

'You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth'

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Preacher: Charlie Masters

[0 : 00] So Acts chapter 1, starting at verse 1. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered round him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[1 : 13] After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Men of Galilee, they said, 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.

This is the word of the Lord. From here, is that what? Yes, that's great. Yes. Can we pray again? Let's do that. We wait on the Lord. We want to sit at Jesus' feet and his word. May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight.

O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Dear friends, it is a great joy and an honor to be at St. Silas.

[2 : 25] I thank you for this meeting that I've been able to be part of already. I can assure you that I will be praying for you as a congregation, for gospel unity as you rightly spoke, Martin.

And I realize the perplexity and the many things that must be going on in your hearts. It's interesting that I've been here in Scotland for a week and I have now, this is the third great church that I have been in and each at a different place in terms of that.

So that last week, I was at, last Sunday, I was at West Hill Community Church in Aberdeen where they have had a vote and they voted to secede and now they're dealing with the realities of what that means for them.

Then this Sunday morning here at St. Thomas' in Edinburgh, they are now, this was their first Sunday and their relaunch of their new reality.

And so it was a joy for me to be there and to preach and to preside at Holy Communion. And they, in the service, actually made a recommitment to the Great Commission.

[3 : 39] And so, and now here you are at St. Silas on the edge of a very important decision which I can tell you're taking very seriously before God.

I'm thrilled to have, I hope this will be a little bit of an oasis for a few minutes to reflect on what I think is a great passage of Scripture, Acts 1, 1 to 11.

The more I think and pray about it and meditate on it, the more I like it. Now I have to confess, I'm a big fan of Luke. I think Luke is a pretty good guy. I'm sure he's grateful for my endorsement.

But anyway, I love the Gospel of Luke. I love the way he starts, you know, verses 1 to 4 about this orderly account to this guy Theophilus and then he engages in it, ending by the end with the ascension.

And then there being a sequel which is what we are looking at this evening. It's an extraordinary passage and I hope that you'll capture some of that.

[4 : 39] I'm hoping and praying that I'll be able to give something of that and it'll lead you to further study on it. The summary or the text which I want us to think about is Acts 1, 8, which I would suggest to you, and this is not just me, you know, every commentary you're going to read is going to say Acts 1, 8, is the thesis verse for the rest of Acts.

And what is exciting about this is that it's not only Jesus as the fifth expression of the Great Commission, and we'll speak for a minute about what the other four were, but as the fifth expression, but it actually charts a plan and a course for the history of the church that continues today.

One of the things which is so, you know, unsatisfactory, if I was to give one blot on Luke's very good record, would be that Acts 28 is sort of a disappointing ending to a very exciting story. It sort of just trails off. There's Paul in house arrest. What happened to him? Did he get out? You know, and so on. And none of that is there. There he is just opening the word day after day as people came in to him.

And that's the end. Well, what is that about? Well, when you read Acts 1, 1 to 11, and you read that, for instance, it says in the first verse 1, in the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

[6 : 14] We realize that he's suggesting that, in fact, Jesus is not done. That from a salvation viewpoint, the John 19, 30, where Jesus said, it is finished, all that was required for our salvation has been completed.

It's done. There's nothing to be added to it. But in terms of the gathering of people for his own namesake, that continues today. And so that the Acts 1, 8, summary, Great Commission verse, actually charts a course that you and I, and you here at St. Silas, find yourself squarely right there in line with it.

Now, let me just say a word about the other four before we look at Acts 1, 8. The other four, Matthew 28, 19 and 20, go and make disciples of all nations.

Mark 16, 15, go and preach the gospel to all creation. Luke 24, 45 to about 48, says that we, that Jesus is saying that we are to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name to the nations.

John 20, 21, it's Jesus on that resurrection evening. And in fact, what we find is that all five come in this 40-day period that Luke talks about.

[7 : 37] This 40-day period from the resurrection till he is taken up, which is his ascension. And so, John 20, on that first Easter evening, he's there, and Jesus says, as the Father sent me, you remember in John 3, he said, for even the Son of Man came not, came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

So, the sending, for the Father sent the Son not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. And so, now he's saying, as the Father sent me, this is Jesus, the Son of the Father, he's saying, so send I you.

