



The Royal Task-Part 3

Urgent Till Christ Returns

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Some have been asking, Pastor Mike, did you write another book on your recent break? No. But I did clean my garage. And that's a big deal, man. I don't do that very often. It just doesn't normally happen but it recently happened. I realize I don't normally do it because it doesn't, just never seems like an urgent thing to do and as long as I can walk through it, it doesn't seem all that important. But every now and then I feel that urge that it just needs to be cleaned. I know it's the right thing and I feel like I ought to do it. Usually it's a feeling I can ignore and it goes away pretty quickly but occasionally everything just lines up and I feel that sense of just get off the couch and just do that. And so I stand up and get out there and tackle this very uncomfortable and unpleasant task.

That, by the way, reminds me of how a lot of Christians view sharing the gospel. They know it's the right thing to do and every now and then they feel motivated to do it. But, you know, they can usually ignore that feeling and it goes away. But every now and then in the Christian life a real Christian feels like I ought to do this. And every now and then they feel like, OK I should and they actually do and they stand back like I do about my garage and say, "Well, that was a good thing. I'm glad I did this."

Writing, by the way, when I am writing on my break, that is a whole different ballgame. I had that experience of having a publisher actually come and say, "Hey, you need to write a book for us." Now, some people ask me, "Pastor Mike, you must enjoy writing. Do you enjoy writing?" And the answer is: Yuck. I mean, I hate it. I'd rather clean my garage any day of the week than write. But, you know, at least for me, it seems like a big deal. There was Thomas Nelson first and then Harvest House and Moody Press, and they'd say, "Would you write a book for us?" And so I write that book and it feels important to me. This is a big deal. Then there's that deadline that just haunts you. You know, you've got to get this manuscript turned in by this date and certainly in the periods of time where I've had a deadline approaching, it's like I might get up in the morning, I might not even know what day it is, but it's like I know the day is fast approaching, you better get down to your computer, you better get this thing written. I feel that urgency and that importance that this is a big deal and I ought to do it.

By the way, from a guy who feels, really and honestly, this is not false humility here, I feel completely inadequate to write. It's a weird thing. I mean, I hardly read as a kid and teenager and now I feel like I can't do it. And yet the pressure of that important contract and signing it and promises and deadlines, all the urgency and importance, you know, ends up in my life, I do a lot more writing now than I do cleaning because of all that.

That, by the way, is how I think Christ views the task of sharing the gospel. He sees that as something incredibly urgent and certainly supremely important. I think to myself how do we as people who feel inadequate, I think most of us, to share the gospel and to stand up and give a reason for the hope that's in us and really open our mouths about Christ, how do we get past all



of that with that sense of importance and urgency to actually be motivated to open up our mouths this week and talk about Christ? If I were asked that question I would have an answer and it would be two words. Words you may not expect but here's the answer if you want to elevate your view of the urgency and importance of sharing the gospel. Here are the two words: The Ascension. I told you you wouldn't expect that. The Ascension? Yeah, the Ascension. "What are you talking about?" The Ascension, the bodily ascension of Christ who ascended and left this planet to go back to be glorified with the Father. That scene, which is all but forgotten in modern Christianity, was a huge impetus, a catalytic event in the hearts and minds of people in the first chapter of Acts that motivated so much of what you see in the 28 chapters of Acts as people went out with a high level of significance given to the task of evangelism and with a great deal of urgency. If you want to change your perspective to get to see evangelism more like Christ sees it and a lot less how I see cleaning the garage, then you need to understand and study the Ascension of Christ.

We've reached that passage in Acts Chapter 1 and I'd love for you to open your Bibles right now, if they're not already open, to Acts Chapter 1. Call this up on your phone or your iPad or your laptop or the old Gutenberg Bible in the seat there in front of you and look at this text, three verses, three simple observations, all of them related to how the Ascension changes our perspective about what we've been calling in this series, The Royal Task.

Let's take a look at this in verse 9. Acts Chapter 1 verse 9, I'll read it from the English Standard Version, it says, "And when he," that of course is Christ, "had said these things..." What things? Verse 8, "You're going to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, end of the earth." "When he said those things, as they," the disciples, the apostles in particular and probably others standing there, "when they were looking on, he was," literally now, "lifted up and a cloud," of all things, "took him out of their sight." Verse 10. "And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee. Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way you saw him go into heaven.'" There's a scene that we're all familiar with. It's not one we think about very often. And I would venture to say many of us don't think very often about how that might change whether or not I'm courageous enough this week to say something about Jesus Christ to someone.

And yet this was an oft-celebrated and very important significant event in the lives of the apostles and the early church that they constantly came back to this as an impetus for their evangelism.

So, how does that work? Well it works in part because they understood the Old Testament perhaps better than we do. And when you see a scene like this in verse 9, look at it again, "When he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a," I said this now, "a cloud..." Right? I said what a strange way to go, but there it is, "a cloud took him out of their sight." Now for us, I don't know, cloud, if I say cloud, what do you think of? Well, if you're thinking of the Messiah and a cloud, if you're thinking about God and a cloud, if you're thinking about the Bible and a cloud, all you have to do is start scanning through the Old Testament in your mind to start thinking that is a pretty significant deal. As a matter of fact, if you want to talk about the first



time we have God putting his thoughts on to, in this case, rocks, stone tablets, it happened as a cloud descended and all this crazy stuff was happening on Mt. Sinai. Moses went up there and interacted with this cloud. It was such a strange event it actually ended up having photons like glowing off of his face that would take time to fade. This cloud was a big deal and then he builds a tabernacle according to the instructions he got on the mountain.

