

The Church that Grace Builds

In Acts 1:1-11, the risen Christ commissions His Church.

In the first book, O Theophilus,
I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,
2 until the day when he was taken up,
after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit
to the apostles whom he had chosen.

3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs,
appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem,
but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me;
5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit
not many days from now.”

6 So when they had come together, they asked him,
“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons
that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the end of the earth.”

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on,
he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went,
behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?
This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,
will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Sermon Outline:

Scripture Intro (vv.1-3): Luke’s gospel and his Acts of the Apostles may be thought of as one book with two parts. Together they cover 66 years of history: Luke’s gospel records the 33 years of Jesus’ life, and Acts relates the 33 years following Jesus’ ascension. By means of this symmetry Luke communicates that Acts is just as much about Christ as his Gospel is. The only difference is that Jesus’ work after His ascension was accomplished through the Holy Spirit. That has moved one to rename Acts “The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus by His Spirit through His Apostles.” Thus, our focus in this study will be on Christ’s work of building His Church through the Spirit.

In these early verses, Jesus tells His Church corporately and individually to do three things in order to make manifest the power of the Spirit they possess: wait, go, and hope.

I. Wait (1:1-5). To realize Christ’s power, we must learn to wait on the Spirit of Jesus.

- A. **Commissioning.** Before that gift would be imparted to the Church, an important commission would precede it.
- B. **Empowerment.** That Spirit's empowerment would be so great as to transform weak-kneed disciples into powerfully brave apostles who would begin preaching the good news in Jerusalem itself.
 - 1. **Evangelism.** It is specifically the power to share the Gospel. It is absolutely impossible under your own power to evangelize anyone.
 - 2. **Christian Living.** More broadly it is the promise of power for the whole of the Christian life. There is nothing that a Christian can do without the empowering of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, with the Spirit there is nothing you cannot do.

II. Go (1:6-8). What must happen after you have waited? You must go forward. Wait on the Spirit to enable you to go to people for the sake of the Kingdom.

- A. **Politics.** Even the apostles were prone to put their hope in politics instead of Christ! We all do. Luke informs us that the apostles kept asking Jesus if He was going to restore the kingdom at the present time. No matter how many times Jesus had emphasized the spiritual nature of His Kingdom, they were still focused on a political one liberated from Roman oppression.
- B. **People.** The focus of our lives must be to live as witnesses. That is the great commission. It is to be that to which we give the best of our energies and focus. That calling is both responsive and proactive. You are constantly to ready yourself through study and training to give an answer for the hope that is in you. Proactively you are to make the most of every opportunity and create more opportunities to testify to Christ.

III. Hope (1:9-11)

- A. **Renew Your Call.** Galilee is where Jesus began His ministry. It symbolizes inauguration. He is calling us to get back to Galilee where we were first commissioned and now live nobly under those orders until the King releases you.
- B. **Focus Your Hope.** The original disciples returned to the heat of the battle with joy because they were confident that Christ would win the battle.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Acts 1:1-2 set Christianity apart from all the other world religions? What do these two verses reveal about Jesus Christ? Here is one observation: Jesus is both the historical Jesus who lived in the first century, but He is also the contemporary Jesus who lives and works through His people now. *(Adapted from John Stott)*
2. What do you make of the implication from Acts 1:1-2 that Jesus desires to continue His earthly ministry through your life?

3. In what ways does Jesus prepare and equip His followers to continue His ministry on earth?
4. What was hindering the original followers of Jesus from embracing their commission to live as witnesses for Christ (see 1:6-7)? What hinders you from embracing your Lord's commission? What does this reveal about our hearts?

Richard Lovelace, in his book Dynamics of Spiritual Life, declares: "The apostles were revealing the natural gravitation of their hearts away from outward mission and toward self-centered enjoyment of kingdom blessings. We have the same tendency that the apostles had. We want to settle down and enjoy the kingdom now instead of expanding it throughout the world. The American dream of dynasty building and material prosperity is operating where the vision of the Messianic kingdom ought to be (p. 166)!"

5. What was going to happen according to Acts 1:8 as a result of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples?
6. What difference should the ascension of Jesus and the blessed hope of Jesus' second coming make in our lives?

Going Deeper

1. The book of Acts is a book still being written as the Holy Spirit continues energizing and equipping God's people. What one way will you serve more intentionally as Christ's witness, beginning with your own Jerusalem?
2. Are you struggling to believe that God can work through you to advance His Kingdom? Ask the Lord in prayer what is the one great thing that you should expect of Him and what is the one great thing that you should attempt for Him.
3. How is the Lord calling you to witness to your family members, your friends, and your work associates who do not know Christ? Are you conducting all of these relationships with Christian love, respect, forbearance, and forgiveness? Wherever you find hostility, resentment or any other kind of static disturbing your communication and relationships with others, are you working to resolve it so that you can witness to the power of the Gospel? Are you being drawn into any pattern of living that does not have God's Kingdom at its center?