And now we come to Acts 1.8. And that comes on the heel of, Luke is saying that Jesus was asked the question whether or not he would, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel.

And verse 7, he says, it's not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. Incidentally, this passage which we're looking at, Acts 1.1-11, is a great passage for understanding the triune God.

The Father by his authority sends the Son. The Father by his authority is going to send the Son back. The Son declares that and he speaks of the giving of the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 08] In 11 verses we have this, very much like the baptism of Jesus where up he comes through the waters, the Son. He sees on visual form the Holy Spirit descending on, remaining on him and the Father speaking, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Well, Acts 1.1-11 is like that. And so he's saying that it's not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. And then, here it is, the key verse, 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.

As you think about the future of St. Silas, as you ponder, and I loved it that Martin gave a sense of who you are and summed up who St. Silas is, I think you have a very good idea and I loved hearing that.

But from Acts 1.1-11 and specifically Acts 1.8, what kind of church is Jesus when he lays the groundwork and is launching a church which is going to be set in motion by the giving of the Holy Spirit in the following week?

What's this to be like? Well, I have four points to make and I'm going to tell them to you right now in case I blow it and you can't tell what I actually tried to say. Okay? Number one, a church that witnesses to Jesus, point number one, you will be my witnesses, Jesus said in Acts 1.8.

[10:56] A church, secondly, empowered by the Holy Spirit, but you will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you. thirdly, a church which starts where you are and seeks to proclaim the gospel faithfully to all nations, the whole world, everyone, in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And fourthly, a church that recognizes there is urgency and limited time because Jesus is coming back soon. I'm suggesting to you that to the end of the earth is not only a geographical inclusivity, all people everywhere statement, but it actually speaks of a conclusion of something which later and of course by Acts 1.11 where it says this, the angels say, this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in some way, same way as you saw him go into heaven.

So first, a church that witnesses to Jesus. It's very refreshing to know what you're supposed to be doing, what you're about, why you're left here on the scene in this planet earth.

What in the world are we to do in the midst of that? Well, I love it that this passage, and of course, get the scene, it's Jesus in this 40 day period coaching, commanding, and see, there's nothing of gentle suggestions, it's he ordered them, it speaks about with regards to staying in Jerusalem.

And so, he who said all authority is given to me in Matthew 28, this is the Jesus, the resurrected one, who's assuming authority and is charting a course which those who are to follow him are to follow.

[12:49] What are they to do? He says, you will be my witnesses. Jesus. Now, incredibly, Luke, in these few 11 verses, makes it clear that we are to be witnesses to Jesus and in fact, finds a way to cram all the saving actions of Jesus in these few words.

I think it's incredible. As you already probably can tell, it takes me a long time to say anything. I'm a verbal kind of guy which, it's a slow breaking kind of thing.

But I'm impressed with a Luke who finds a way to cram into 11 verses all the saving actions of Jesus. His life.

I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach. That's his description of his life in his earthly pilgrimage. His death after his sufferings. Verse 3.

His resurrection. Verse 3. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. His ascension until the day he was taken up.

[13:57] Verse 2. And verse 10. 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. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes.

The giving of the Holy Spirit. 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 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Verses 4 and 5. And then verse 8. But you will receive power. After that, the Holy Spirit. And finally, the return of Christ. The culmination of all things.

So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel? Verse 7. He said to them, it's not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority and said, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking?

This is verse 11. This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. His life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, the giving of the Holy Spirit and his return.

[15:09] All there in this verse. In these few verses. Why? Because it's to flesh out the reality that in fact we are to be witnesses to Jesus.

It is this Jesus who lived, died, not for his own sin. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God.

He died in our place. That's what we call the atonement. And so he died. He rose again. He was vindicated. Vindicated. The Father declared him not guilty and he was seen to be the Son of God

that he is.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And then his ascension. He was lifted to be sit down at the right hand of the Father. From there he reigns and rules with all authority.