This cloud settled in on them. They went through the wilderness and a cloud there was what led them. And then Solomon builds a temple. He builds this temple 600 years later, 400 years later and what happens is this cloud descends on the temple. There's always this sense of a cloud and this cloud became a very significant symbolism to them that God's glory dwelt here. When the cloud left they had a word for it, we mentioned this in the series already, "Ichabod." Ichabod meant that the glory, "Kavod" is the Hebrew word for glory, the gravity, the weight, the importance, the glory, the majesty, the greatness of God has departed. You want the cloud. When the cloud settles then that's a big deal. The cloud sat there at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The cloud, it was so important, the cloud filling the holy of holies. So when you see this simple explanation. I mean, he could have been lifted up. Matter of fact, most people probably think of the Ascension without any reference to clouds. They go, "Oh, I think, okay, I should put some clouds, maybe some fluffy white clouds." That's not the picture here.

Matter of fact, here's the real picture. Jot this down if you're taking notes. Daniel Chapter 7. If you want to get very specific about everything converging in their minds, prophetically, biblically, you better think of this particular passage. Daniel Chapter 7 verses 13 and 14. Daniel 7:13 and 14. Let me remind you this is a super important passage. I often quote it from the platform. It is so important as we studied the Gospel of Luke because Jesus liked to call himself the Son of Man. The Son of Man. It was his most favorite and frequent way to describe himself. When he talked in the third person about himself, he talked about himself as the Son of Man. Matter of fact, he even talked about the fact that the Son of Man would be coming on the clouds in glory.

Well, where'd that come from? From this passage, Daniel Chapter 7 verse 13. Here's Daniel prophetically looking down the corridors of time. He had from the beginning of this book and all the recorded prophecies of this book been talking about the kingdom that was going to be established to replace all other kingdoms. No matter if you're Babylon and you're Nebuchadnezzar, no matter what came after that, the Mido-Persians, the Greeks or the Romans, it was all going to be replaced by an ultimate kingdom. A kingdom that would replace all others, it would dominate all others and it would start by a Son of Man, one like a son of man, who would come before the Father, the Ancient of Days, and he would be presented before him, let me read it for you now, "with the clouds of heaven," it says, "and he would come and be presented before the Ancient of Days. And to him would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom."

Dominion, sovereignty, power, glory, all the majesty and the importance and the gravity of God, and a kingdom. He would lead it, he would be the king. "That," here's the purpose now, "all peoples and all nations and all languages should serve him." That's the picture, collecting a group of people. Not just of Israelites but of all nations, all peoples, all languages, collecting the people. And then "his dominion over those people will be an everlasting dominion, it will not pass away and his kingdom shall not be destroyed." And it all came down to this one who looked like a



human being, the Son of Man. He didn't look like God, whatever God looked like "dwelling in unapproachable light," as it says in the Bible, or something strange in Ezekiel, Chapters 1 through 4. This strange, bizarre, distant, transcendent God, to speak freely honestly and bluntly, was now pictured and embodied in a person. And that person would be the one who would be the representative of all the leadership of dominion and glory over all the people. Everyone from every nation, every language, all the peoples would be subjected to him and that kingdom would be everlasting.

Now the weird thing is it's going in the wrong direction. Right? Think about it. The whole point was, even as Jesus stood before Pilate and the Roman officials, and here all the Sadducees and Pharisees condemning him, and they sat there saying, "Are you the Christ? Are you the Christ? Are you the Christ?" And he got tired of answering all these questions and in frustration it seems like in the text he says, "Listen, from now on you're going to see the Son of Man coming on clouds in glory." He kept talking about that. It's that passage, the clouds.

The Bible says in John Chapter 17 that Jesus had glory. The glory, the gravity, the greatness, the majesty, the power that God the Father has, he had all of that before the world was created. I'm quoting John 17 when Jesus was praying. He prayed right before he went to be crucified. He said, "Listen, after I'm done with this," Mike Fabarez paraphrase, when all this is wrapped up, the death, burial, resurrection of Christ, he says, "restore to me the glory I had before the world was created. Restore to me the glory that I had with you and all that majesty and power, grant that back to me." This is the strange thing. The book ends on something we know of, that we think predominantly was Jesus, is really just the anomaly. It's not normalcy. That is between the incarnation of Christ and the ascension of Christ, this is something that the Bible calls the Humiliation of the Messiah. Those are the biblical words for it. Right? He humbled himself, Philippians 2, "taking on the form of a servant," a bondservant, "being found in the appearance as a man," like a son of man.

And here was someone humiliated. By that I mean, here's someone who does not deserve to be contained in some lowly human body. And yet the fullness of deity dwelt in that humble abode of a body. Yet all the glory, the glory that we only got a quick glimpse into in his earthly ministry on the Mount of Transfiguration, all of that glory to be restored to him and even more so. I mean if glory can be added to in terms of divinity. Think about it. Jesus did say after this redemption, after his humiliation, God would grant him a name which is above every name, to continue to quote Philippians 2, "So that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, those in heaven, earth, under the earth, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is," at the top, he is, "the Lord, to the glory of God the Father." It's exactly what's going on in John 17.

