**The Lord Jesus Christ Says Farewell**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A local priest was being honored with a farewell dinner after 30 years in the priesthood. The town mayor was scheduled to speak, but when he was delayed, the priest himself got up to say a few words.

He said, “You know, when I first came here, I thought I had been assigned to a *very* sinful parish. The first man who came to me for confession confessed that he had stolen a TV set from his office, and was having an affair with his secretary. He also admitted he was embezzling money from his place of business. But that was the last confession like that I ever heard, so I eventually realized I was in a *good* parish, filled with decent and honest people.”

Just then the mayor arrived, so the priest sat down. The mayor then began his speech by saying, “I’ll never forget the day our parish priest arrived. In fact, I was the first one to go to him for confession!”

Well, I’m thinking that the mayor probably wished he hadn’t confessed that to the people whose tax dollars he’d been embezzling! But speaking of farewell speeches, the Lord Jesus Christ gave one in our text in Acts 1, after which He made quite an exit!

**“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).**

Now the “things” that the Lord had spoken that day have often been called The Great Commission, for the Lord *commissioned* the 12 apostles to be His “witnesses” to the world (Acts 1:8). And those were the last words He spoke before ascending into heaven.

But that doesn’t mean He didn’t have anything more to say. As we saw in our comments on Acts 1:2, the four gospels present “all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach” while He was here on earth, and that suggests that He *continued* to speak *through the Holy Ghost* that He gave the 12 at Pentecost.

And that’s important to remember—especially if you have what’s called a red-letter Bible. If you’re not familiar with red-letter Bibles, I should explain that they feature all the words that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke while here on earth *in red ink*, as if they were more important than all the *other* words found in the Word of God.

Now that’s a problem for a couple of reasons. First, if the Lord *continued* to speak through the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4), then the words they spoke at Pentecost should *also* be in red ink, right? And so should the words the Lord *later* spoke through the Apostle Paul. Shucks, we believe *the whole Bible* was written by the Lord Jesus—including the Old Testament portion of our Bibles that He penned before His incarnation. So if you want to print the words of the Lord in red ink, you’d have to print *the entire Book* in red.

You see, the question we should be asking isn’t: which words did the Lord speak? The question we should always ask when reading the Scriptures is: who was He speaking *to*. And the words He spoke here in the early portion of the Book of Acts were written *to the Jews,* as you can see from Peter’s words in the address that he gave when the day of Pentecost was fully come (Acts 2:1):

**“…Peter…lifting up his voice…said…*Ye men of Judaea,* and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known *unto you…”* (Acts 2:14).**

**“*Ye men of Israel*, hear these words…*let all the house of Israel* know assuredly…” (Acts 2:22,36).**

But compare Peter’s words to what Paul later wrote in Romans 11:13:

**“…*I speak to you Gentiles,* inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles…” (Romans 11:13).**

You know what that means, don’t you? It means that Paul’s words are the Bible’s red-letter words to us Gentiles in the Body of Christ! The words the Lord spoke through him are the words that ought to be in red during the dispensation of grace in which we live.

Now when it says the Lord was taken up in “a cloud,” that’s not talking about a rain cloud. The word “cloud” in the Bible sometimes refers to a cloud of *men,* and sometimes to a cloud of *angels.* We see it refer to men in Hebrews 11:4—12:1, where we read about

**“Abel…Enoch…Noah…Abraham…Sarah…Isaac…Jacob…Joseph...Moses...Rahab…Gedeon…Barak…Samson…Jephthae…David...Samuel…Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about *with so great a cloud of witnesses…”***

What that’s saying is that when we read the Old Testament, we’re compassed about, or *surrounded,* by a great cloud of men and women who did things “by faith” (Heb. 11:4,5,7,8,9,11,17,20,21,22,23,24,27,29,30,31), believers who *witness* their faith to us as we read the pages of Scripture. But a Bible cloud can *also* refer to *angels,* as it does in our next reference, where Daniel was given a vision of heaven:

**“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came *with the clouds of heaven*, and came to the Ancient of days, and *they* brought Him near before Him” (Daniel 7:13).**

Who are the “they” here? It has to be the clouds! And when it says that “they” brought the Lord Jesus to God the Father, well, that’s not something that rain clouds can do. First of all, there are no rain clouds in the 3rd heaven where God dwells. And even if there were, they couldn’t serve as escorts. But clouds of angels can! And there’s plenty of them in the 3rd heaven.

