

Acts 1:1-11 (ES)

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Preacher: Rev. Chris Ley

[0 : 00] Well, tonight we're starting a new sermon series, and we're looking at what happened immediately after Jesus was crucified, died, buried, and then three days later rose again.

Until the summer here, we're going to be looking together at the book of Acts, where we will see God's plan for the rest of history in light of Jesus' resurrection. In Acts, we'll see how all of us are invited to enter into God's story of being at work in the world, sharing his gospel, extending his kingdom, that all may repent and believe and be saved through the work and words of Jesus Christ.

Last Wednesday, we started a new course here at St. John's called Introducing Jesus, and these are evening sessions that are intended for people of all spiritual backgrounds and beliefs to gather together and to look at who Jesus is and why he matters by reading the gospel of Mark.

And as we started our first session on Wednesday, I asked a question for everyone to consider, and the question was, if you could ask God one thing, imagine God came to visit you, you went for coffee, and you could ask him one thing, what would it be?

There were some great suggestions. Someone shared, I would ask about validity. How do we know that the Bible's true?

[1 : 32] How do we know that Jesus actually lived and died and really did rise again? There's a perfect question to start our session, because none of us here were there 2,000 years ago.

None of us saw Jesus risen. So how do any of us know the story's true? It's a question all of us should ask.

And those of us who are Christians should be prepared to answer when someone asks us. In our text, the people who are around Jesus ask him one question.

They actually have a moment to ask God one question. And they don't need to ask him if the resurrection's real, because they've already eyewitnessed it. They're the ones who saw and touched and heard the risen Jesus.

So the question they ask is different. They ask him, what now? Christ is risen indeed. So what's next? What's the plan?

[2 : 39] Those are the two questions that frame our text today. First, how do we know that Jesus is actually risen? And secondly, if Jesus is risen, what are all of us supposed to do?

What's next? How should we live in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Our passage answers that first question by focusing on the risen Jesus and telling us three things about him to prove to all of us that he's risen.

And the focus then shifts from Jesus to his followers, revealing what's next for them. Jesus promises three things that will happen to his followers and then through them.

So by looking first at Jesus and then at those who follow him, we'll see the answers to both how we know he's truly risen and how all of us should live in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So first, let's start by looking at Jesus. This is verse one of chapter one on page 909. How do we know Jesus is actually risen?

[3 : 47] Listen how the book of Acts begins. In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up after he'd given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

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

The first thing to notice about Jesus is that he is alive. Verse three, he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs.

If the story of Jesus was written to be a fairy tale or a legend or a myth, then this sentence would not be included. The only reason the author would describe that Jesus presented himself alive with many proofs is because the author wants us to believe that this actually happened.

There was proof. Jesus presented himself alive by many proofs to many people as the basis of our belief in the resurrection.

[5 : 01] It was proven by Jesus himself and recorded by eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus wrote about it and their testimony forms what we now call the New Testament.

You don't read of Goldilocks returning home and presenting proofs to her family that she really did encounter a domesticated family of bears living in a human home in the woods.

It's a fairy tale. The proof is not necessary. George Lucas gives us no proof that the events described in Star Wars really did occur a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

It's fiction. Proof is not necessary. The author of Acts writes differently. This is not fiction.

He wants us to know that this story is verifiable history. It's based on evidence presented to eyewitnesses to give us the proof of its validity.

[6 : 04] These eyewitnesses moved from unbelief to fear and skepticism to then faith when they encountered the risen Jesus.

They went from hiding for their lives because Jesus was killed to then boldly proclaiming before the world that he is risen. And all of them, without exception, were willing to die to defend their testimony.

They saw him. They touched him. They heard him. People ate meals with him. They went on walks with him. He had Bible studies with them. They broke bread with him.

They were willing to die. They were willing to die. There was a Chicago Tribune reporter who, to his great horror, found that his wife was being wooed to believe in Jesus. This man was horrified.

He did not want to be married to a Christian. So he used his professional investigative reporting skills to attempt to disprove the resurrection once and for all, to bring his wife back to her senses with definitive proof that the resurrection of Jesus is a fable and a hoax.

[7 : 16] But to his shock, the more he studied the Easter events as a secular journalist, the more he realized the proof for the resurrection was overwhelming.

His research led him to the exact opposite conclusion than his initial goal. He ended up disproving his own disbelief, and he became a Christian by trying to debunk Jesus' resurrection.

His name's Lee Strobel, and his book is called The Case for Christ, and has sold over five million copies. It's worth reading. Jesus is alive.

That's the first thing we learn from Acts chapter 1. Secondly, we learn that Jesus is still at work in the world. If you look at verse 1, the author Luke refers back to his first book, a biography of Jesus that's in our Bibles, and we call the Gospel according to Luke.

In Acts chapter 1, Luke summarizes his Gospel this way. He writes, Dear Theophilus, In the first book, I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

[8 : 24] Notice Luke doesn't say, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught. Past tense. The book of Acts is a record of the ongoing, outworking, unstoppable word and works of the risen Jesus.

The successful spread of the word is further proof that Jesus is alive and still at work. Jesus proves to us that he is alive.

He proves that he is at work. And thirdly, he proves that he is ascended. Verse 2 said he was taken up. Verse 9, he was lifted up.

And a cloud took him out of their sight. Jesus is not physically here anymore. This is why all of us struggle to know if the story is true or not.

No one was expecting Jesus to leave and to ascend to heaven. Look at what his disciples were expecting to happen in verse 4. While Jesus was staying with them, his followers asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[9 : 33] See, the disciples are thinking Jesus is alive. Death is dead. He actually is God's Son come to earth, risen and ready to reign. So bring your kingdom, Jesus.

