

“Hold Your Head Up”
Acts 1:6-11; Luke 24:48-53

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In the roughly six weeks since Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the disciples of Jesus experienced quite a roller-coaster ride of emotions. They went from the the anguish and loss of Jesus’ crucifixion... to the bewilderment and confusion of the resurrection... to the hope and promise of the ascension. Their journey with Jesus lead from the **pain** of the cross... to the **puzzle** of the empty tomb... to the **power** of Jesus being raised to heaven. Or, to put another way, the disciples went from **looking down** in fear... **looking around** to figure it out... to **looking up** as Jesus ‘flew away.’ His physical Ascension into the heavens was The punctuation mark to his final appearance on earth, during which heavenly messengers appeared to the disciples, asking them... why do you **‘Hold your head up?’**

As this phrase bounced around in this ‘musical’ head of mine... you know, like music that plays on a ‘merry-go-round?’... once again a song from my sometimes misspent youth came to mind: **“Hold your head up.”** By a British hard-rock group in the 70’s named “Argent.” Now, I’ll bet your wondering , ‘Ok, pastor, just HOW could THIS ‘rock-and-roll’ band’s work have ANYTHING to do with a message about the risen Savior Jesus Christ?!

Well, I’m glad you asked 😊 ... As I dug a little deeper into this group, I started with the name: “Argent.” A word that means ‘silver.’ You know... like the **valuable, precious metal**. The term ‘Argent’ goes back to the 15th C., relative to the silver used for heraldic coats-of-arms, which would be carried into **battle** by medieval knights, **warriors** who proudly displayed those symbols while in defense of their family name. This song was on a ‘45’ (how many of your remember those?) whose “B” side’ (and this?) was entitled “Closer to Heaven.” The album was called **“All Together Now.”** Another hit single from that same album was entitled **“God Gave You Rock and Roll,”** which would also be covered by KISS (no shock there), as well as a contemporary **Christian** band named **“Petra.”** (‘Petra’ also being a famous city in Jordan carved out of ‘rock’...where that travel group I mentioned last week also went to). Petra is near where Moses’ brother Aaron is said to have been buried).

Soooo, this group relates to something as **precious** as **silver**... involving **warriors** who go into **battle** in **defense** of their **family name**... on an album proclaiming **“All Together Now”**...

with another song sung by a Christian group named for a noteworthy place in Biblical history. If all this doesn't point to its Christian value, I would lift up some of lyrics of the song itself: *'Don't let it get you down, you can take it... you can make it... if they shout, don't let it change a thing that you're doing. Hold your head up!'* Could not words such as these been spoken by Jesus to His disciples? 'You can take it. Through me, you can make it. If people shout at you, don't let it change what you're doing in my name. Hold your head up!'

Am I saying that these guys had 'Jesus on their mind' when they were coming up with band names and song? Hardly. But what I AM saying is that you can find a lot of spiritual messages relative to Christian values in the most unlikely places. Even a 70's rock group song. GOD'S TRUTH TRANSCENDS ANY GENRE OR STYLE OF MUSIC. From Reba and Kelly Clarkson to Bob Dylan and Bono to Prince and the Beatles, you can find God's wisdom in many unusual places if you'll look thru the 'lens' of the eyes of Christ.

Just as there are individual appeal to different types of music, as we seek to reach others with the Good News of the Gospel, we can best connect with those who might speak another 'language' by speaking in their terms. For instance, last week when Paul was addressing the Greek council of learned leaders, speaking to them 'apologetically' of how close their 'unknown god' was to everyone, you may recall that he said that ***"In him we live and move and have our being"...*** that we ***"we too are our offspring."*** (Acts 17:28) Wise words authored by the Christian apostle Paul? NOPE. Actually quotes from two Greek poets, written hundreds of years earlier. But they would have been very familiar and treasured writings of their culture. Paul knew that use of such quotes would 'connect' with these learned Greeks. Things haven't changed. It is still very important to 'connect' with our 'audience'... speak to where THEY are in their current context. And one of the most memorable 'languages' with which God speaks to his human creation is through MUSIC...

So, how do these two passages concerning something as 'distant' as a bodily ascension into heaven relate to US in our 'current context?' How do these ancient experiences 'sing' to us in our modern-day lives? Here's a few ways: That first line in our reading from Acts says that ***"So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when YOU will restore the kingdom to Israel?"*** (Acts 1:6) These not-always-faithful followers of Christ had just

gathered together in the presence of their miracle-working Teacher, who had proven Himself to not only be fully human, but fully GOD, and what is the first question out of their mouths? 'So, Jesus... NOW are YOU going to take on that 'kingly' role of squashing all of our enemies, and YOU will restore us Israelites to our glorious past in the Kingdom of God? We've been in decline for so long, we're ready for you to bail us out...'

