

HE WILL COME AGAIN

Acts 1:1-8

Television shows live and breathe by the ratings. One of the keys to getting the rating is to have people involved in the characters. When TV first came out people were not so picky about it. They were just glad to have it and were satisfied by whatever the one broadcast station showed. But now with streaming and all that is on the internet something has to attract the audience. One way is to create tension between male and female leads. Often they are opposites, argue over things, and think they can't stand each other. But down deep we root that they will get together. We saw that in comedies like "Cheers" with Sam and Diane, and in dramas like "X-files" with Mulder and Scully. But the one thing you don't want to do—even if fans clamor for it—is have them get married and settle down. They call that the "Moonlighting" effect from the series that introduced us to Bruce Willis and had him in such a relationship with Cybil Shepherd. Once they actually got together, the tension that interested so many people was lost. The show lost popularity and was cancelled.

In a sense Jesus' ascension produced a "tension" for us. Yes, we are saved through Jesus' death and resurrection, but things are not fully consummated. Jesus ascended so that He can come again to consummate His relationship with us. Then all suffering and pain and worry will end. Then we will be complete as God intends.

But wouldn't it have been easier if He just stayed here? Why did Jesus ascend into heaven? People flocked to see Him preach. He amazed them with His teaching and His miracles. Why not just stay here on earth so that more and more people are attracted and we have convincing proof that Jesus did rise from the dead? The critics would be silenced and who would not believe, especially with our information so much of the world through the internet.

Look what happened before Jesus left. It may have been only 40 days that He appeared after Easter and before His ascension. But who believed in Him? The ones who had followed Him before. What about the rest? His enemies bribed the guards at the tomb and threatened them if they did not lie and say Jesus' body was stolen. If they didn't think He had risen, why do that? Why not just have them tell the truth and say Jesus was not alive? If Jesus had stayed, then people would still turn away from Him. Or they would look upon Him as someone to heal them from

diseases as he had done or feed them like He did the 5,000. Look what happened after He fed the 5,000:

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them.” From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.

People would lose interest in Jesus if He had stayed. They would focus so much on what He could give us in this life that we would fail to look forward to the eternal life He wants to give us. After a while they would still see that people die, that wars go on, that people are enslaved, abused, and humiliated. Jesus would be like a drug that could satisfy for a time. Then they would move on.

Instead Jesus ascended into heaven, as the angel told the disciples, to come back in the same way. There is more to the story. It is not all over with. It is not something for us to get excited about for a while, and then move on to something else. We live in the anticipation that Jesus will come again to complete the story, to give us something to anticipate, to give us a goal and direction to our lives.

Many have accused Christianity and the teaching of Jesus coming again to take us to heaven as an excuse to ignore problems in the world today. Karl Marx called it the “opiate of the masses,” a way the ruling class kept the masses of poor people content as they looked forward to life after death. But Jesus did not ascend into heaven to give us an easy cop out to ignore life now. Instead He did it to give us the desire to hold on to Him until He comes again. The Christian hope of eternal life does not lead to indifference, but to do something about what is wrong in our world today. It keeps us “interested.”

Look what happened to Jesus’ followers. Did they hide in caves until the day Jesus came? Did they just let themselves die so they could leave this world and rest in Jesus until He comes again? No, they fed the hungry, cared for the sick, took care of widows ignored by society and raised children who were left to die.

Knowing that Jesus will come again also helps us to anticipate Him coming. Many in this life try to be “satisfied,” to get the maximum comfort and enjoyment out of life before it ends. Why not if there is nothing after this life? But knowing Jesus will come again puts us in tension, not being satisfied with this life. It gives us the “itch” to do something about the pain and suffering in this world, to not just simply “accept” death, but to fight it. But neither do we get overwhelmed by all the suffering in this world because we know this life is not the end. Jesus is coming again to put an end to sin, suffering, and death and make a new world for creation and humanity to live with Him forever.

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.

The angel said that to the disciples as they watched Jesus ascend. Because of that message the disciples did not stay there staring into space. Instead Luke Gospel tells us:

While Jesus was blessing the disciples, He left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

They could rejoice knowing that Jesus would come again. They stayed in Jerusalem because Jesus told them to, but only for ten days until the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. Then, like a tightened spring let go, they went out in the world sharing their faith in Jesus.

Jesus is coming again. He makes us live in that tension so that we live, not just for this world and life, but in anticipation of what comes when He comes again.