

PM Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-11

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Date: 11 August 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Together from the Holy Bible, we've got two readings. First of all, from Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4. And we're going to look a bit later at the beginning of the book of Acts, chapter 1 of Acts.

But Acts is really the second volume of a two-volume series written by Luke, and the Gospel of Luke is the first volume.

And the introduction, I think, of Luke's Gospel really serves for the whole two-volume set. So we'll read from Luke chapter 1, verse 1 to 4.

And I think if you've got the same Bible as me, it's on page 1030. So Luke writes, And then we turn to the beginning of the book of Acts.

So Acts chapter 1, and if you have the same Bible as me, it's page 1095. So Acts chapter 1, and we'll read verses 1 to 11.

[1 : 5 9] And you'll notice that it's addressed to the same person, this person called Theophilus. So Acts 1, verse 1, Luke writes, In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

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 have heard from me.

For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

[3 : 2 4] And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. 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 and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

Then this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. May God bless to us those readings from his word.

Let's join together again to turn back to the second passage that we read. That's to Acts chapter 1, verses 1 to 11. The book of Acts in the Bible is a very exciting book.

It traces the spread of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, from Jerusalem just after Jesus rose from the dead, before he ascended into heaven, from Jerusalem all around the Mediterranean until the capital of the empire in Rome.

[4 : 47] And there are many exciting events. There are prison escapes, riots, a shipwreck, an earthquake, miracles, martyrdoms, and many other adventures as people, both individuals and groups, come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and come to experience forgiveness and salvation and new life in him.

And as those people are gathered into communities of God's people. Well, as we mentioned earlier, Luke is the author of the book of Acts and it's the second part of these two volumes written by Luke.

In Acts, in verse 1 of Acts chapter 1, he talks about the first book, in the first book of Theophilus. And as we saw, both Luke and Acts are addressed to this man, Theophilus, who we don't really know anything about.

He may have been the sponsor, the person who sort of funded Luke to write this, but we don't really know anything about him at all. Although we do know that from Luke 1 verse 4 that he has received some instruction in the Christian faith because Luke writes that he may have certainty about the things that he has been taught.

So this opening section of Acts, verses 1 to 11, is really a resume of Luke's gospel and especially the last chapter of Luke.

[6 : 27] It kind of reiterates what is said there and it also serves as this sort of introduction to this new book, what we know as Acts of the Apostles.

And in verses 1 and 2, Luke really describes what this book is about. He says, In the first book, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit.

So the first book is what Jesus began to do and to teach. And that word began is significant because the implication is that the subject of this second book is what Jesus continued to do and to teach after he had been taken up into heaven.

So strictly speaking, the title of the book should not be Acts of the Apostles, but the Acts of Jesus. Or as John Stott says in his commentary on the book, he suggests the title, the continuing words and deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through his apostles.

That's what this book is about. So verses 1 to 11 repeat much of what's in the closing section of Luke's Gospel, focusing on the period between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension into heaven.

[8 : 00] And we're told in verse 3 that that was a period of 40 days. A 40 day period over which Jesus appeared to his disciples on a number of occasions.

And just from different books in the New Testament, we can piece together quite a number of occasions when Jesus did appear to his disciples. And here it says that in verse 3, he presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs.

So his appearances are really to prove to them that he is really alive. That is what they saw, what they witnessed.

And that is really key to the whole of Luke's work, back to the whole of the New Testament. That Jesus rose from the dead, but that's not all. That he appeared and proved himself to be alive to his disciples.

Our focus here is on two occasions when Jesus appeared to his disciples and taught them. We're told that he taught them about the kingdom of God in verse 3.

[9 : 15] So two occasions are mentioned here in verses 4 and 5, and then again in verses 6 to 8. And I want us to look at these together and consider the two main subjects that Jesus speaks about here, which also form two of the main themes of the whole book of Acts.

So the first is the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the second is witnessing about Jesus. So the first of all, the first of those is the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So we've just mentioned that the book maybe should be called The Acts of Jesus, because Luke was about what Jesus began to do and to teach until he was taken up to heaven.

Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and to teach after he was taken up into heaven. But of course, Jesus' action and Jesus' teaching in Acts, after that event, after he's gone up to heaven, is not in exactly the same way as it is in the Gospel.

When Jesus was physically here on earth, the way of Jesus' teaching and the way of Jesus' acting, his actions and teaching, is in some way different from when he was here on earth.