Might this sound familiar? Might we know some churches that are now just 'coming together' again, certainly glad to be in the presence of God and one another, but could readily find themselves saying, 'so is NOW the time you God, will restore your church again to its 'past glory?' And 'corporate expressions' of our life of faith aside, cannot we all be guilty of our expectations of God to 'fix' our personal dilemmas? OK God, I've punched in my personal 'PIN' number of prayer in... time to 'dispense' my 'withdrawal' of answered prayer.

And how does Jesus respond? ***"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."*** (Acts 1:7) 'God operates on His own timetable, not yours.' This does NOT mean we are to be fatalistic about it, and stop praying for specific requests! It merely means that must learn patience and acceptance when the answer to our prayer is 'wait.' We must remember the words of Isaiah, ***"They who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will rise up... run and not grow weary... walk and not faint..."***(Isaiah 40:31)

Mindful of how we are to 'wait' on the Lord... while not expecting Jesus to do all the heavy lifting... we hear the words of Jesus BOTH in Luke and Acts: ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."*** That his followers are to ***"stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*** That they are to WAIT until they have been prepared, and empowered, by the Holy Spirit. To what end? Because, Jesus says, ***"You ARE ... (and) you WILL BE... my witnesses..."*** (Luke 24:48-49, Acts 1:8)

Jesus is getting ready to leave the earth. Not for good. He IS coming back. When? The same response that Jesus gave his earlier disciples: ***"It is not for you (and me) to know the times that the Father has set..."*** But no matter if its one day or one millennium... no matter if it be 1st C. followers or TWENTY-first C. ones, the job description is the same: 'You ARE, and WILL BE, my witnesses.' We are the ones called to 'testify' on the behalf of our Master, our

Lord. We are God's 'character witnesses.' Whether in a grocery store in Welsh or Jennings or a pavilion out in MorganField, we must ask ourselves just what kind of **witness** we are. Credible? Or inconsequential? Do we hold our heads down, filled with doubt and fear... do we look around, confused and looking for answers... or do we 'hold our heads up,' filled with great joy, continually blessing God, confident that one day... maybe even today... ***"This Jesus will come (back) in the same way as (we) saw him come into heaven."*** (Acts 1:11) When that 'master of the house' returns, how will he find that 'house?' Will he be pleased with the manner in which we have cared for his prized possessions... not the 'property' with some physical structure, but that human creation who reside on its lands?

As you and I gratefully and gradually move back toward that practice of the first disciples upon Jesus' departure... to be ***"...continually in the temple (church) blessing God"***... Let us remember 'JOB #1': NOT simply 'to be with my friends'... NOT just 'to feel good about worship'... but Jesus' command: ***"You WILL Be my witnesses."*** Which will require you sometimes to 'step out of your comfort zone,' and speak in languages you're not used to. You may be classical talking to rock-and-roll. You may be country talking to rap. But God's truth transcends any particular background or personal preference. In the words of a popular song by former American Idol contestant Mandisa, *'We all bleed the same. We're more beautiful when we come together.'* And we have SO much more in common than we do that divides us. We may all have our own music preferences, but it is all part of the one beautiful gift of music on which we can all agree to its value. In the same way that while we all may come from different backgrounds, we yet share in common those human struggles which can be healed through the one beautiful gift of God's love.

I would leave you with lyrics of a song I mentioned earlier: *"God Gave You Rock and Roll."* From that album "Come TOGETHER":

"Love your friend. Love your neighbor. Love your life. Love your labor.

If you're young, you'll never grow old. Music can make your dreams unfold.

How good it feels to be alive."

As those who build our lives on the 'ROCK'... whose names are on the 'ROLL'... I think that these are words that are pretty compatible with our lives in Christ. The Jesus whose life

was all about love of friend and neighbor. The One who loved our lives enough to lay down His own. That we who are made new in Christ will never die. As we lift up our praises to Him, in word and song, He will unfold his glorious plan for us. May Our lives be a living WITNESS to the truth of that final statement. “How good it feels to be alive... in CHRIST! The One who speaks to us through that ‘present tense’ of God, the Holy Spirit: **‘Do not be afraid. Hold your head up!’**”

BENEDICTION: “No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary.

No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the Resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good.”

(Josh McDowell)

Hold your head up high and know that God is in control of your life!