I’m sure it will come as no surprise to you that the Lord Jesus Christ has always been surrounded by an *entourage* of angels. When He was born, Luke tells us that

**“…*there was…a multitude of the heavenly host praising God,* and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13,14).**

And we know that the Lord’s angelic entourage didn’t leave Him during His sojourn here among us, for in speaking of Him we read:

**“*He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways.* They shall bear Thee up in their hands, lest Thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11,12).**

We know that the psalmist was talking about the Lord here, for the devil *quoted* this passage and ascribed it to the Lord (Mt. 4:6), and He didn’t say, “That’s not talking about Me.”

We also know that the Lord’s entourage *stuck with Him* when the going got tough. When the soldiers came to arrest Him, and Peter tried to relieve one of them of his head, we read,

**“Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place…Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, *and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”* (Mt. 26:52,53).**

As you can imagine, those angels were standing by, just *waiting* for the order to defend Him.

So it is no surprise that the Lord would ascend into heaven with a cloud of angels to protect Him. Don’t forget, Satan is “the prince of the power *of the air”* (Eph. 2:2), and the Lord had to pass *through* the air to get to heaven. Sounds to me like a cloud of angels would serve as a good escort through enemy lines.

Later we’ll see more proof that the Lord was received up by a cloud of angels. For now, notice that it says that the 12 apostles “beheld” Him as He ascended. We see a picture of this in something that happened in time past, when a prophet named Elisha was about to take over for a prophet named Elijah. Right before he did so, we read:

**“Elisha said…*let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, *if thou see me when I am taken from thee,* it shall be so unto thee…and it came to pass…that…Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. *And Elisha saw it…”* (II Kings 2:9-12).**

After that happened, Elisha went on to work twice as many miracles as Elijah. Obviously, he had received a double portion of Elijah’s spirit. And that’s a picture of something the Lord said to His disciples in John 14:12:

**“He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; *and greater works than these shall he do;* because I go unto my Father”**

After the 12 saw the Lord ascend to His Father in heaven, He sent the Holy Ghost to them. And once they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4), they were able to work *greater* miracles than the Lord Himself, like when Peter healed a man with just his shadow (Acts 5:15,16).

What does that tell you about the “miracles” done by modern day healers? Are they greater than the works the Lord did? If you believe this to be so, you must be watching different television ministries than I’ve seen. Some of those men may be sincere, but their inability to do greater works than the Lord shows that they are not filled with the Holy Ghost as the 12 apostles were.

Now next, I have a feeling that the 12 weren’t *expecting* the Lord to ascend into heaven. It’s a feeling I get when I read the version of this account that Luke provides us in the gospel that bears his name:

**“…He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, *while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.*  And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:50-52).**

I don’t know about you, but I get the idea from these words that the Lord was talking to them, and suddenly He started to rise up above them!

Now think about what that might have been like. If you are speaking with a group of fellow believers one Sunday after church, and one of them suddenly begins to rise into heaven, don’t you think you might stare up after him for awhile? And you’d think that God would understand why you were staring, knowing you’d miss him, and wonder if he’d be coming back.

Well, the same was true for the 12 that day! But God didn’t seem to understand why the 12 kept staring after the Lord. He sent them two angels to tell them to knock it off!

**“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;**

**“Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10,11).**

Now these two “men” were obviously *angels.* They are described as wearing “white apparel,” and “white” refers to *righteousness* in Scripture (Rev. 19:8). But these angels, who were delivering a message from God the Father, didn’t seem to be very understanding when the 12 kept looking into heaven after the Lord.

So we have to ask: what’s up with that? I mean, didn’t they know the 12 would miss the Lord, and want Him to return? Well, yes, but that word *steadfast* means they *kept* staring up into heaven. If you’re thinking, “What’s wrong with that?” it helps to remember that the Lord had told them,

**“…when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies…signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars…*when these things* begin to come to pass, *then look up,* and lift up your heads; *for your redemption draweth nigh”* (Luke 21:20-28).**

The Lord had given them very specific instructions about when they should be looking up, and none of the things He described had happened yet at that time. They say timing is everything, and it wasn’t *time* to be looking up! That means the 12 were making *a dispensational error* in looking for something to happen before it was dispensationally *supposed* to happen. So the angels were *right* to tell the 12 to quit staring into heaven that day.