[10 : 44] Verses 9 to 11 record Jesus' ascension into heaven. And the rest of the book from that point onwards is after that event. The risen Lord Jesus is still in heaven.

And he was in heaven for almost the whole book of Acts. But that doesn't mean that Jesus is absent, that he's sort of gone away and has forgotten about them.

It is still Jesus working. And Jesus' deeds and teaching continue on through the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, later on in the book, in chapter 16, the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of Jesus.

So the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Of course, we know from the rest of the Bible that the Spirit and Jesus and the Father are one.

They are one God. What we often term as three persons in one God. So this is the Spirit of Jesus. And Jesus continues to teach, continues to act through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

[11 : 53] And the Spirit is at work in and through the apostles and indeed through all of the believers, God's people, the church. So the ascension of Jesus is closely bound together with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

That's brought out, if we can jump just to John's Gospel, John chapter 16, verses 5 to 7. Jesus there says, Now I am going to him who sent me.

Yet none of you asks me, where are you going? Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor, that's the Holy Spirit, will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. So, in other words, Jesus must go up for the Holy Spirit to come down. I think that's probably why Luke has two accounts of the ascension.

There's one at the end of Luke's Gospel. But there's also this account in verses, chapter 1, verses 9 to 11, of the ascension in Acts. Because I think he wants to place it side by side with the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is in chapter 2 of the book of Acts that happened on the day of Pentecost.

[13 : 12] So he wants them to be together in the same volume to show this connection. Jesus goes up, the Spirit comes down. So who is the Holy Spirit?

Well, in verse 4, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father. And those who know the Old Testament, and of course Jesus' disciples were people who did know the Old Testament, they would know of many times where the Old Testament speaks about the Spirit of God.

even right at the very beginning, we read it this morning, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters.

So the Spirit of God was there involved, there in creation at the beginning. And very often in the Old Testament you have words such as the Spirit of the Lord came upon a particular prophet and gave them words to speak.

So the Spirit of God is active and involved throughout the Old Testament. Quite who or what the Spirit is is not maybe very clear, but certainly mentioned many times.

[14 : 34] And one of the things that is mentioned in the Old Testament, again on a number of occasions, is the Spirit being poured out on God's people. So just one example, and Peter quotes it in the next chapter from Joel chapter 2 verse 28, where God says, and afterwards I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

And this Holy Spirit is also, Jesus says here, the Spirit that you have heard me, or the promise of the Father, which you have heard from me. Jesus has spoken about this promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

particularly in John's Gospel, again in chapters 14, 15, 16, Jesus there speaks about another comforter or helper or counselor.

There's different ways it's translated. And Jesus speaks, as we've seen, about himself going away, but he will send another comforter or counselor who is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

in, in, in, in, so, Jesus is the one who, he, he's the one who pours out the Spirit.

[15 : 53] So, he says in verse 4, that, sorry, verse 5, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now.

Now, John the Baptist, when he had come, and it's recorded early on in Luke, when people asked who he was, he said, you know, I'm not the Messiah, but one comes after me whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And that tells us that the one who does the baptizing with the Holy Spirit is Jesus himself.

And it's interesting that we're in Joel, it's God who pours out his Spirit. From John the Baptist's words, it's Jesus who baptizes or pours out the Spirit.

So, the purpose of the Spirit or the function of the Spirit here is power. In verse 8, power for witness. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

[17 : 07] We, all around us, we see windmills which are powered by wind. They generate a lot of the electricity that we use in our houses and it's generated by wind.

Now, in the biblical languages, the word for wind and spirit is the same word and also the word for breath. And so, that gives us some, just an illustration of the power of the wind, the power of the Spirit.

But, here it's the power for witness. You will be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. so you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.

See, Jesus here and elsewhere in the end of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, he gives his people, the church, a task, a mission to perform.

and it's described in different terms. In Matthew, it's making disciples of all nations. In Luke, it's about repentance and forgiveness of sins being preached or proclaimed to all nations.

[18 : 25] Here, it's in terms of witness. You will be my witnesses. witness. But the church has this task of worldwide mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

And that's really an overwhelming task. But the Lord doesn't leave us on our own to fulfil it. He sends the Holy Spirit to give us power for witness.

And this is fulfilled particularly in chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes down upon the church, upon the whole church.

Now that event, Pentecost is a unique event. The whole church for the first time has the Spirit, the Holy Spirit poured out upon it.

