

May 17, 2026
Paul Purdue preaching

The disciples asked, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Lord, are you going to send the Roman colonizers back to Italy? Jesus, are you going to permanently kick the money changers out of the Temple? God, when will we find the high priest through prayerful discernment instead of as a political appointment made by King Herod? Jesus, when will you lead a pay-back tour for the injustices of Holy Week?

Did the disciples imagine everything would be easier if God miraculously restored the world? Sometimes we passively pray asking God to break into our world and change things, instead of considering how God might be calling us, to be like Moses and go down to Egypt, like Ester and challenge King Xerxes, or like Peter and baptize Cornelius. (Exodus, Esther, Acts 9-15) When we pray "*Lord, your kingdom come-your will be done*", do pray remembering God's kingdom is among us, within us, and working through us. (Luke 17)

I grew up with people who longed for Jesus to come back and "smack the devil", setting the world alright! The theology wallowed in judgement and felt contrary to God's steadfast love and the grace we saw in Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples "*It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.*" Jesus seems to say, only God knows when God's kingdom will arrive as fully on earth as it is in heaven. God only knows when we will live fully into our belovedness, when we will study war no more, when we beat our swords into plowshares, when the lion and the lamb will nap together, when every chain of retribution will be broken, when we will walk the path of peace, when the hungry will be satisfied, the sick healed, the prisoner freed, when no one will build a house but not have a home, jealousy will end, outcasts welcomed home, no one will be a stranger, there will be no weeping, and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. (Isaiah 2,11,& 66 and Matthew 25) Has not God has put that healing work in our hands? Christ tells us, "*you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... 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.*"

In Matthew 28 Jesus shares a similar message before slipping through the clouds: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey everything that I have*

commanded and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” What is the post ascension message we teach? Jesus taught to serve, to love God, love neighbors, be humble, make peace, treat others as they long to be treated, welcome strangers, do right by enemies, forgive, forgive some more, give expecting nothing in return, not live for things, don’t judge, feed hungry people, shelter poor people, offer healthcare and remember Christ is with us to the very end. (Matthew 5-7 & 25) Jesus does not send the church out to conquer the world but to help heal it.

Jesus tells us *“you will receive power, the holy spirit will come upon you and you will be my witness.”* In Strength to Love Dr Martin Luther King Jr describes that power like this *“Admitting the weighty problems and staggering disappointments, Christianity affirms that God is able to give us the power to meet them. God is able to give us the inner equilibrium to stand tall amid the trials and burdens of life. God is able to provide inner peace amid outer storms. This inner stability of the (person) of faith is Christ's chief legacy to his disciples. Jesus offers neither material resources or magical formulas that exempt us from suffering and persecution, but Christ brings an imperishable gift: "Peace I leave with thee." This is that peace which passeth all understanding.”* I have been wondering if our imitation of Jesus, living Christ-like living, is the power, the presence, the witness that upholds, transforms and encourages us amid life’s journey. Perhaps, the Spirit’s presence comes to us through our imitation of Christ? God does not force us to follow, so perhaps the Spirit can only fill us with Christ’s peace and power when we are open to imitating Christ. God’s love is steadfast, but our witness and practice plays a role in our experience of the holy. We see this pattern in the beatitudes... *“Blessed are the merciful, they will know mercy... blessed are the peacemaker, they will be called God’s children”* (Matthew 5)

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Samaria, Capernaum and Jerusalem were not that different. They wore the same tassels on their jackets, carved the same living from the land, kept the same commandments, shared the same stories from Abraham to Elijah, spoke the same language, worshiped the same God, and yet they often hated each other over differences that alluded outsiders and that crafty kings played against them all. Red State or Blue state? *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and from there to the ends of the earth.”* Wouldn’t Christianity be so much easier if Jesus never talked about loving those neighbors who see things differently from us? Do we have a word of hope for the world if we cannot speak with folks just right down the road from us in Samaria? Can we see to help a neighbor, when our own spiritual eyes are clouded with hopes contrary to love? (Matthew 7:1-5)

I sometimes think our governor and state legislators hate Nashville. They have carved us up into 5 congressional districts to dilute our voices, but they have hated the people of Memphis even longer. Do you wish Jesus had told us we could skip over Samaria or other parties who mistreat us? Perhaps, if we long to see the peace of Christ take hold in our world, we must each take seriously Jesus' call to become peace-makers. I wish I knew a few simple sermon pointers to explain how we resist injustice while restoring civility, but maybe you and I do not need a grand plan to fix everyone else, maybe the plan begins within each of us. How did Jesus flip over the money-changers tables and yet love the moneychangers? My only answer is to bear witness with compassion, to see our even enemies with compassion.

Jesus saw the crowds with compassion, even from the cross. Compassion breaks the chains of retribution and revenge, restoring our souls to our manufacturer's settings: "beloved, beautiful, made in the image of God, designed to Love God, neighbor and ourselves". Compassion softens hard hearts and liberates our souls. Compassion allows us to imagine what redemption, restoration and renewal might do in our lives, for our friends and even our enemies. Compassion does not ignore wounds, injustice, and violence. Compassion never silences anyone, instead, compassion transforms how we see the world. Compassion doesn't mean that we agree with an enemy or acquiesce to evil, but compassion cares about our enemies wellbeing, their souls, their children, their health, and their future. Compassion unclouds our eyes and lets us see, compassion awakens our imagination to new possibilities.

We ask "Jesus when will you restore the nation? Instead of a plan Jesus gives us power. "You will receive power and you will be my witnesses". The Book of Acts does not offer us a well organized plan or much guidance on how to be the church, it does something more radical, it tells us that we have power to do unexpected things, power to go to Samaria, to allow pork barbecue, to baptize eunuchs, to welcome Roman colonels, and to ordaining women. Love empowers us to make a new way.

Perfect Love's empowerment begins on Pentecost when the disciples embrace every nation under heaven: Parthians, Medes, Elamintes, residents of Methopotamia. These early Christians called themselves "the Way (of Jesus)" and devoted themselves to the Christian oral tradition, being together, breaking bread and praying. They sold stuff and took care of the poor. They spent time together with glad and generous hearts. People liked what they saw and joined the community. They demanded the Justice for Jesus' crucifixion in front of the court house. When Peter and John got arrested, they prayed for greater boldness instead of safety. The first church committee ran the food pantry. Finally, in Chapter 8, Philip heads to Samaria preaching there before racing off to baptize an Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip, empowered by God's Spirit of Love, set aside old

laws that excluded and did harm. The circle will grow wider, as the church welcomed Saul who once terrorized the church, then Cornelius a Roman Centurion (the very backbone of Roman imperialism), and then Priscilla, Phoebe, Lydia who will all start new churches! Friends, the Spirit is still speaking, guiding, renewing and creating through us today. Compassion always calls us to see the world anew.

I wish there was some simple prayer to heal all our heartaches, restore every broken relationship and reconcile our divisions, but perhaps the plan is Christlike living. Perhaps Christ-likeness is our power and our witness. Perhaps Christlikeness is the presence, the leaven, the light, the salt that restores us. "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes up upon you*". Friends, You and I are filled with the same Holy Spirit that filled Moses, Elijah, Ester, Paul and Mary. Christ is with us, filling us, forgiving us, guiding us and empowering us to live with the deepest compassion God, which is the very image of God within us. (1 John 4) amen.