And he is always interceding as again Martin said of his ascension. the promise of the Holy Spirit happened as we know and we'll be celebrating that next Sunday.

[16:19] As part of that great day in which you vote Christians around the world will also be thinking about the giving of the Holy Spirit as the beginning. Now the gospel is the good news of Jesus.

What he has done what he's doing and what he will most certainly do nothing more and nothing less. Repentance and faith in this one is the thing that brings salvation.

What we need to understand is to be a witness to Jesus necessarily involves the Bible. The Bible has to be part.

It's interesting that Jesus said it's the Spirit who gives life the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.

It's also interesting that in fact at the resurrection on that great and glorious day it says then he verse 45 of Luke 24 then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem you are witnesses of these things.

[17:44] The assumption is and the practicalities are even the Son of God used the scriptures as the means of persuading that he had risen from the dead and to make clarity their understanding.

So it is that for instance in that walk with those two men on the way to Emmaus earlier in the day it says in beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained the things concerning himself in all the scriptures.

It is the Bible which is the means. It is the Bible that Paul said in 2 Timothy 3 that makes us wise to salvation. And so when Jesus says you will be my witnesses the assumption is that the scriptures will be the means through which that happens.

And so it is no surprise for instance that in Acts 8 when Philip is engaged in a conversation with this Ethiopian eunuch this court official it says beginning with the scriptures he opened his mouth and explained to him the things he opened his mouth and spoke to him of Jesus.

This is the way the witness happens. The word of God must happen. So first of all we are called to be a church which is a witness to Jesus. Secondly for that to happen we must be a church empowered by the Holy Spirit.

[19:07] Did you notice in verse 4 and 5 that Jesus meant no words he ordered them to stay in Jerusalem. Why? Because if they charged off they would be leaving on their own steam.

And we had already seen how they did on their own steam. And so it was that in fact he instructed them they were to stay and this time they obeyed. And so for the rest of Acts 1 it's the waiting phase as they're engaged in prayer in the upper room waiting and trying to amend and adjust their lives to be in line so that God could do what he did in terms of giving the promise of the Father had given to them.

Friends it's very clear according to Jesus and according to Acts 1.8 that we desperately need the Holy Spirit.

That we cannot do the Christian life and we cannot be witnesses in any way without the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Paul said you however are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him but if Christ is in you although the body is dead because of sin the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

[20:32] If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

This is amazing stuff. This is saying that in fact the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is at work in the life heart and life of our mortal bodies in the life of those who are believers.

And so that's a wonderful promise and in fact without the Holy Spirit we're just bones dry bones but with the Holy Spirit there's the river of life where there's life springing up in every way thinking of relevance surely that's the picture of life springing up.

No Holy Spirit no life. No Holy Spirit no sprinkling clean as it speaks about in Ezekiel no receiving forgiveness.

No Holy Spirit no transformation. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty but we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord this is 2 Corinthians 3 are being transformed from one degree of glory to another just as from the Lord the Spirit.

[21 : 51] No Holy Spirit there's no transformation of life. No Holy Spirit there's no guarantee of eternal life from Ephesians 1 13 and 14. No Holy Spirit no ministry no Holy Spirit no Jesus ministry no Holy Spirit no witness.

This is why Jesus said you got awake in Jerusalem. John baptized you with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

We friends desperately need the Holy Spirit. Without Him we are dead and useless and dead and useless to a broken world.

Thirdly Jesus says Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth Acts 1.8 He's calling for a church which starts where they are and seeks to proclaim the gospel faithfully to all the nations the whole world everyone.

Surely that's the import of what Acts 1.8 is talking about. interesting that we had some verses from Romans 10 read earlier this evening.

[23 : 16] How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching?

The Jerusalem Judea all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth is speaking about a call of God on the life of every believer to open their life and speak about Jesus so that by an ever increasing circle a ripple like a pebble dropped in a lake or a sea the ripple effect goes there be this impact that ultimately reaches all people everywhere.

