

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But 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.” ⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

The credits roll from the bottom. The familiar theme song music plays. But you just sit and watch. You turn the last page, and now there is the back of the dust jacket. And you just kind of stare at it in silence. You’ve been there every step of the way, every episode. You organized your schedule to catch every single one. You set aside time to read every chapter, and now it’s over. You watched the final episode, you finished the last book, and there will be no more. The music stops. The credits are over. The book finds its place at the end of the row.

And you have a weird sort of feeling. Is there really nothing left? What am I supposed to do now? You just sit there and stare blankly, musing over the ‘journey’ that you’ve been on. What am I supposed to do next?

I wonder if Jesus’ disciples had some of these feelings as they watched Jesus ascend into heaven. Jesus was a massive part of their lives, and now he’s gone. Jesus had completed his earthly journey, and his ascension appeared to be the season finale and final chapter. Jesus had done many marvelous things while he walked this earth, and many people walked alongside him.

The season premiere was when Jesus was born on Christmas day in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn. His mother, Mary, and his Father, Joseph, raised a small boy who was simultaneously the perfect son of God. They watched him grow in intelligence and stature as he grew into the man he was destined to be.

As an adult, he grew into his ministry. He gathered his disciples, calling them from their very occupations. He taught them about the kingdom of God, who he was, and his mission. He went through Galilee and Judea, healing demon-possessed, feeding thousands, and spreading the message of sins forgiven in his name.

Towards the end of his life, he gained powerful enemies. The Pharisees and Sadducees plotted to kill him. His disciples deserted and denied him. He walked the road to the cross, where he bore the whole world's sins upon his shoulders. His mother and his followers, who had gotten to know him so well, watched him die.

Three days later, he rose from the dead and appeared to his good friends many times. The mourning was over, giving way to rejoicing and confidence in their master. He

explained things to them, helped them understand the scriptures, and everything seemed like it would be great heading forward.

But then the finale came. Jesus was with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, and then he rose up from this earth. He rose up through the sky. His disciples watched intently as he drifted farther and farther away. They gazed astonished as their good friend and Savior was taken away from them. Staring at Jesus until a cloud hid him from their sight.

Well, now what? Jesus is gone. It's over. What are we supposed to do? Jesus taught us, guided us, led us, and now he's gone. I wonder if those disciples sat there and had the same feelings that you and I do after the final episode of a beloved show is finally finished, the last chapter completed. A little empty. A little confused. A little lost.

But suddenly, two angels have something that the disciples need to hear: ***“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*** Yes, Jesus is in heaven. But he'll come back someday. Don't be afraid. Jesus' ascension marks his rise back to his place at the right hand of God. Where he reigns with all authority and dominion, and all things on earth are put under his feet.

That still doesn't answer the disciples' questions, though. What are we supposed to do now? He's gone, and we're here. Even though Jesus left them, he still has important work for them to do. Jesus' end was just their beginning.

Looking back through the text of Acts chapter one, you see that Jesus had given the disciples everything they needed to know before he left them. The things that he gave to his disciples are twofold: First, he gave them a mission, and then he gave them promises.

The mission given to them is this: ***“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”*** You, my disciples, my apostles, my redeemed children, have much to do. You have been trained. You have walked alongside me and watched what I have done for my people. You have seen firsthand my life and my death. You have received in your own ears my teaching and my instructions. Now, go and tell the world about it. Tell them all you have seen; tell them all that you have heard. Teach the hopeless world about the forgiveness of sins and life eternal, which I have won for them.

But the mission isn't theirs alone. Jesus promises to sustain them as they start their journey to the world: ***“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”*** I

may be gone in heaven. But you are not alone. The Spirit will be with you. You will receive power to accomplish the task I have given you. The Holy Spirit will be upon you. While I am in heaven, I will still be with you to the very end of the age as you carry my message of salvation to the ends of the earth. I have not abandoned you, I will be with you, and one day you will see me return for you in the same way that you have seen me go to the Father's right hand.

Jesus is in heaven. What does that mean for us? What are we supposed to do? In a sense, the same thing as those disciples. Because Jesus has given you all that you need until he returns, he has given you a mission and his promises.

And he has given you that same mission. You will be my witnesses to all the ends of the earth. As my redeemed children, you have a lot to do until I return. We have the most important message to share with a world full of people, that Jesus suffered and died for the world's sins and that he rose from the dead on the third day—total and free forgiveness of sins and life eternal for all who believe. We are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations, just as Jesus bid those first apostles to go. It may seem that there might be little work to do, but there are still people in our city, in our county, in our state, in our country, and in our world that need to hear the message of the ascended Lord.

And while you may not have traveled along the roads with Jesus and heard the words from his mouth like the disciples, you have also been equipped by his Word and Sacraments. You have learned from his Words in the Gospels and witnessed his life through the inspired writers of the New Testament. You have discovered the prophecies and fulfillments recorded in the prophets and the Psalms. You have been baptized into his name, and you have dined at his table for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.

You will not be doing it alone; God has promised you that you are not alone in your mission either. While He is in heaven, he has assured you that he is with you on your mission, with his power and grace. I have not abandoned you. The Holy Spirit has come upon you in power to speak God's Word to the ends of the earth. God is there with you; you are his instrument.

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, tonight as we have with the apostles seen Jesus ascend into the sky to the right hand of God the Father, listen to the angel: ***“Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*** And until that day, Jesus has given us a mission and equipped us for the task. And he has promised us that he will be with us until that day that he returns. Amen.