

Jesus is alive, His Mission Continues

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[0 : 00] Already things have taken a sour turn. So verse 9, After he had said this, Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

This is not going to be much of a sequel if Jesus is not in Jesus 2. In verse 6, it shows what the apostles were expecting for part 2. Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? That's not a bad question, actually, because in verse 3, Jesus has convincingly come back to life. He's spoken about the kingdom of God. In verse 4, he says, Don't leave Jerusalem, but wait for the Holy Spirit.

See, in kingdom terms, Jerusalem is ground zero for God's activity in the world. The Old Testament reading which we were given, that showed that the Holy Spirit would be a sign of the kingdom of God breaking through into the world.

And so they put all those pieces together and say, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Is it time yet, Lord? And the answer is yes and no.

[1 : 08] Verse 7, It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. It's not yet time. But some serious kingdom activity is about to happen.

Look at verse 8, everyone. 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.

See, verse 8 is the plot for Jesus part 2. In fact, Luke uses verse 8 to arrange his whole book around. So, Corrine, can I have this first slide, please? So, you can see chapters 1 to 7, the witness goes all around Jerusalem.

Chapters 8 to 12, they reach Judea and Samaria. And from chapter 13 onwards, the gospel ripples outwards until it reaches Rome, which was the center of the empire.

Thanks, Corrine. You see, the apostles, they thought the Jesus saga was a two-parter. But actually, in movie terms, it's a trilogy. It's a three-parter. And between Jesus' first appearance and his final return is verse 8 and part 2, where you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[2 : 29] Lots of people's jobs are split up into territories. My wife, Rachel, when she used to work for a bank, her territory or responsibility was Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, which is quite big, actually.

Part 2 of the Jesus saga begins with 11 ordinary apostles whose territory is not just Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, but even to the very ends of the earth.

These 11 apostles, they're like a cricket team, a cricket 11, only they're not a good team like Australia or England. But they're a hopeless cricket team, like Surrey Hills Juniors when I used to play for them as a boy.

Hopeless is how you might describe the apostles from part 1, Luke's Gospel. Not to mention, there's no email, there's no post. How are they going to get this message out?

Aeroplanes won't be invented for another couple of thousand years. How are they going to reach the ends of the earth? You see, part 2 is already in trouble. How will they reach the ends of the earth?

[3 : 32] And the answer is, our second point. What I'm going to do is read verse 8 again. And as I read it, I want you to ask yourself, what is Jesus telling them to do?

Okay, I'm going to read it. What is Jesus telling them to do?

The answer is nothing. This is not, please will you go and be my witnesses. It's a promise about what Jesus will do in them. You will receive power via the Holy Spirit.

You will be my witnesses. This is a promise and not a command. We tend to be skeptical when people make promises. We live in a culture where leaders over promise and under deliver.

But when God and Jesus make a promise, you can take it to the bank. Remember the Jacob series we just finished? God promised him, I will bless you.

[4 : 35] I will make your name great. I will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you. And week after week in Genesis, we kept ticking off God's graciousness as he did what he said.

Acts is similar because, again, God is going to do something dramatic in our world. You will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. You will receive power.

Verse 8. You will be my witnesses even to the ends of the earth. When God makes a promise, we can take it to the bank. Actually, you can see all of God working in chapter 1.

Verse 5 and 7. The Father is promising and authorizing. Verse 5 and 8. The Holy Spirit is baptizing and empowering. And in verse 8. It is the Son promising his witness will continue.

In this series, all of God, Father, Son, and Spirit will direct their power wherever these apostles are testifying about Jesus.

[5 : 38] In fact, we can cheat and go to the end of the book. Do you ever do that? Go to the end of the book? I do that. Well, Curian, please, on the next slide. This is the very end of Acts. For two whole years, Paul stayed there.

That's in Rome. And in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance.

You see, we can see that the gospel is established in Rome by the end of this book. Back then, all roads led to Rome. To reach Rome or to reach the center of the empire was to reach the ends of the earth.

You see, just like Melbourne, lots of people back then went to Rome for work and for a better life.

They went for new experiences in the melting pot of cultures. And they went for safety and peace in the capital.

But while they were there, lots of them ended up hearing the apostles' testimony about Jesus.

History shows that they took the gospel with them back where they came from to Asia and Africa, to Mauritania, to Espania, to Britannia.

[6 : 54] Everything has gone according to the plot of verse 8, just as Jesus promised. I wonder if you have heard of Richard Johnson.