I mean the exciting thing about the gospel is that it works in every case Romans 1 16 says for I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek and so there is this incredible aspect of it which gives us this knowledge of the fact that in fact God's heart is for the whole world for everybody everywhere and there is no one outside the circle of his love or his concern for God so loved the world John 3 says and so there is this aspect and what is really exciting is that in fact you don't have to preach to everybody yourself or even a whole ton of people that in fact the gospel sees the power of the individual that in fact by one person being reached and made a disciple the possibility of reaching the world for Christ is there and so it is that Paul in a dank prison in Rome for sure about to be martyred in 2

Timothy 2 to his protege in a situation where the Ephesian church is definitely dysfunctional there is everything to be discouraged about but he speaks about the power of the individual the things which you have seen and heard from me in the presence of many witnesses these entrust a faithful man who will be able to teach others also what kind of a church are you to be would I suggest based on Acts 1 1 to 11 based on Acts 1 8 it is one which sees the impact of discipling one as a means of reaching the many so Paul talked about himself Timothy faithful men who will teach others also that's the picture four generations recently I received well that's about a year ago now but about a year ago I received an email from a man who when I was a young man and he was a young man

I in Vancouver met him and tried to share the gospel with him and he was a very unhelpful customer he had little interest and his life spoke of complete apathy he was frankly and he would say a slob and had little interest in anything other than this next drinking binge skipped classes at university etc and yet in the mercies of God when he heard the gospel over time he eventually committed his life to Christ now this guy who was such an unhelpful character overnight started witnessing the gospel to everybody and anybody I remember one guy saying to me you've created a monster and that was not a compliment but in fact you know tried to help and disciple this guy over the next three years well now the clock ticks and many years and we have not actually had a lot of contact for the last many many years and he writes to me in an email and says that his wife is gravely ill that in fact and since then she died but he spoke about during these years of her illness and deteriorating illness that he found himself involved in healthcare situations and before he knew it he was speaking about the

[27 : 43] Lord Jesus and this is a quote from him he said Charlie I don't even have to drop the net the fish are jumping into the boat this was his experience that people were literally coming to Christ in droves and I know his whole clan his whole family out of one of his members of his family a very well-known pastor in the Vancouver area and all of that through the one this is exciting all of us can pray for the one and see ourselves as in line to fulfill and be part of the Acts 1 8 reality but thirdly fourthly I mean a church that recognizes there is urgency and limited time because Jesus is coming back this same Jesus who you've seen go is coming in like manner the gospel orientation of Acts 1 1 to 11 and in fact of the whole of Acts in fact of the New Testament is unto a preparation for the return of

Christ and yet sadly so often as a doctrine it's squeezed out as sort of for those who are into that kind of stuff because we're not going to waste our time trying to figure out when he's coming which of course is right but in fact the reality of the imminent return of Christ it was not that Paul got it wrong I believe it was in fact he was living out the reality that Jesus was coming soon and he was bidding us do the same the whole direction of the writing of Luke is towards the return of Christ and isn't it interesting that in a communion service it says for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes and isn't it great that at the Mars Hill Paul with that intelligentsia of his time said the times of ignorance got overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he's fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead

I love that I love it the fact that in fact the Jesus who is the judge was raised from the dead to give assurance that in fact there is salvation to any and all who run to him by faith dear friends I know I have said nothing but the obvious which is what I always do I've said nothing that you haven't heard regularly from this pulpit which I'm proud and glad to be able to do but if I can pray for you for encouragement as you reflect on the ascension of Jesus and on this 40 day period before the ascension in which Jesus prepared a church which includes Saint Silas that it is to be witnesses to Jesus that it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit that it is to be for all people everywhere and that it is to be informed and driven by the return of Christ can we stand to pray would you stand with me Lord Jesus Christ

I thank you for this great church and for these dear people that you know and love I thank you for this amazing portion of scripture and pray that you bring encouragement and strengthen our weary arms and give us hope for the days ahead and I pray that these marks of life would be real and manifest here at Saint Silas more and more I pray in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you