In John 17, I should quote to you, in the middle of that prayer he says about being restored to that glory. He says, "I brought you glory on earth by completing the task you gave me to do." He says, "And since I have," here it comes, "authority over all flesh, I give eternal life to all that you've given me." The point is this: I'm collecting people and these people are coming under my leadership, just like Daniel 7 says. And in that, you know this, you're granting me authority and that authority is going to be clearly established and manifested when I'm returned to my glory and I'm seated at the right hand of the Father.



It's no mistake that in Chapter 1 of Acts verse 8 we have the commission to be witnesses and in verse 9 we have the ascension where he receives his glory. The glory he gets back from the glory he had before the incarnation. It's no mistake that when Jesus says when he had a Galilean commission there, as he meets the guys in Galilee and he says to them in Matthew 28, "Go make disciples of all nations." Well, I'm skipping a word, it's "therefore." "Go therefore and make disciples." When the "therefore" is there you better look back to find out what it's "there for." And you know how it starts? Here's how it starts. The great commission starts with this: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples."

If you don't catch these elements... Here are the elements. There is an all-authoritative, glorified, exalted Christ who is giving a commission to people so that they might collect a people who are submissive to him. Not just from Israel, but from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. The picture of the task is elevated to the most supreme importance in that it's not your friend saying, "Hey, would you write a few things down on a piece of paper," just to take my silly analogy to where I was just thinking earlier. But have a big, big publishing company saying, "Hey, I need you to write this." That's far, far different than someone saying put a few thoughts down on paper. And the commission that we have, the contract that we've signed, the commission that sent to us from the commissioner is the one who has all authority over heaven and earth.

When you start looking for the themes of authority, the authority of Christ, the Commission or the calling to make disciples to share the gospel and what we're called to do, collecting people unto the lordship of Christ, you see it everywhere. And it elevates the task when Christ was restored to his glory on a cloud, that picture of the greatness and majesty of God, people stood back and said, "Wow, this is the most important thing we can do." When you start thinking about whether or not you're going to talk to someone about Christ this week, maybe those names you jotted down last week when we identified someone that kind of corresponds in our world to the Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth, I want you to keep, number one on your outline, I need you to "Keep the Exalted Christ in View," the glorified Christ in view. The Christ who now exists, not the Christ who existed between the two bookends of the incarnation and the ascension. That's the anomaly.

See, the Christ who you should fix in your mind is the exalted, glorified one, who's not suggesting something as he sits there with sandals on by the Sea of Galilee, but the one who John was reintroduced to in Revelation Chapter 1. John the apostle, who hung out with Jesus. You want to talk about someone who's going to fulfill the contemporary Christian songs about high-fiving Jesus and dancing around when he meets him. Right? Well, you'd think it'd be John, but it's not. Matter of fact, when John sees Christ after his glorification, the Bible says he "falls down as though dead." Why? Well, here's why. Because he sees "one like the Son of Man." There's the picture. And he has "a long robe on." Well, that's what you would have if you were a king. And he has "a golden sash around his chest." Well, that's what you'd have if you are a really rich king. And "the hairs of his head were white, like wool, white like snow." Well, that would be the picture, certainly, the depiction of someone who is infinitely wise.



And "his eyes are like flames of fire, and his feet are like burnished bronze." Nothing stands in his way, like huge, like boots to stomp. That's the picture of burning bronze. And his voice wasn't whispering, "Would you please go represent me at your office this week?" His voice was like the sound of "many waters. In his right hand he held the seven stars," and in that picture that's the seven churches. Right? The seven lampstands, the seven stars. He has there the people who he has called out to be his representatives. "And out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." When he speaks, man, those words cut and they divide, as it says in Hebrews, like they divide our motives and our conscience and they just cut down to the core of who we are. "And his face," I mean, here is John who'd seen Jesus' face many times. Well now, it says "his face is shining like the sun in full strength." It's hard to stare into the sun. "And when I saw him," here's what I quoted to start with, "I fell at his feet as though dead.

And he laid his hand on me and he said this: 'I'm the first and the last, I'm the living one. I died and now I'm alive forevermore, and I have the keys to,' Death and Hell, 'Death and Hades.'" Picture that now. Those keys, by the way, he keeps handing those out in the New Testament. He wants us to take the keys, the keys of the kingdom and to make a difference in people's lives. And that sharp two-edged sword that comes out of his mouth, I'm supposed to take that and wield that sword. It's the Word of God. I mean, these are the tools he's given us, weapons of warfare, to go to war, not the way that the world does, as Paul said, it's not weapons of the flesh. These are arguments, these are things that tear down every thought raised up against the knowledge of God. For you to go into the workroom or talk over the mailbox or to deal with your relative about the truth of the gospel, these are powerful weapons that he gives us, and he says, "I got the keys of Hell and Death." And now he says to John, very specifically, now get to work. In this case, you write down what I'm about to tell you. And you know what? We're supposed to publish and broadcast what Christ has commissioned us to broadcast and to publish. And that is an authoritative message from an exalted Christ.

Which, by the way, is not one God among many. Do you know that two-thirds of so-called, self-proclaimed Christians in American culture today, two-thirds from a recent Pew Research study, they said that you can find eternal life in lots of religions? That's two-thirds of self-professing Christians who say, "Yeah, our religion is nothing special. You know our Christ? Yeah, we like him, he's our guy. But, you know, if you've got another quarterback on your team you like better, well, you know, so be it." I mean I've already quoted the one from the Barna Research about millennials today and they were called not just Christian millennials, these are practicing Christian millennials. So in this study you had to be practicing, you go to church and you read your Bible. Out of the younger generation, 50%, 50%, it was just like 49.2%, just shy of 50% of young practicing Christian millennials said it is wrong for you to evangelize. You should not be trying to talk other people to be into your quarterback. Because you might be into Buddha, you might be in Hinduism, you might be a Muslim. You know, you might just be a really nice agnostic or atheist. So why should I try to talk you into my religion?