But here we have a dispensational *difference.* No angel is ever going to tell *you* to stop looking up, for no signs like that have to occur before the Lord can come *for us,* to rapture us home to heaven. That’s why our apostle Paul tells us to be

**“*Looking for that blessed hope,* and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).**

Don’t ever let anyone tell you that this, that or the other thing has to happen before the rapture can come, or that the rapture must be “very near” based on what’s happening in the Mideast, as prophecy preachers like to say. The Lord will come for us when He’s good and ready!

In the meantime, are you looking for that blessed hope? Sometimes when I’m reading my Bible in my yard, or riding my bike, I’ll look up and think that someday I’ll see the Lord come—and I don’t have to wait for a cloudy day to look for Him!

But looking for the Lord to come for us means *more* than just looking up with our eyes. It means *living your life* as if you are looking for Him to come. That’s actually more important than looking up in the sky with your physical eyes. If you’re not doing *that,* you might want to consider making some changes in your life.

Now when the angels said that “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven,” that tells us a lot about the Lord’s 2nd coming for Israel. First, it tells us that He will come *suddenly,* for as I mentioned, the Lord *left them* suddenly. That matches a lot of what we read about His 2nd coming, such as when He said,

**“…be ye also ready: *for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”* (Matthew 24:44).**

The Lord *left* suddenly, and He is going to return just as suddenly.

But here we have *more* proof that the “cloud” that received the Lord out of their sight wasn’t a rain cloud, for the cloud He’ll return in is a cloud of *angels,* and He’s going to return just as He left. How do I *know* the Lord will return with a cloud of angels? Well, first of all, we read in Revelation 1:7,

**“Behold, *He cometh with clouds;* and every eye shall see Him…”**

But if every eye on earth will see the Lord come, and He’s going to come with *rain* clouds, then it would have to be cloudy everywhere on earth where people have eyes, right? And that’s everywhere on earth, isn’t it? And is there ever a time when the entire planet is *covered* by clouds? That alone should make you suspicious that Revelation 1:7 isn’t saying that the Lord will return with rain clouds.

Then look at what it says in Psalm 104:1-3:

**“O Lord my God…*who maketh the clouds His chariot:* who walketh upon the wings of the wind.”**

Now when it says that God makes the clouds His *chariot,* doesn’t that suggest something to you? I mean, when you get into your Dodge Chariot, do you climb in just to sit there, or do you hop in intending to go someplace? So when the psalm says that God uses clouds as His chariot, we have to conclude that He uses them when He intends to go somewhere.

Now notice that the psalmist *also* said that God walked on the wings of the wind. Compare that to what we read about the 2nd coming of Christ in Psalm 18:10:

**“…*He rode upon a cherub,* and did fly: yea, *He did fly upon the wings of the wind”* (Psalm 18:10).**

Did you catch that? Both psalms talk about walking on the wings of the wind, but one says He’ll ride in a chariot of clouds, while the other says He’ll ride on a cherub, an *angel.* Do you see how that equates clouds with angels?

If that’s too much of a stretch for you, look how Matthew describes the 2nd coming:

**“…they shall see the Son of man coming *in the clouds of heaven* with power and great glory. *And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet,* and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds…” (Matthew 24:30,31).**

Well, where’s the Lord going to *get* those angels to send to gather His elect into the kingdom of heaven on earth? Well, if He comes with the clouds of heaven, and those clouds are made up of angels, He’ll have plenty of angels on hand! Later, Matthew records the Lord as saying,

**“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, *and all the holy angels with Him…”* (Matthew 25:31).**

When the Lord returns for the people of Israel, He is going to return with an angelic entourage that will reflect His “power and great glory.” Now I know that rain clouds can do that when they appear with thunder and lightning. But clouds of angels can do it much better!

Now there’s one more way in which the Lord will return as they saw Him go, and it’s found in the next verse of our text:

**“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey” (Acts 1:12).**

As you can see, when the Lord ascended into heaven, the 12 were on the Mount of Olives. That’s how they saw Him go into heaven, and we know that that’s how men will see Him return, for the prophet predicted,

**“…*His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives,* which is before Jerusalem on the east, *and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west*, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:4).**

Clearly, the Lord knows how to make an entrance, just as He showed He knows how to make an exit when He ascended into heaven! And when He *does* make an entrance, it will be just as they saw Him go, from the Mount of Olives.

That means that His feet won’t stand in that day anywhere in America, as Herbert W. Armstrong used to teach. The founder of the Worldwide Church of God believed and taught that “the lost 10 tribes” of Israel all relocated in Europe, and from there immigrated to the United States. That’s probably why he taught that the Lord will return here to America. Of course, he didn’t know that the 10 tribes were never lost,\* and he probably didn’t recognize the difference between the Lord’s coming for us in the rapture and His 2nd coming for Israel either.

