

Theme: Look Up. Move Forward.

Text: Acts 1:1-11 (EHV)

I wrote my first book, *Theophilus*, about everything Jesus began doing and teaching² until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After he had suffered, he presented himself alive to the apostles with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and told them things about the kingdom of God.⁴ Once, when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for what the Father promised, which you heard from me.⁵ For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”⁶ So when they were together with him, they asked, “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set 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, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁹ After he said these things, he was taken up while they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight.¹⁰ They were looking intently into the sky as he went away. Suddenly, two men in white clothes stood beside them.¹¹ They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Did you see the Aurora Borealis (also known as the “Northern Lights”) in the night sky over the weekend? I saw some pretty fantastic pictures of them over the Golden Gate Bridge area, and saw many photos from friends in the Midwest and some really amazing photos from our CLC pastor up in British Columbia, Canada. I unfortunately did not get to see them in person this time, but I have seen them once before while I was in college in Wisconsin. Some friends and I sat and watched them on a hill late one night, just mesmerized by them. We were staring up into the sky for hours, talking about school and life, and about how unreal this scene was. It was a sight I will never forget.

Can you imagine the “unreal” scene the disciples saw in our text as they were staring up into the sky? I would say it was even more incredible than the “Northern Lights,” wouldn’t you? Jesus, their risen Savior, their teacher, their friend ascending into the sky, higher and higher, until a cloud finally took Him out of their sight. Can you picture them standing there with amazement on their faces, their mouths open and their heads tilted back **“looking intently into the sky as he went away” (v. 10)?** Maybe some of them were trying to get one last glimpse of Jesus moving around to try and see Him behind the cloud that covered Him. Then, from out of nowhere, two men dressed in white appear right next to this crowd of onlookers and they begin to speak. **They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (v. 11).**

“Why are you standing here looking up into the sky?” Were these angels serious? No one had ever seen anything like this before. Jesus had just lifted up off the ground and ascended up into the sky! Of course they’re going to be standing there staring for a while in amazement! We probably would have done the same thing.

But think of what else the apostles had just seen and heard. Verse three of our text tells us, **“After he [Jesus] had suffered, he presented himself alive to the apostles with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and told them things about the kingdom of God” (v. 3).** These men had heard Jesus’ teachings and witnessed His miracles first hand. These men were eyewitnesses of the events of Holy Week. They saw Judas, one of their own, betray Jesus into the hands of His enemies. They watched their Lord, their best friend, get brutally beaten by the Roman soldiers and hung on the cross. They viewed Jesus’ agonizing death from the foot of His cross. They heard His cries

from the cross and with their own ears heard Him declare, **“It is finished!” (John 19:30)**. Their hearts were burdened with sorrow as Jesus’ body lay in the grave, and then were filled with unimaginable joy when they saw Jesus again after He had risen from the dead. They had just heard Him teaching **“them things about the kingdom of God” (v. 3)** during the 40 days He was with them after His resurrection. In His last words to them before He ascended Jesus told them, **“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” (v. 8)**. He didn’t want them to just keep **“standing here looking up into the sky” (v. 11)**. So, God had to send them two angels to snap them out of their daydream and remind them that they had work to do, for this Jesus was going to return again someday in the same way they saw Him leave.

We may not have experienced these events with our physical eyes and ears like the apostles did, but with eyes and ears of faith we have seen and heard the events of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension as they are recorded for us in the Bible. The Holy Spirit recorded these things for us so that they would fill our hearts and minds with faith and become as real for us as they were for the men who experienced them first hand.

We have watched the agony of Christ’s suffering and death, we heard His cries from the cross as He completed the payment for our sins. We have felt the sorrow of His burial, and experienced the great joy of hearing and seeing that He is risen. Our ears have also heard Him tell us to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, and today we have seen Him ascend to the right hand of God the Father in heaven to rule over all things. We have also heard the angels say that this Jesus will return again in the same way we have seen Him go into heaven. We too have witnessed the things that made the apostles **Look up** into the sky at Jesus with amazement.

But Jesus doesn’t want us to just keep standing here **“looking up,”** He wants us to **Move Forward!** Do we fully understand and apply to our daily lives what Christ’s ascension means for us? Do we realize the confidence and courage Jesus’ ascension gives us? Paul reminded us in our Scripture reading from **Ephesians** that at Christ’s Ascension God the Father **“seated him [Jesus] at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. ²³ The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:20-23 EHV)**. Jesus is right now ruling over **“everything for the church”**—for us!

Knowing this, are we just going to just keep **“standing here looking up into the sky?” (v. 11)**. The apostles certainly didn’t. We read in the last verses of the Gospel of Luke, **“And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:51-53 EHV)**.

We also know from the rest of the book of Acts that these men spread the message of their crucified and risen Savior to thousands of people wherever they went. These men were witnesses of Christ, and they became witnesses for Christ. Through the Holy Scriptures we too have been made witnesses of Christ, and He calls us through this same Word to be witnesses for Christ.

Remember His words just before He ascended? Jesus instructed His disciples, **“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)**. He wanted them to start close to home, in their own city and spread the Gospel in ever widening circles. That’s exactly where you and I can start too: close to home—maybe within our own home and family— in our own neighborhood, and city. The point is to start! Through the Words of Scripture we **Look Up** and have seen once again our ascended Savior—a sight that is more incredible and awe-inspiring than even the Northern Lights! May His ascension to His heavenly throne inspire us and give us the confidence to now **Move Forward** and be His witnesses to the world. Amen.