I tell you when you start seeing Jesus that way, as one deity among many, as one option among many, and you think you're being loving? Can we stop with that whole game? I mean, really if Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords and he begins our assignment with these words, "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth," then who are we to sit around at the



lunchroom and go, "Well, you know what? You're into your thing, I'm into mine. It's OK." That's insane. That's insanity. "Yeah, but it's nice." It's not nice. It's the most unloving thing you could do. If the ship is sinking and the Christ is the captain now of a lifeboat and it sits there on this deck at that part of the deck and all signs lead to that and you're telling people, "If you want to climb to the top of the smokestack, that's fine. If you want to try to swim for it on the starboard side that's fine. You know, because I'm loving and I want you to like me." Christians today are enamored with trying to get the culture and the world to like us and think we're accepting and tolerant and loving.

Here's what the King of kings said. When he said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled," which by the way, you think is just a nice slogan for a Dayspring card. Do you know why he said that? He said that in John 14 because he knew in John 13 that the guys were struggling over the fact that he promised I'm leaving you, I'm going away. "But don't be troubled. Let's trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house," many mansions, "many rooms," many places. I'm going to go and prepare a place for you, "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I'm going to come again, receive you unto myself, that where I am you may be also."

And he goes, you know all about this, "you know the way I'm going," and Thomas said what? "I don't know what you're talking about. Where are you going? I don't know the way. We don't know what you're talking about." And he said, you want to know the way? "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life." John 14:6. "No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus the exalted, authoritative, glorified Christ has not changed that message. And here's what they got. They understood that because of the cloud of glory lifting up the exalted, glorified Christ, they could say two chapters later, "there's no other name under heaven given among men by which men must be saved." There's no other way.

And in that study, by the way, it was interesting how the commentators about young, practicing Christian millennials... I'm not trying to bust them. You got two thirds of confessing Christians saying there's salvation in other religions. But you need to understand this. The commentators said, "Hey, you know what? Younger Christians are just more personally aware of the cultural temperature." Well, you may be personally aware of the cultural temperature knowing that that's what the culture wants you to do and wants you to say, but Christ has been very clear. Here's what he wants you to say. There's hope in nowhere else. There's salvation in no one else. And when Paul writes to the Romans, a very eclectic, pluralistic culture, I mean they had all kinds of gods there, he says this in Romans 10, how is anyone ever going to get saved unless they put their trust in Christ. Rhetorical question. They're not. How is anyone going to put their trust in Christ and call on the Lord to be saved unless they hear the message? How are they going to hear the message unless someone preaches to them that message? We're not talking about preachers with microphones, we're talking about people in workrooms talking to their friends and neighbors and co-workers about Christ. Then he says this: how's anyone going to be talking to people and teaching and preaching this message of the gospel unless someone sends them.

Well guess what we're doing this morning? Right? You think that's a missions conference verse? Well it works for that. But here's the application. We're in a sermon series right now called the Royal Task and the royal task is given by the royal King and the King is saying to you and I'm



trying to in this series send you out to do the very thing that you were called to do and that is to offer the only option that people have to have their sins cleared, their sins expiate, their moral rap sheet cleaned and to be offered eternal life. There's salvation in no other name. There's no other way. The exalted Christ is the only way to be saved and he says to you, "Be my ambassadors."

It's easy to get distracted. Matter of fact, there's kind of an implied sense of distraction in verse 10. Look back at our passage. "While they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes said 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?'" So they're standing looking into heaven and the rhetorical question is, "Why are you looking into heaven?" And I'm going to raise my hand and say, "Da," if they weren't angels I would say it. I'd say, "Da, because he just went up in the sky!" I mean, I lose a balloon, I'm going to stare at it as long as I can to see where it goes. Of course, I'm going to watch the rabbi. He just levitated off the planet. I'm looking into the sky. But there's an implied rebuke there, isn't there? The answer is maybe you shouldn't be looking up into heaven. Maybe there's something else to be doing. Well, of course there is. I mean, the point is, the whole point is you're going to get the Spirit to come upon you and give you power, verse 8, so that you'll be my witnesses. Now, get back into Jerusalem, wait for that promise, it would come a short week later and then they would go out and start sharing the message of the gospel. Get to work.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with looking up into the sky. They were gazing into heaven. I call them angels, by the way, and if you say, "Well, it doesn't say angels, just two men in white robes." Well, white really wasn't the fashion statement of the first century, by the way. I mean, you don't want to walk around the dusty streets of Jerusalem with a white robe on. And when you see white robes in Matthew 28, Mark 16, you'll see them throughout the New Testament, John 20. These are angelic beings, clearly identified elsewhere as angelic beings. The white-robed persons, called men. They're called men because that's what they look like. They don't come as blobs or Jabba the Hutt, they come as a human being. They look like human beings talking in the language of the disciples and saying to them, "Hey, what are you doing looking up into the sky?" Well, they're looking up into the sky because they just lost their Messiah. It doesn't sound like a very happy day. Yeah, but they lost the Messiah in a grand picture that you and I often miss and that is the authoritative exalted Christ. That was a big deal. Now, he's saying, "Would you stop doing that? Would you stop looking up at the sky? Would you start getting about the work?" At least that's the implied rebuke there. It's a mild rebuke but, "Can you start looking to see what the job is that God has for you ahead of you?"