\*After Jeroboam split the kingdom and the northern 10 tribes went into apostasy, faithful Jews in the northern tribes who refused to worship the idol he set up in Dan migrated south to Judah (II Chron. 11:16,17) . The northern 10 tribes were later conquered by the Assyrians, and never returned to the land. That’s why they are considered “lost.” However, all that were *really* lost were a bunch of unbelievers that just had a physical attachment to Abraham, with no spiritual attachment to God. That’s why God never bothered bringing them back out of captivity from Assyria.

Meanwhile, down south, representatives from all the lost ten tribes found new homes in Judah. When Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and spent 70 years in Babylonian captivity, God was careful to bring these believers back to the land in Daniel’s day. Thus the lost ten tribes were really never lost.

But now, it’s significant that they returned to Jerusalem. If you’re wondering, “What’s so significant about that? Isn’t that where the Lord *told them* to begin their ministry?” You’re right! He had just commissioned them saying,

**“…ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).**

So if the Lord told them to start their testimony to the world in Jerusalem, why *wouldn’t* they go back to Jerusalem?

Well, they wouldn’t have returned to Jerusalem if they had interpreted the Lord’s words in the way most preachers interpret them. Most preachers and teachers think the Lord was talking *to us* when He told the 12 to be His witnesses to the world. Then they start thinking, “Wait a minute. If the Lord was talking to us there, that means all missionaries must be sent to Jerusalem, so the gospel can radiate out from there, as the Lord instructed.” They then conclude that He must have been speaking metaphorically, and that what He *really* meant was that you should begin your testimony in your home town, and from there let the gospel radiate out to your county, then your state, then the other states, and then from the United States out to the rest of the world.

But we know that *wasn’t* what the Lord meant, for the 12 went back to Jerusalem to start witnessing, *and none of them were from Jerusalem.* They were “men of Galilee” (Acts 1:11), so Jerusalem wasn’t the home town of *any* of them. So if the Lord meant for us to begin our ministry in our home towns, the 12 all started off on the wrong foot!

Of course, they knew better than those who suppose that the Lord meant something other than what He said. They knew that *Jerusalem meant Jerusalem.* And that’s *more* proof that the Lord wasn’t talking to us. God never planned for Jerusalem to be God’s base of operations for “the church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22,23), as it was for His kingdom church in Israel (Isa. 2:3).

If you’re wondering what “a sabbath’s day journey” might be (Acts 1:12), I’m sure you know that the 10 commandments specified that the people of Israel shouldn’t work on the sabbath, right? Well, a sabbath day’s journey was the distance that the Jews believed they could walk before it would be considered *working.* Now, the law of Moses didn’t *specify* how far you could walk under the law, but somehow the Jews decided this, and as you can see, Luke recognized it by way of accommodation.

How far was a sabbath day’s journey? Well, remember, Luke 24:50 said that the Lord was near Bethany when He ascended (v. 51), and “Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, *about fifteen furlongs off”* (John 11:18). A furlong was 1/8th of a mile, so 15 furlongs would be 1.875 furlongs, or just under two miles. Now I bet you thought I had a point to make in doing all that math for you, but no, I just figured you’d want to know how far a sabbath day’s journey was! But all of this does serve to show that the Bible is pretty good at interpreting itself, in even the smallest of details.

Once the 12 arrived in Jerusalem, they seemed to know just where to go:

**“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James” (Acts 1:13).**

Now this “upper room” just might be the same one in which the Lord ate the passover with His disciples (Luke 22:7-12). That room was likely found in John Mark’s house, for in describing the events that transpired that night, Mark said, “in the evening He *cometh* with the twelve” (Mark 14:17). For the Lord to “come” with His disciples, Mark would have had to live in the home where they shared that final passover meal.

Many Bible teachers believe that Mark came from money. That would explain why he’d have a house with a “large” upper room. It would also explain why he left Paul and Barnabas in the lurch when the going got tough during their first apostolic journey. A young man brought up with wealth and privilege would surely blanche in the face of hardship. And so, as I say, it is possible that the 12 assembled in the same upper room where they last supped with their master before He ascended into heaven.