Now you might think, what about us today? We weren't there at Pentecost. It was centuries before we were born. How does that relate to us? Well, when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, when we believe in Jesus Christ, then we receive the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 38] We are baptised with the Holy Spirit. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 13, and he's speaking there to the church in Corinth, probably none of or very few of whom would have been there on the day of Pentecost.

But he writes to them, he says, we were all baptised with one spirit into one body. So if you're a believer in Christ, if you're in the body of Christ, then you have been baptised with the Holy Spirit.

So every believer has received the Spirit. Every believer has power to be part of the church's witness to Jesus Christ. witness. And that leads us to the second great theme of what Jesus teaches the disciples about, which is witness.

In verse 8, he says, you will be my witnesses. Now, that's an almost direct quote from words we find in Isaiah chapter 43 and 44.

In fact, three times in those chapters, God says to the Israelites, you are my witnesses. Jesus and almost a verbatim repeating of that, Jesus says to his disciples.

[20 : 54] And I'm sure they would have heard and I'm sure Jesus intended that to be an echo of Isaiah and just one of those many subtle pointers to Jesus' claims to be the Lord, the God of Israel.

So just three things. Witness. First of all, witness what about. Second, witness to whom. And third, witness until when. So first, witness about what?

Well, a witness is someone who speaks about or testifies about something that they have seen and encountered and experienced. We often use the terminology in the context of the law court.

So you've got a case in court and someone who is a witness, who witnessed say a crime that took place, it is absolutely key, absolutely crucial, to the reaching of the right verdict in the law court.

Well, the subject here is Jesus himself. You will be my witnesses or witnesses of me. So it's about Jesus.

[22 : 05] And in particular, it's about the kind of things that Jesus speaks of in verse three, where he presents himself alive after his suffering. So it's about his suffering, his death, his resurrection from the dead.

And I think especially his resurrection from the dead, that's what's emphasized in verse three. It's also emphasized later on in chapter one, when they're choosing a replacement apostle after Judas has left them.

So it's this witness to the fact that Jesus is alive and that we have seen him with our own eyes. If we can compare it with Luke chapter one, where Luke says that he's writing an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us and that have been handed down by eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

So that's really the whole content of Luke's gospel. And the whole content of Luke's gospel was passed to Luke by those who witnessed those events, those who were eyewitnesses who were there.

They saw Jesus do these things, perform these miracles, and they heard Jesus say the things that he said and that Luke records there. So that's what the content of this witness is.

[23 : 28] It's what's recorded there in Luke's gospel and in the other gospels. So we've seen that this word witness has legal connotations.

And that tells us something about the nature of the gospel. The gospel is not based on hearsay. It's not fables or legends.

It's not moral stories just to teach us something. Because moral stories or fables or legends don't need the testimony of eyewitnesses.

But Jesus is very clear. You will be my witnesses. And Luke's very clear that this is the testimony. This has been handed down by people who were eyewitnesses.

So that is crucial to the nature of the gospel. It tells us that the gospel is based on facts, on events, things that have happened in the world.

[24 : 27] Those who had seen the risen Jesus, who had received those proofs that he is really alive, and they're to give witness to that.

Theophilus, as well as readers of Luke's gospel and of Acts, we can read their testimony so that we can be certain of the things that we've been taught about Jesus.

Now, in one sense, only the apostles were witnesses. The apostles and other disciples who were contemporary, those who had actually seen the Lord Jesus and risen from the dead.

Later Christians are not witnesses in the sense that we have not eyewitnessed these events. We have not witnessed the events. We have not seen the risen Jesus before our eyes in the way that they had.

And in the New Testament, the overwhelming use of this term witness is in the context of actually people witnessing with their own eyes Jesus risen from the dead and the other events surrounding that.

[25 : 40] And so, in that sense, we are not witnesses today. But in a secondary sense, we are because all believers, we are part of the same church, the same body of believers, those who are part of the people of God, the people of Christ.

And our task today is to pass on that witness, that witness that has been handed down to us from the apostles in the scriptures in the New Testament, different, to hand that on to others.

That is the church's task in our age and in every age. So, that involves translating and explaining, reading, expounding, teaching, proclaiming these scriptures about Jesus.

witnesses. And we know that it's not just, you know, this is not just speaking to the apostles and doesn't, you know, the idea that this has no relevance to us today is nonsense because Jesus says you've got to be witnesses to the end of the earth.