I mean, if I'm an executive at Disney walking down Main Street and you're selling those \$30 balloons or whatever they cost and you lose one of them as the crowds are all around you. If I find you sitting there with your big thing of balloons watching the one that got away, guess what I'm going to say? "Why do you stand gazing into heaven," is what I'm going to say. "I want you to sell the balloons. Would you get to work and get those balloons out." And that's exactly what's going on here. It's certainly an implied response of you should not be sitting here just gazing up into heaven. What you've "lost" is really the gain of what you now are starting.



Jesus said in the Upper Room Discourse, "it is an advantage to you that I go away." Because right now you got these people following around wherever the embodied deity is, wherever Christ is. "But I'm going to go away and I'm going to send my Spirit and my Spirit is going to be active not just in Jerusalem or wherever I happen to be at a given time, but in Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth." And you can have God's activity with God's power with the reflection of God's mighty sword out of his mouth, you can have the activity of God, wherever that message is being shared whether it's on the other side of the planet in America, in our case, whether it's going on in the Middle East, whether it's going on at the South Pole, it doesn't matter. God's power is going to move out through the message of the gospel. This is a good thing. So this is a good thing that you understand the fact that you've got a commission. I want you to stay focused on that commission, not focused on what you just think you lost.

Number two on your outline, let's remember that's the context that this is a commission. I need you and I to "Stay Focused On His Commission." He's commissioned us, number two, to make sure that we know our job is to represent him on this earth. That's not changed. It's not a command just to the first century I said last week. It is a command to every generation of Christian who understands what it is to have a message that changes people's lives. We have to share this message. Why should we share it? Well number one, because it's the most powerful person in all the world just gave it to you. And number two, because you shouldn't be distracted by anything, no matter how good it is, even staring off into space thinking about Jesus. Now that sounds like a contradiction coming from a pastor that I don't want you sitting on a rock thinking about Christ. Well, of course I do. But I want you to be like Christ and understand that even your devotional life should not get in the way of your evangelistic life. Do you understand that?

I know you'd want to, if you really love God, sit in a room, get a nice comfortable chair and read theology, read your Bible, think about God, grow close to God. I get all that. Matter of fact, that's been a very popular option that has led to the delinquency of evangelism. Athanasius in the 4th century when the church fathers from Alexandria, Egypt, wrote a book that was a bestseller. It's called the Life of Antony. The Life of Antony was a book about a guy 20-years-old, very shy. He goes away into the desert and he starts seeking God. Well, he wasn't good with people anyway, but he goes out in the desert and he becomes this guy, you can kind of picture him, kind of leaving his life behind, putting his backpack on and he's going to go seek God. And certainly he does. And he gets all these great, you know, emotional connections with God and he studies the Word and he's just the guy everyone admires. What a godly man Antony is.

Well Athanasius wrote this book, it became a best-seller and guess what that started? Something we now call the Monastic Movement. We call them the "desert fathers." I know when I talk about monastic or monks, you think about fat guys in snugezes, you know, in castles or something. But they didn't cloister in castles until much later. The monastic life of the monks in, you know, [00:30:29] worn [0.0s] in monasteries, they were out in the desert scattered by themselves in lonely lives. They went out to desolate places. And that became very popular. People equated that with godliness. All I'm saying is this: that may seem really godly, but you need to understand your job is people.



Oh, it's God, I understand that. But let's be like Christ. First John 2 says, "If you claim to be in Christ then you better walk as he walked." You better live the kind of life that he lived. Let me give you one example of that and I love this passage from Mark, Mark Chapter 1 verses 35 through 38. Mark 1:35 through 38. Jesus says, I love this, "rose early in the morning." Matter of fact, it's a continuing participle. "He was always rising early in the morning, while it was still dark," which means most people weren't active and doing stuff in the marketplace, "and he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." There's an Antony moment right there. There's something Athanasius where said yay. That's something that a lot of people say, "I want to do that. I want to seek the Lord in a desolate place."

Well, within this passage, verse 36, Peter comes and finds him in the desolate place and says, "Hey, everyone's looking for you Jesus." Probably what Antony's friends and family thought. "Hey, where are you?" And you know what Jesus said? Leave me alone, I'm seeking the Father. No. You know what? Every time we see Christ interrupted in situations like that, he never turns these people away. Matter of fact, here's the response of Jesus, the godly one, that you and I are supposed to replicate, as he's "staring and gazing into heaven" if you will. When Simon Peter says, "Everyone is looking for you," Jesus said to him, "Let us then go to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that's why I came. I came to do this. Give me the people. Where are they?" And you could see him rolling up his sleeves. "Let me at them."

Do you want to be a monastic monk who seeks the Lord and is fixated on theology and doctrine? Great. Do it early in the morning before the sun comes up. But when the sun comes up and you can interact with people, the Bible says people are your focus. I mean, I'm with you on this, I know you don't believe me, but I'd much rather be by myself alone. I'd rather have a book in a quiet place and just, you know, like pastors have jokingly said, "ministry would be great if it weren't for the people." I mean, I hate to admit that I've had that thought (laughter), but I realized that's what God has called all of us to be about, is the people. And all I'm telling you is this: it's great for us to edify one another and we should, all the more as we see today approaching. But what we really need is we need to get serious about the commission that you and I have.