He doesn't live around here. He lived 200 years ago. But Richard Johnson was from England and he used to minister to prisoners. And about 200 years ago, the very famous John Newton and William Wilberforce, they realized that England was sending a first fleet to Australia and said that Australia would need someone to share the gospel down under.

And so they encouraged Richard Johnson to set sail with his new wife on a long passage to the ends of the earth. And on the 3rd of February, 1788, Richard Johnson conducted the first church service in Sydney.

From Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to Rome to Britannia to Australia, the very ends of the earth. I want to demonstrate this another way.

And so can you please forget that you are grown-ups for a second? Can you please raise your hand if you first heard about Jesus in Jerusalem? That's good. What about Judea or Samaria?

[8 : 08] Good. That would have really ruined my thing here. All right. That means for the rest of us, we all heard about Jesus for the first time somewhere in the ends of the earth. And so can you please shout out where you first heard about Jesus?

Singapore. Anything more exotic than Singapore? Not that that's bad. That's good. Christmas Island. Christmas Island? Yeah. That's pretty good. South Korea.

South Korea. Excellent. Christmas what? Excellent. Anything else? New Zealand. It's hard to get more exotic than New Zealand, isn't it? I first heard about Jesus in Baldwin in Deep Dean, which is not very exotic, is it?

But anyway. And I wonder who first told you about Jesus. Do you know who they are? Do you know who first told them about Jesus? Can you trace your Christian family tree back?

I was talking to Olive Wilkinson, who's right there. Olive told me this week that she first heard about Jesus, wait for it, from her father in 1927. And Olive said her father heard about it from his father in about 1890.

[9 : 17] That means you only need about 30 chains like that to get from Olive, who's sitting right in front of me, back to verse 8, this actual promise from the mouth of Jesus.

You will be my witnesses, even to the ends of the earth. Down through the centuries, round the world, this Jesus story has survived the most wicked persecutions, natural disasters. It's crossed the most unlikely boundaries. Empires have come and gone, but the witness of these 11 apostles has continued to spread to the ends of the earth.

It's a miracle, we might say. But actually, you might say it's been a dead certainty right from the start. And this is our third point.

In my family, there are a few pregnancies at the moment. So my sister Viv and her husband, they're expecting their first baby in a few weeks. And we went to see them. And even before the baby's here, the house is sort of totally organised.

[10:24] So there's baby proofing all over the cupboards, which means I can't even get a fork anymore. The nursery's all made up and they've got those little gate things over the stairs. And that's the thing with pregnancies, isn't it?

You don't want to start organising the house or choosing the names too early. People usually wait till about week 12 before they make any sort of announcements until they're more sure.

You see, certainty is key. And certainty is key in Acts as well. Just as Luke wanted Theophilus to be certain about what Jesus began to do and teach in part one, he wants his reader to be certain that Jesus' mission will continue.

In fact, we call this series Mission Unstoppable. There is at the top there. Because chapter after chapter in this series, we're going to see that no matter how big the doubt, Jesus' ministry will spread.

Luke's very good at dealing with doubts. Certainty is going to be huge in the book of Acts. In verse 3, have a look down. He includes many convincing proofs that Jesus was alive.

[11:35] In verse 9 and 10, there's a repeated emphasis on what the apostles saw. It says Jesus was taken up before their very eyes. A cloud hid him from their sight.

Verse 10, they were looking intently. He returned just as you have seen him. It is eyewitness testimony which we're going to see each week. The event in our passage is Jesus' ascension into heaven.

That's a really hard thing to prove. But it's something we need to be certain about. Because Jesus' ascension into heaven means he's still alive. It means he's still ruling the universe.

And that's why Luke includes language about clouds and men dressed in white. And about going up into heaven. Because all these things, they tick the Bible's boxes for the person who sits in the oval office of heaven.

The president of the universe, if you like. And verse 8 is Jesus' first executive order. You will be my witnesses even to the ends of the earth.

[12:39] Which, as we've just seen, even in the life of Olive over there, has pretty much just happened. The kingdom may not fully, finally, physically be restored just yet.

But in part two, we're going to see that some serious kingdom activity is underway. We're going to see spirit-empowered apostles. We're going to see whole cities and religions and people's lives turned upside down.

Just with the message of Jesus. We're going to see a new community of love. Where there was no one in need. You see, against all the odds, the Christian church has become the greatest social movement the world has ever seen.

