

## Acts 1:1-11

I wrote my first book, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began doing and teaching<sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup>So when they were together with him, they asked, “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

<sup>7</sup>He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>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.”

<sup>9</sup>After he said these things, he was taken up while they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>They were looking intently into the sky as he went away. Suddenly, two men in white clothes stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>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.”

## Raising Our Focus

Once a year, without fail, it is necessary for me to make another visit. Some things I have been guilty of putting off for a while. The nurses in the doctor’s office look up at me with that little knowing smirk when I say it has been a couple of years. They can see by my chart on their screen that my idea of “a couple” is slightly understated. But there’s one thing I never fail to do. Every calendar year I go see the optometrist.

Being able to keep things in focus is not overrated. It’s a seeing world. Those with vision problems are acutely aware of the things they cannot do at all and the things they need assistance with. It’s great to be able to see.

My optometrist tells me I’m not getting any younger. If I want to continue to wear contacts, there are certain compromises I have to make. How well do I want things to be in focus at any given distance? I’m nearsighted. Pop those contacts out or take the glasses off, and I’m perfectly able to read with no corrections. Look up from my book, however, and everything else is blurry.

### I.

Their question seemed innocuous enough: “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6, EHV). Where was their focus?

If their understanding had been fuzzy in the past, that was understandable. Jewish society pointed to a certain kind of Messiah—a political Messiah. They expected one who would throw off the yoke of the Roman government and restore some sort of Davidic kingdom—one in which the nation of Israel would have its former prominence and glory in the world. Perhaps as they first joined the little band of disciples they had been infested

with visions of grandeur. If Jesus really *was* the Messiah, they were being set up to be in his cabinet in the new government. James and John outright *asked* for special positions: “Promise that we may sit, one at your right and one at your left, in your glory” (Mark 10:37, EHV).

But time had gone by. Jesus had carefully explained things. Their focus, however, didn’t allow them to see the truth. Sure, eternity was coming someday. Sure, when they saw Lazarus raised from the dead they thought about the resurrection and that some day they, too, would be raised from the dead. But that was in some far-off nebulous future. *This was now!*

More time had gone by. They had been through Holy Week. They had eaten the Supper Jesus instituted. They heard him say it was for the forgiveness of sins. They were there in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus *allowed* himself to be arrested. Some had dared to watch the trial and listen to the accusations. Whether up-close or from a distance, they witnessed the execution. They had all been there, at one time or another, in the locked upper room when the resurrected Jesus came and stood among them and showed them his hands and his side.

Forty days had gone by. They had seen him alive multiple times. Things *should* have been starting to set in. Their focus *should* have been lifting. But: “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6, EHV). Still they looked for Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom.

## II.

Where’s *your* focus? It’s all too easy to get bogged down by the immediate. It’s been going on from the beginning.

There were consequences associated with a certain tree in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve knew it. Soothing sibilant sounds from the snake and a glossy sheen on some fruit distracted them. The short-term pleasure just looked too good and sounded too good. Just a little taste couldn’t hurt anything, could it?

A man and woman on a date get caught up in the moment. Passions and emotions run high. Long-term feelings are not taken into consideration. Possibility of pregnancy? Reaction of parents? These are the furthest things from the couples’ minds. It’s all about the moment.

A person is seated at a barstool with a group of friends. Tensions of the day slip away with a few drinks. The laughter and idle chatter are soothing, somehow. Just one more drink. And one more. Soon a few indiscretions slip out of the mouth. Physical inhibitions slip away, too.

“Lord, is *this* the time?” The disciples wanted relief from the oppression of the Romans. The person nursing a hangover wants the pounding to go away—and any other consequences they just can’t remember, as well. Someone battling illness grasps for a cure.

Lord, is *this* the time you are going to make everything right in our lives? I know you have taken care of heaven for me, but what about right now? I’m struggling with issues and problems and difficulties *today!* Are you going to take away my problems right now? Are you going to help me with the things I have to face in this earthly life? Lord, will you make my life easier?

### III.

“He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>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’” (Acts 1:7-8, EHV).

That’s not the point, says Jesus. I didn’t come to make your life easier, necessarily. But...I’ll give you something to do in the meantime. Those things to do will help you to raise your focus.

Jesus didn’t come to restore an earthly kingdom, or to make the one we live in to our liking. He didn’t come to give us an easy life.

In whatever your vocation, as a student or in your job or at your home, or even in your retirement, Jesus says you are his witnesses. Live your life as a believer. By doing so you have an opportunity to give glory to God.

That raises your focus. That’s *heavenly* stuff. Keep your eyes on the heavenly prize.

### IV.

“After he said these things, he was taken up while they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9, EHV). After he told the disciples they had something to do that should raise their focus, he drifted up, right before their very eyes, and disappeared.

There they stood. Mouths hanging open. Wondering if they would ever see him again. Was he coming back? How were they supposed to go on without him?

Jesus *didn’t* abandon us. “Suddenly, two men in white clothes stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>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’” (Acts 1:10-11, EHV).

He’ll be back. Jesus himself promised the same thing the angels said: “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.” (John 14:3, EHV). He will come back for *you*. He has gone to make sure your reservation is ready for you when the time comes.

There are lots of distractions. Anxiety levels for many are off the charts. Every day there are things that keep our focus short-sighted. Keep raising your focus. Watch Jesus ascend into heaven and remember that he has gone to prepare your place. No matter what distracts you, heaven is your home. Focus on your Lord Jesus who will take you there. Amen.