That list of four names that I had you to put together last week. I know you can multiply that by 10 and perhaps you should, but those are the people who need time with you, they need to get a text from you, they need to hear an email from you. I've heard stories today on the patio how great it was, even when the door was closed, I mean, how good it felt for those Christians to say I've been reaching out to those non-Christians. I've been offering the words of life. I've been offering to meet with them. I've been sending them things to read. I sent them a Bible. I mean those are great stories. Keep that up because that's really the work we're called to do. If we shouldn't be distracted by the highest thing that you could possibly excuse distraction over, and that is seeking God, nothing secondary is going to work. Right? Nothing.

Here's a little phrase in Second Corinthians 5 that talks about our ambassadorship. Maybe you gloss over this when you read it. It says we no longer recognize anyone according to the flesh. The whole concept of this passage in Second Corinthians 5 is that we are his ambassadors and we've been given the ministry of reconciliation. So I'm a reconciler. I'm making an appeal to



people as though God were making his appeal through me, be reconciled to God. That should be my identity. He says this, "We no longer recognize anyone according to the flesh." The point is this, of course, Paul knew this guy, you know, inherits household, this guy's a merchant, this guy's a tentmaker, this guy's a tax collector, this guy's an official. Of course, he knows that. But he no longer sees that as the important thing. The identity of Christians is you're an ambassador, you're a representative. You've been given a ministry of reconciliation.

I don't know how I can say this more forcefully. You got one of two things you can do. You can either accept this or you can reject it, but you and I need to see that the task of the gospel, sharing with people, is from the most authoritative person, it's the most important thing you have going in your life. It's the thing that Paul says, that's the main thing I'm concerned with. I don't even recognize what your business card says. What I really care about is what difference you're making in that business. How are you connecting with people, how are you making a difference for Christ? I mean, that's what we've got to see. We cannot be distracted from our calling. We've got to stay focused on his commission. The Great Commission is for us to remember all authority has been given to him. Go make disciples. Do it anywhere and everywhere.

By the way, this little phrase, look at verse 11, the top of verse 11. "Men of Galilee." You know where they are when this happens, right? Think about it, don't forget the context. We're just outside of Jerusalem, the Old City, we're across the Kidron Valley, we're on the Mount of Olives, or on the actually the backside of the Mount of Olives, because we know, as Luke 24 says, they're on the way to Bethany. So somewhere on the backside of the slopes of the Mount of Olives this thing is going down. How far is that from Galilee? Well that's 70 miles away. I mean, that's a long way from Galilee as you walk, it's going to take you time to get there. It's like us, you know, traveling to Chicago. It's a long way.

And so it was for them that they recognize that when the angels said, "Hey, guys." He reminds them of where they're from. I don't want to overread this. I don't want to think too much about what's not there in this text, but it is interesting. You could have said a lot of things, "Hey, disciples," "Hey, followers of Christ," "Hey, apostles." He says, "Men of Galilee." Now when you're in Jerusalem being up from Galilee, it's not a big deal. Matter of fact, a lot of people think, "Galilee. Oh, Galilee." Right? There is the country folk. But what an encouraging thing. I talk about the fact that I feel like inadequate to write, I feel inadequate for a lot of things, and I think you and I feel inadequate about sharing our faith or defending the faith. But to hear him remind them, "Hey, Men of Galilee." It's not a slam or a slight. Actually it elevates the sense of, "Hey, you can do this." Right?

Why did Jesus go to Galilee to collect these men? Because he said to them, "Hey, fishermen, drop your nets, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. I'm going to turn this band into a group that's going to change the world. Listen, follow me. I will have you collecting people for this kingdom that Daniel 7 talked about." One of the important things for us to realize, the "Men of Galilee" should elevate the fact that God can use you. First Corinthians Chapter 1 says the gospel ultimately ends up being for those who are being saved. The power of God, it changes everything for this, the wisdom of God. But it starts out in context by reminding, well, how many of you, really, according to the flesh, are anything great? I mean, consider your calling, brothers. Not



many were noble, not many were of noble birth, not many of you were great. I pick the common things, the normal things, even the lowly things to shame the wise. He picked men of Galilee to take this message. You got a lot to do horizontally. You're looking up vertically. Nothing wrong with that, pursue the relationship we have with God, but don't be distracted from the task. You may think you're better suited for something else. But God wants you to be seeing your job, as lowly and inadequate as you may feel, to be the ones who bring this message of God's wisdom to our generation. Stay focused on the commission.

The bottom verse 11, this is the part we probably see most clearly because it's most exciting it seems. "Christ was taken up from you in that cloud. He's going to come in the same way you saw him go into heaven," which is exactly what Jesus promised. He kept saying, "You're going to see the Son of Man coming," not leaving, "coming on a cloud in glory." He said it multiple times. You're going to see the Son of Man coming on a cloud in glory with the angels and the glory of the Father, you're going to see all of that. Well they're seeing the reverse of that. But he says you're going to see that, it's going to come, it's going to happen. Well, what do we know is going to happen between those two things? Well, we know this, verse 8, you're going to get the Spirit of God to empower you and enable you, give you the endurance to go out there and be my witnesses.

So between the Ascension and the coming of Christ to get his Church, we got a lot of stuff to do here. Basically, it boils down to the great commission of seeing people saved. So get to work. You got to get to work. Why? Because there's a time coming, look back up at verse 6 when they ask in verse 6. "Hey, is now the time you're going to restore the kingdom?" Jesus said, "It's not for you to know," verse 7, "the times or the seasons which the Father has," and this is a big word, he's "fixed them," he set them "by his own authority." So I know this: when it comes to him coming out of heaven, coming back to establish his Kingdom, I know this: There's a day set. And there's a terminus. And it's actually coming, it's in the future. And it's going to end. What's going to end? This period of time between the Ascension and the return. And it should be for us that we realize that there is a temporal, finite, closure to this.