But whoever’s house it was, isn’t it wonderful that he was willing to use it for the Lord? How about you, are you using *your* possessions for the Lord? Just last week a visitor to my church got an Uber ride to our midweek Bible study, so one of our men used his car to give him a ride home after the service. I bet if you think about it, there’s probably someone you could pick up with your car for church. Or perhaps there’s some other way you could use your possessions for the Lord. Why not give it some thought, and get back to the Lord about it before the day is through.

Now we’re not going to study these *eleven* names here in Acts 1:13, but suffice it to say that they were the names of the 12 apostles, minus Judas, who took his life after betraying the Lord Jesus. But the apostles weren’t the *only* disciples who gathered in that large upper room that day, for we read,

**“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).**

Now the “women” here are most likely the women who remained with the Lord after they arrested and crucified Him. You know. The ones who stuck by Him when all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Mark 14:50)! In describing the Lord’s death, Mark wrote,

**“…*There were also women looking on afar off:* among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him;) *and many other women* which came up with Him unto Jerusalem” (Mark 15:40,41).**

As you can see, there were women who stood by the Lord when the men in His life feared to do so. People say that the Bible doesn’t honor women, but the people who say that are people who haven’t *read* the Bible. This verse presents one of many testimonies to the faithfulness of the weaker vessels in the Lord’s work.

Now as a former Roman Catholic, I have to point out that Mary was praying *with* the disciples in the upper room, they were not praying *to* her, as Catholics are taught to do. Mary wasn’t anyone who should be prayed to, for she was just a sinner like ourselves. We know this to be so, for we read in Luke 1:46,47,

**“Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced *in* *God my Saviour.”***

Think this through carefully. Mary called God her savior, *and only a sinner needs a savior.* Rome may insist that she was a sinless co-mediator with the Lord, but the Apostle Paul is just as insistent that “there is *one* mediator between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus”* (I Tim. 2:5).

You’ll notice that Acts 1:14 *also* tells us that Lord’s “brethren” were present in the upper room. This is something *else* that doesn’t agree with Roman Catholic doctrine. Catholics are taught that Mary remained a virgin even after the Lord was born, that her womb was somehow too holy for the likes of Joseph’s seed. But the Bible mentions the Lord’s brethren on more than one occasion.

I don’t mean to offend anyone reading these words. I hasten to add that my only problem with the Catholic church is that Catholic leadership does not teach what it says in the Catholic Bible. Catholic Bibles faithfully record Mary’s words about her savior, and just as faithfully describe how the apostles were praying *with* her and not *to* her. So even Catholic Biblse can be relied upon to disprove the doctrines taught by the leadership of the Catholic church.

By the way, this indicates a dramatic change in the spiritual status of the Lord’s brethren, for before His crucifixion we read that “neither did His brethren believe in Him” (John 7:5). Their appearance here in the upper room after His resurrection indicates that they had had a change of heart. This was certainly one of the many infallible proofs of the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 1:3). If anyone would know if an imposter was claiming to be our risen Lord and Savior, it would have been the members of His family. But they were obviously *convinced* that He had risen, and were now unafraid to endanger their lives by associating with the Lord’s followers.

Now since we’re not told what these upper room disciples were praying *for,* our Pentecostal friends hold that they were praying for the coming of the Spirit. That’s why they have prayer meetings to do the same, tarrying for Him to come and fill them as He filled the disciples at Pentecost. However, the Lord didn’t tell them to prayfor the Holy Ghost, He told them to *wait* for Him:

**“…He…commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but *wait* for the promise of the Father*…the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 1:3-5).**

But you can wait and pray for the Spirit to come all you want today, in the dispensation of grace. He will not come and give you the power to speak in tongues or heal the sick as He did for the disciples at Pentecost, for the Father didn’t promise to give *you* the Spirit in that fashion.

In closing, look again at how Luke described the Lord’s ascension:

**“…He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem *with great joy”* (Luke 24:51,52).**

Wouldn’t you think it would say that they returned to Jerusalem with great *sadness?* I mean, the Lord was gone, and they missed Him already. They knew He would return, but they also knew it wasn’t for them to know *when* He would return and restore Israel’s kingdom (Acts 1:6,7). So how come they were so joyful?

The answer to this question is, the Lord had given them *a job to do,* and as the hymn says, there is joy in serving Jesus. So don’t be sitting around moping because you weren’t here when the Lord was here, and so you missed out on the blessing of enjoying His fellowship in the flesh. He’s given *you* a job to do as well! That same Jesus who made you an ambassador for Christ (IICor.5:17) is coming again to see how well you represented Him in that capacity. What do you say we do our best not to disappoint Him?