And that process, the apostles didn't get to the end of the earth, that process indeed still goes on today and will go on until Christ returns. So, secondly, witness to whom?

[26 : 56] In verse 6, the disciples ask, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now, some commentators are quite critical of the disciples for being sort of narrowly nationalistic or, you know, sort of focusing on the wrong thing.

And I think that's a bit harsh because what the disciples were doing, they were thinking in terms of what they read in the scriptures. And, of course, for them, the scriptures were the Old Testament.

And so many of particularly the prophets spoke about the restoration of the Israelites and of that coming through the king, the Messiah, who would come.

Just a couple of examples, well-known examples that we think of often at Christmas time. Think of Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 to 7. Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.

And he will reign on David's throne with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. So there's this prophecy of this king in the line of David who will reign.

[28 : 05] So, you know, that's I think behind their thinking in terms of restoring the kingdom to Israel. On Micah chapter 5, verse 2, again, often read at Christmas time about the ruler who will come from Bethlehem and who will shepherd his people Israel.

And so I think that's what the disciples are thinking of. So they're thinking biblically. But Jesus' response in verses 7 and 8 is that it's not for you to know the times and seasons the Father has set by his own authority.

And I think he's speaking there in terms of what we call the second coming, the return of Jesus Christ when he will return to this earth in the future. But Jesus says, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

So he kind of broadens their horizons. Their focus is on Israel and that's not wrong, but Jesus broadens that to everywhere, to the whole world.

Jesus' words actually are very similar to words we find in Isaiah chapter 49 verses 5 and 6 which says, And now the Lord says, He who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.

[29 : 33] For I am honoured in the eyes of the Lord, and God has been my strength. He says, It is too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light to the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. So, that sort of echoed in Jesus' words here about being witnesses, witnesses about Jesus and the salvation he brings to the ends of the earth.

Now, they were to begin where they were in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, and from there take the message further and further outwards to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In fact, verse 8 is almost like a sort of contents page of the book of Acts. So, chapters 1 to 7, we are in and around Jerusalem. Chapters 8 to the middle of chapter 11 deals with Judea and Samaria, and then the rest of the book is really going to the ends of the earth, to the nations of the world.

And it records the progress of the gospel around the Mediterranean to Rome, as far as Rome. And that process is still going on today. I don't know if you've ever noticed, reading through the book of Acts, that Acts is a book that doesn't really have a conclusion.

[31 : 00] It finishes with Paul in Rome, and he's in prison, or in sort of house arrest, and it just ends with him preaching the good news of the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it just stops. There's no sort of wrapping it all up in a conclusion. And I think that's deliberate, because Luke is saying to us that this story doesn't stop here.

It goes on, and it's still going on today, and will go on until the end of the age. Because the whole world must know this message of Jesus Christ.

Christ. This is good news for everyone. Every man and woman and boy and girl in every tribe and nation, to the ends of the earth, needs to know this.

They must know because Jesus Christ is the Lord of all. His rule extends over the whole universe, and everyone must be called to acknowledge that rule and submit to it.

[32 : 01] And they must know because Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. As Peter says in chapter 4, verse 12, there is no other name under heaven given to human beings by which you must be saved.

He is the only Savior. And so everyone needs to know that. And it's our job as the church, as the community of God's people, to tell them.

Today the apostles are dead, but they have left their testimony in the New Testament.

They have left their message. And we are those with the responsibility to take that message to those who have not heard it, whether that's nomadic tribes in the Sahara, or just to the people in and around Dumfries.

So mission is not peripheral to church life and work. It's absolutely central to the church's being and reason for existence.

Jesus. Finally then, witness until when verses 9 to 11 give an account of the ascension or the taking up of Jesus into heaven.

[33 : 18] And also with that the announcement of the return of Jesus Christ in the same way as he went. And that return of Jesus Christ is still future.

It will take place at the end of this age. When Jesus Christ will return to this world, he will raise the dead and bring the final judgment. And that event sets the time boundary for this task of witness about Jesus Christ.

Just as the ends of the earth sets the spatial boundary, so the return of Jesus Christ sets the temporal boundary of that. and we are living in this period between the ascension of Jesus Christ and his return in glory at the end of the age.

and so today if we are believers, if we belong to the church of Jesus Christ, our task, our privilege is to witness to all nations and peoples to the ends of the earth in the power of God's spirit to witness about Jesus who is Lord of all and Saviour of the world.

Amen. May God bless his word to us.