Just like when Noah was building the Ark. There was a time when that Ark would no longer be on the dry dock. It's going to be there saving people from the flood. Jesus even said, "You know, when I come back it's going to be a lot like it was in the days of Noah." And what is that? Everyone's just going about their work. People marrying and giving in marriage until the flood came and took them all away. And the thing about the Ark is, I guess you could say, "Well, I know the flood's not going to come till the Ark is finished. Well that's true. But you see when Christ was ascended that was the point, it was finished. Salvation was completed in terms of all the mechanism for salvation. Therefore, we sit here in the dry dock, so to speak, with the Ark, and the only thing we got now is an open door that still allows people to get in it. But there is a day where that's going to close. You ought to feel that time running out.

Number three, let's put it that way. "Sense the Time Running Out." The time is running out. The Bible constantly emphasizes that theme. The day is drawing near. We're closer now to our salvation than we were before. I mean, the night is long gone, to quote Romans, and the day is approaching, it's at hand. So we know Christ is going to return and there is a day set, it's fixed in



the Father's authority. "Well, it sure would be good if you'd tell us because I went to that last prophecy conference and they didn't tell us." Well listen, he said not for you to know, so don't waste your time on prophecy conferences that are trying to set dates. "Well, wouldn't it be better if I knew when it was?" No, it wouldn't be better, any better than it would be for you to know the day you're going to die.

Which, by the way, there is a day and the Bible says in Psalm 139 it has been set. It's been set. You could even say fixed by the Father's authority. And as it says, Psalm 139, just to quote it, "Every day of your life," here's how it was put, "every day of your life, it was written in a book." That's the picture of the authoritative chronicling of God's sovereign plan written in the book before there was even the first one, before there was even one of them. So I know this: there's a day, if I could look out here and, you know, kind of picture the technology and put a date over your head, if I knew the date that you're going to die and you could look in the mirror and you could see the date you're going to die, you're thinking, "Would that help?" And I'm saying the only thing it would seem to help with is all those commands in Scripture like Psalm 90. What is it? Psalm 37. "Go number your days." We'll it would be a lot easier if I knew the number. Right? When am I going to die? I'd know how many days I have left.

Well you don't know that. And yet I'm told to number my days. Well how does that work? See, picture that. How do I in my life not knowing the terminus of my physical life, how am I helped by a command that says number my days? Well, because of the next line. "And let me know Lord how fleeting my life is." Well, number my days doesn't mean I know how many I have left. It means that I counted today as another day gone. The opportunities are gone for this day. See, here's the deal. There is a time fixed in the authority of the Father when the Lord is coming back the way he left. He's coming back. Zechariah 14. It's going to be where he comes back to the Mount of Olives.

But all that intervening time, I don't know when it is but I know this, if I'm thinking rightly and making the most of every opportunity, as the worksheet passages are going to show you, one of them, that we're being wise about every encounter we have with outsiders, with non-Christians. Because we understand this: opportunities come and opportunities go. And when it comes to sharing the gospel every opportunity is going to be gone on the day that Christ is dispatched to get his Church. I just want you to think about that. The time is running out.

I'm not trying to emotionally manipulate, you know, my congregation here but that is something for us to think about. This week could be the last week that you have to work through that list and say here are people who need the gospel, I need to say something now. Today. I mean, I love the way Paul says that, he says to the Corinthians, "today is the day of salvation." I mean, right now. It's very important that we get more urgent about this. I mean, when you know I have a task and I know it's supremely important and now add to that a deadline, talk about urgency, that might get you off the couch to tackle this very uncomfortable task. That may really motivate you to say, you know what, I need to do this and do it much more often.

There's a day coming. I quote this passage all the time but if you need to jot it down, Second Peter Chapter 3 verses 9 through 12. Second Peter 3:9 through 12. It reminds us this: that God is not



slow in keeping his promise. Like, "Where is he? Where is he?" He's "not slow as some count slowness. "But he is," you know the passage, "patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." The point of the delay is salvation. His patience. So the Ark door is still open. The opportunity for salvation is still there. God has picked out people from every tongue, tribe and nation. We're out there trying to find those folks by giving them the gospel. We'll know we found them when they respond rightly to the gospel.

In that passage, by the way, that I had you just jot down if you needed to, Second Peter Chapter 3 in verse 12, it speaks of us hastening or hurrying up the day of the Lord. The only way that we could have any experience of hurrying up the day of the Lord is seeing every day as another opportunity to see if we can get the word out to someone else. Appealing to someone "as though God were making his appeal through us." Be reconciled to God. "Arrg, that's going to make me a narrow-minded, you know, Bible-thumping Christian." Oh well... I mean, I don't know what to say. All I know is this: that that authoritative Christ is going to return. Jesus said quite often, "Hey, are you sure that you're doing what you've been called to do?" "Blessed is he who the Lord finds so doing when he comes." In that passage I'm quoting, Matthew 24, there's that picture of faithfulness in dispensing my responsibilities.

