

January 4, 2004
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“This Team Is Going To The Playoffs!”
Acts 1:1-11 NLT

Dear Theophilus:

In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. ³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ In one of these meetings as he was eating a meal with them, he told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ When the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?"

⁷ "The Father sets those dates," he replied, "and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ It was not long after he said this that he was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. ¹⁰ As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"

Jim Fassel recently decided to fire himself as the coach of the N.Y. Giants (before the N.Y. Giants could fire him). The Giants had a terrible year, not even coming close to making it to the playoffs. In 2000, when the team's appearance in the playoffs was also questionable, all though still possible, Coach Fassel made a great speech at a news conference. He said, "This is a poker game, and I'm shoving my chips to the middle of the table. I'm raising the ante, and anyone who wants in, get in. Anyone wants out, can get out. This team is going to the playoffs, ok? This team is going to the playoffs!" And you know what? They did! The Giants won seven games in a row to advance to Super Bowl XXXV. Now I'm not a betting man. I don't even play the lotto (it is a waste of my time and the Lord's money). But if I were a betting man I would shove all my chips to the center of the table and you can get in on it if you want and if you want to get

out you can too, but I'm telling you Jesus is returning to this earth and "This team – this church and all people - are going to be in the 'playoffs'!"

For 40 days after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Jesus appeared to many people. During this time He gave instructions to His apostles. He instructed them to wait for the promised baptism with the Holy Spirit. They kept asking Him, "Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom?" But He replied, (v7&8) "The Father sets those dates and they are not for you to know. But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

(v9-11) It was not long after He said this that He was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and He disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see him, two Angels suddenly stood there among them. They said, "Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"

That is the promise and our hope. Jesus will come again. Not as a baby (as we just celebrated at Christmas) but as the conquering King to re-establish the Kingdom of God. To me it's a sure bet. Just as the prophecies were fulfilled when Jesus came the first time I'm betting on the prophecies being fulfilled that says that Jesus will come a second time.

I want you to be ready for:

1. The Lord's Promise

The angels said in v11 "Someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!" (v. 11) Jesus is returning.

The "play-offs" are coming. And I don't mean for the NFL, I mean for the whole world. Jesus is returning. It could be soon. How do I know? Just look at the signs. Jesus told us when we see certain things we will know that the time is near.

Matt 24:3-14 NLT

3 Later, Jesus sat on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and asked, "When will all this take place? And will there be any sign ahead of time to signal your return and the end of the world?"

4 Jesus told them, "Don't let anyone mislead you. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah.' They will lead many astray. (*Jim Jones, David Karish*) 6 And wars will break out near and far, but don't panic. Yes, these things must come, but the end won't follow immediately. 7 The nations and kingdoms will proclaim war against each other, (*Iraq, Africa, Israel*) and there will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world. (*Today we have famines in many parts of the world and recently had earthquakes in California and Iran*) 8 But all this will be only the beginning of the horrors to come.

9 "Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because of your allegiance to me. (*Christians are being persecuted in China, North Korea, several places in Africa, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Viet Nam, just to name a few. Christians are hated even in our own country as well as all over the world because of our allegiance to Jesus and His Word.*) 10 And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. 11 And many false prophets will appear and will lead many people astray. 12 Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. (*How much colder could one's love be than to leave their new born child to die in a garbage dumpster and we hear of this often.*) 13 But those who endure to the end will be saved. 14 And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come. (*We have the capability like never before for all nations to hear the Gospel preached*).

2 Tim 3:1-5 NLT

You should also know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. 2 For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. 3 They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control; they will be cruel and have no interest in what is good. 4 They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. 5 They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. You must stay away from people like that.

Jesus is going to return. You can bet on it! It's a sure bet. It could happen at any time and we are going to be in the playoffs. I want you to be ready. Now here is ...

2. The Lord's Plan

"Tell people about me everywhere." (v. 8) We are to be His witnesses. What are we to tell people? What we know and here is what we know – It is recorded in our text: "...after his crucifixion (for sins of world), he appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. On these occasions he talked to them about the Kingdom of God." Jesus was the sacrifice for the punishment our sins deserved and He rose from the dead to prove that He is indeed God in human flesh who alone can atone for and forgive sin. No one will see the Kingdom of God unless they repent of sin, believe in Jesus, and receive the Holy Spirit. This is how to be prepared for His second coming and this is what we are to tell people everywhere so they can be prepared too. You have a place on the "team". You are in the "playoffs". Everyone has a place/job in the Body of Christ (and in the World). God has a specific plan/place for you that only can fulfill. No one else can do what God created you to do. But wait...First you must be ...

3. The Lord's People

"You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" and "When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and (then and only then) will tell people about me everywhere." (vs. 5 & 8)

Notice the order:
Receive the Holy Spirit
The Holy Spirit gives power
Then you can witness with extraordinary results.

Conclusion:

“This team is going to the playoffs!” (We may be the generation that’s alive when Jesus returns – of course no one knows for sure, as Jesus said, "The Father sets those dates and they are not for you to know." But it is possible for it to be in our lifetime.) How do we prepare? Be people of God. Here’s the test: Do you have the Holy Spirit?

2 Cor 13:5 (TLB) Check up on yourselves. Are you really Christians? Do you pass the test? Do you feel Christ's presence and power more and more within you? Or are you just pretending to be Christians when actually you aren't at all?

How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Peter tells us in Acts 2:38

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How can we be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit?

We initially receive the Holy Spirit when we receive Jesus. But many Christians are not allowing the Holy Spirit to direct and empower their lives. They have dethroned Jesus and are trying to live on their own strength. You need the Holy Spirit’s power. You must first sincerely desire to be directed, empowered and under His influence at all times, confess any known sin, present every area of our life to God and by faith claim the (baptism or the) fullness of the Holy Spirit.

How do we know we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit?

You will be doing what Jesus said in our text: “...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere.” With our lives and with our lips we will tell people about Jesus.

Get your head in the game. Be part of the team. We are going to the playoffs! ... No, we are, right now, already in the playoffs!