to receive, but in *quality*—you have all the Spirit, but does the Spirit have all of you? You will not be all Jesus wants you to be until you allow His Spirit to have all of you there is to have.

4. Walk in faith.

Do you remember the conversation between Nate and Tommy at the beginning of this sermon? Tommy said he would only believe Jesus was alive if he was able to see Him and touch His scars. And who can blame him? Isn't that how you would have been? Have you ever thought it would be easier to believe in Jesus if you would have been an eyewitness to all He did?

Well, when Tommy (some people call him Doubting Thomas) finally saw Jesus and was able to touch Him, Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."²⁵ The bottom line is following Jesus is a walk of faith, and it is only through faith that you can be all you can be.

5. Go out and change your world.

²⁵ John 20:29

As many of you know, I teach Sociology at Nashville State Community College. I love the interaction I have with the students and the diversity of the student body at Nashville State. Each semester, usually early on, I ask my classes the following question, “How many of you are the first person in your family to go to college?”

There are always a few in every class who raise their hands. Some of those who do also tell me they are the first person in their family to have graduated from high school. I know teachers should not play favorites, but I can’t help but admire those in my classes who are doing something no one else in their family has ever done. I tell them, and I hope they realize that what they are doing is going to change the direction of, not just their life, but their family for generations to come. Their commitment to education is going to change their world. I teach for students like that.

But I follow Jesus because I want to change the world, or at least my little part of the world. Whatever dreams you have for yourself, God has bigger dreams because He wants you to be a world changer, and He wants you to start in your neighborhood. Before His ascension He said to His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²⁶

Then, right before His ascension, Jesus told His followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Once they received the Holy Spirit, they would receive power to be His witnesses, first in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of

²⁶ Matthew 28:18-20

the earth.”²⁷ In other words, be all you can be. Dream big. Change your world, starting where you live.

CONCLUSION

Pastor Dave never wanted to be a pastor. To be honest, the thought never enter his mind. As a teenager he had two loves: rock-n-roll and girls. At best, he was a nominal Christian, but nothing to serious. After graduating from high school, Dave went to the state university. He wanted to play music, and he wanted to be lawyer.

That was during the 1970s and his college campus, like many others in our nation, got caught up in the “Jesus People” movement.²⁸ Dave and some of his friends placed their faith in the resurrected Christ. Soon, he was having Bible studies in his dorm room. Gradually the group grew and by the time they graduated from college, that group of 1970 hippies had formed a church with Dave serving as pastor. Thirty five years later, Pastor Dave is still the pastor of that church and they are still attracting wild eyed college students with wild ideals. He and his church have a heart for their own city, reaching people who are far from God; and their influence impact travels across the world.

Pastor Dave would be the first to tell you that before he committed his life to Christ, he had big plans for his life, but those plans would not have changed his world. Pastor Dave would tell you that the way to succeed, the way to fulfill your life’s destiny

²⁷ Acts 1:8

²⁸ Starting in the mid 1960s, continuing through the 1970s, the Jesus People movement was a revival that spread through the hippie community in and outside of college campuses across the United States.

and be the best you can possibly be, is by following Jesus with all you have and all you are.

Jesus was just as human as you and I. Yes, he was God, but He was also fully human. He had the same struggles, the same emotions, the same temptations, and the same ups and downs as you. Yet He lived a full life, being all God wanted Him to be, changing His world.

And now he says it's your turn!

He rose from the dead, he forgave you of your sins, He has given you His Spirit, He has empowered you to walk in faith. You have, within you, the potential to change your world.

What are you waiting for?