Here's our primary responsibility because Paul says, "I no longer regard anyone according to the flesh and that is that we are his ambassadors." Sense that time is running out because it is. "We have weapons of warfare, not of the flesh, but divinely powerful to destroy strongholds, destroying arguments and lofty opinions raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to Christ," to quote Second Corinthians 10, I'm trying to see people's hearts and minds changed. Don't lean back in your theological easy chair and say, "Well, God will get them saved if he wants them saved." He wants YOU to be actively involved as an agent of his message.

Keep the exalted Christ in view. That'll remind you how important this is. Keeping your focus on your task, critically essential. You're not going to get off the couch and do this work without that. And then realizing that our opportunities are fleeting. We don't know how much time we have left.

December 24th. April 12th. May 21st. December 24th, April 12th, May 21st. There are three dates for you. You know the first one. Right? That's Christmas. I guarantee you, you're probably not going to treat that as an average day. When we get around to Christmas you'll probably gain weight, have parties, do special things at church. We'll do all kinds of special things here. Put your kids on the platform of a big play, we'll have special, you know, music and choirs and instruments on stage that we don't normally have. We'll have a lot of extra people here that'll come. You'll invite people, you'll have big meals, just a lot of stuff will happen. You'll probably decorate your house. December 25th. And rightfully so, because we commemorate the birth of Christ and that was worth celebrating. So much so that angels came down and celebrated it. I mean, they made a big deal. They told the people, "Glory to God in the highest." This was a big deal.

Next year, following the lunar calendar, April 12th will be Easter. Hey, there's another time, by the way, we'll have some special services. A lot of people you might go out and buy some new clothes you. You might even buy some chocolate for your kids and maybe a bag of Rocks Jelly



Beans for your pastor (laughter). I don't know. You're going to come up with things that you do to celebrate because it's not a normal weekend. It's a big deal. Why? I understand why. It's the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the victory over the grave, "death where's your sting?" Here is the validation of the work of Christ and angels showed up to declare and say what a big deal it was. "Why do you search for the living among the dead? Go tell everybody about this."

May 21st. "What's that?" Well, it's my brother's birthday for one, May 21st. I meet a lot of people after I preach this a couple of times saying, "it's my anniversary," "it's my birthday" Great. It's a good thing. But it's also the day that commemorates the Ascension of Christ. The Ascension of Christ. It will be for most people a pretty normal day. I'll tell you what, if we lived in the early church it wouldn't be. I mean, maybe you came from a high church background, you grew up in some church with a lot of liturgy. Maybe someone reminded you, "Hey, it's Ascension Sunday" or, you know, maybe you have heard that, but there are no decorations in your house, there probably won't be any special parties, you won't bake any special cakes. It will just be a normal day.

But Augustine in the 4th century said this: hey guys, do you understand that if you look back at the commemoration of special days on the calendar the first one he claimed that the Apostles celebrated wasn't Christmas. It wasn't even Easter. He claims that it was the day of Christ's ascension. Matter of fact, some historians think it was the first real commemoration of a feast day all the way back to the 60s. I'm talking about 30 years within the death and ascension of Christ, they started saying, "We're going to celebrate the day Christ went up into heaven." Now that seems like an odd thing. I understand Christ coming to earth. I get that, fulfilling all righteousness. I understand death, you know, being conquered by the resurrection. I get why the angels showed up there. But why did the angels show up and make a big deal out of the Ascension?

Because it's like hearing the starting gun if you're ready to run a race. I mean, it was the beginning of the Church being given the task, commissioned the task, "go share the message." They were excited about Ascension Day. It was the initiation of Christ mediatorial work as the Great High Priest. It was the time that he promised then and following that week to send his Spirit to empower us. It was the time to take the royal task from the one that was just glorified before our eyes and to take that message to as many people as possible. The Church celebrated Ascension Day. It was important.

I know it doesn't say it here but Luke figures you've already read his first volume. And in Luke Chapter 24 when he speaks about the Ascension, gives the preview to it, he said after he ascended the apostles, and here's how it's put, "returned to Jerusalem with great joy." Talk about again a hard paradox of, "why are you happy about this?" And they were happy. They were happy because the multiplication of the work of Christ through the giving of the Spirit, about the fact that they were seen as Men of Galilee privileged to take this message as ambassadors of heaven. This was a big deal. And I hope it becomes a big deal to you. Maybe you'll celebrate something special on December 25th and on April 12th. But just for fun this next year maybe you should make a big deal out of March 21st. And like the early church see the significance. (Audience yells "May 21st"). What did I say? May? March? See there. I just want to keep you on your toes. You



know exactly what day it is (laughter). That was probably someone's birthday. May 21st. Thank you. Maybe you want to make a big deal... It was going so smoothly there, I was coming in for a landing. Did you feel it? It was like, we're going to end this one so poetically. It was just going to be so smooth. And then I did that.

Maybe you'll make a big deal this year out of May 21st. Maybe it'll be a good thing for you to elevate the importance and the urgency of the message of the gospel. Let it start this week though. Let's open our mouths about Christ.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, to be much more bold about the message. Not to be narrow-minded, not to be bigoted, but to be clear about the fact that there is salvation in no one else. "There is no name given among men by which we must be saved." That "Jesus is the way, the truth, the life." And if we love people we want them to turn from whatever false god they might be worshiping. Whatever secular pursuits that might be absorbing their ultimate priority and replace that. But becoming submissive followers of Jesus Christ, the one to whom all dominion, all power, the kingdom is going to be granted and his reign is never, ever, going to go away. God, thank you so much that Christ is now exalted. We pray that we would respond as though the exalted Christ has given us this commission. Make us faithful this week to share the message.

In Jesus name. Amen.