Jesus' mission continues. Point one. God is in control. That means we can be certain it will happen. And so point four. What are you doing here?

What are you doing here? It does seem strange, doesn't it? That none of these big things I've talked about are going to be mentioned in Parliament tomorrow. We're not going to hear about them on the news.

[13:47] The conversation in the workplace tomorrow will be about Father's Day. And not about the big thing God is doing in Melbourne. But please understand that verse 8 is the big thing.

It's the big drama in the world in 2019. Lots of us are worried that the church will be outlawed by the government one day. And maybe it will. But actually Christianity grows where there is opposition.

Sometimes in spite of the opposition. We saw that in the 20th century under communist regimes.

We see that today in China. And we're going to see it every week in the book of Acts.

Because Luke wants to say very clearly that this community who gathered around the apostles' teaching is God's hope for the world. He wants to invite us into the drama as well.

And so let me ask you, what are you doing here? What are you organizing your life around? Did you know that the gospel has gone so far to the ends of the earth that the underdeveloped nations are now sending missionaries back from where they first heard the gospel?

[14:58] Did you know that happens? It's called reverse missionaries. Brazil now sends missionaries to Asia. Africa sends missionaries to the UK. The Chinese church sends missionaries to the Middle East.

What are you doing here? What are you organizing your life around? See, there's so much you can give yourself to in a city like this.

Don't aim too low. Why not be involved with changing the world? Is that a big enough sort of vision for you? Let's not be too narrowed into just looking after our lives.

God invites us to be players in his saga. A great advantage of Melbourne is you don't have to buy a plane ticket to go to the ends of the earth. They're already here.

They're in our churches. They're in our church. They're in our neighborhoods. They're in our workplaces. They're in our universities, as Gillian told us. They're in our grandkids' schools. Imagine if the people you know went back to their families or even their own countries, if they're from overseas.

[16:02] Imagine if they went back with the message of Jesus that you gave to them. Why not build relationships with people now so you can share your faith with them?

Why not invite them to church each week? Why not invite them to Maroondah Singers, that event? What a great beginning. Why not invite them to our Christmas services where we will share the gospel with them?

It's never too early to plan for Christmas. What are you doing here? What are you doing here? Maybe you've tried to share your faith with others without much success.

Maybe you're wondering if all this is worth it. Maybe you're nervous about the state of religious freedom in this city. Well, verse 8 is a steadying verse. Remember, it's a promise from God that when he decides to make himself known, it will certainly happen.

Lots of you might not be able to get out and about to share your faith. Well, Luke gives you another way to take your place in the drama. It's verse 14. It says, Men and women join together constantly in prayer for the sake of Jesus' mission.

[17:24] This Wednesday is Kingdom Growth Night, which is sort of perfectly titled. Men and women are going to meet in this room to constantly pray that Jesus' mission will continue.

We pray for Christian missionaries on university campuses like for Jillian. Wasn't that exciting to hear about what she's doing? We pray for the Reeds in Singapore, the Knights in Port Headlands, the Davies in Sri Lanka.

If you're able, please join together with us here in this room and pray. If not, please pray where you're comfortable that God's kingdom will continue.

If the spread of Jesus' witness is the big thing God is doing, what are you organizing your lives around? Remember Richard Johnson, that missionary I spoke of from the First Fleet?

As he was setting sail, John Newton gave him this poem. He said, Many in quest of gold or empty fame would compass earth or venture near the poles.

[18:26] But how much nobler thy reward and aim to spread his praise and win immortal souls. It's great to be a Christian, isn't it? All the people that we know have their lives organized around that gold or that empty fame or other things.

We can be part of a mission to fully restore them. To bring them into a saving faith with the Lord Jesus. Tomorrow, as you start your day, please pray that you would remember that verse 8 is the big thing God is doing in Melbourne.

And ask yourself, what am I doing here? We're going to pray to do that now. Father, thank you so much that you would involve people like us in your mission.

I thank you that when you make a promise, it is certainly going to happen. Thank you for the fact that you have told us about Jesus. Thank you for the people who told us and the people who told them and the people who told them.

Thank you that your witness has indeed gone to the ends of the earth. Please would we remember tomorrow when we're away from this place that this is the big thing that you are doing.

[19:53] The spread of the gospel. Please would we take our part in this drama. Please would we pray for it. Please would we be prayerful.

Please would we share our faith with others. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.