Let's plan the parade. Let's celebrate the day of the Lord. Restore the kingdom to Israel and destroy our enemies forever. Let's go. But instead, one of the biggest shocks of history.

The risen Jesus leaves to return to the Father and to be enthroned in heaven with the promise that he will return. It's a total shock.

Death has been defeated. And yet on the ground, the average person feels like their life has been left unchanged.

Rome still reigns. The corrupt state religion under the Pharisees was still in full effect. They were still hunting and persecuting the followers of Jesus, as Acts will tell us.

[10 : 35] Death is still at work in the world. Most of the world has no idea what's happened with Jesus. Jesus is alive. Jesus is at work.

But Jesus is ascended. He's gone. And this leads us to our second question. What's next? What are we supposed to do as we await Jesus' return?

The text shifts now, and we're told three things that Jesus promises his followers who are living between Jesus' resurrection and his return. First, Jesus promises his followers that they will be empowered.

Verse 4. For while staying with his followers, 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 by the Holy Spirit.

Or again in verse 8, Jesus says, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Followers of Jesus are promised that they will receive God's Holy Spirit.

[11 : 48] Jesus promises God the Holy Spirit will enter his followers, bringing God's presence and God's power into everyone who believes in him. The way that Jesus will continue his work on earth is through filling his followers with his Holy Spirit, empowering all of us to carry on his ministry and proclaim his gospel.

We're told later in Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the proof. He's the down payment. He's the deposit that God gives us now that guarantees our salvation in Christ.

The Holy Spirit entering and empowering his followers is a further proof that the story of Scripture is true and that Jesus is risen. You can experience God in your life today.

Jesus promises if you repent and believe, you will be given God's Holy Spirit. So every person who has come to believe in Jesus believes because God the Holy Spirit has been at work in them to turn them to Christ.

Every person here who is following Jesus is following him because of the work of the Holy Spirit empowering you from within to do so. Everyone here or online who feels right now that something is missing in your life or is desiring to turn away from your sin or the burdens of your past to live a better life.

[13 : 17] That yearning within you is birthed out of the Holy Spirit already at work in your heart as you hear God's word proclaimed and are compelled to respond in repentance and faith in Jesus.

The fact you are listening online is proof that the risen Jesus is at work in your life. He's drawing you to himself through his gospel being proclaimed and his Holy Spirit at work.

God the Holy Spirit empowers followers of Jesus. And he empowers people who don't yet know Jesus to turn and follow him as they hear his word.

So the Holy Spirit is further proof of the gospel's truth and its power. The Holy Spirit witnesses to Jesus and his resurrection. He assures you that in Christ your sin is forgiven by Christ's death on the cross.

Your debt has been paid. And through Christ you've been granted the status of a beloved child of God who will enjoy life with God forever. Jesus promises his followers they'll be empowered.

[14 : 26] As you turn to Jesus the Holy Spirit will enter you and begin a work of transforming you into the image of Christ. Propelling you to bear fruit for Christ.

Convicting you of your sin and giving you the reassurance of God's grace and favor. And the gospel's truth. The work of the Holy Spirit is to empower people to believe in Jesus and then become like him.

Okay, so after Easter what's next? First, followers of Jesus are promised that they will be empowered by God the Holy Spirit. And then second, followers of Jesus are commissioned.

Look at verse 8. Jesus says you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses. In Jerusalem. In Judea.

In Samaria. And to the ends of the earth. Followers of Jesus are commissioned to share Christ. To witness to him and his gospel and his kingdom.

[15 : 29] The vision statement of St. John's. Let's say it all together. Is to be a community of contrast. Just kidding. I know none of you know it. So I'm just going to say it. You can just nod and smile. Maybe even an amen would be great.

But we strive to be. It's at the front of your bulletin. A community of contrast. That is gripped by the gospel of grace. Why? To share Christ with our city.

We are commissioned to be witnesses. Very few of us feel equipped or empowered to share Christ. Most of us feel that sharing Christ verbally.

Is one of the most terrifying things we could ever be asked to do. In a secular place like Vancouver. We're taught that our personal beliefs should be private.

And so to speak publicly about Jesus is inappropriate. And even offensive. But witnessing to Jesus is not limited to walking up to strangers.

[16 : 28] And telling them the gospel in 30 seconds. It doesn't mean you have to be that guy at work. Annoyingly making every conversation about Jesus. And force feeding the gospel to everyone around you.

Whether they have a spiritual hunger or not. Rather to witness to Christ means that you are always prepared. To give an answer for the hope that is within you.

Sharing your faith in Christ with gentleness. And with respect. To witness to Jesus means that you and I are commissioned to go. And to love our neighbors.

To image Christ in how we live. To witness to him by our words, certainly. But also by our deeds. Think about how Jesus witnessed to himself in the gospels.

Yeah, of course, by his words. But also by incredible deeds of compassion and justice. By standing up to evil. By kneeling down to serve and to pray.

[17 : 29] As well as boldly proclaiming his gospel. We're not called to just be the mouthpiece of Christ. But his entire body. We are his hands.

His feet. Called to embody all of him. In how we live. And in how we witness to him. As we witness. Our success is not measured.

By the results of our testimony. The word witness is literally the word martyr. The first witnesses of Jesus were ultimately rejected.

And killed by their society. It's not like everyone who listened to Paul. Or Peter. Or even Jesus himself. Accepted the gospel. The vast majority did not.

The success of our witness. Is not measured by converts. But by our faithfulness to share Christ. And to tell the good news of his salvation. That's offered to all.

[18 : 28] Even if we're made martyrs by doing it. This is how Jesus continues his ministry today. It's through his people. Empowered and filled by his spirit.

Modeling him in how we live. And what we say. Commissioned to be his witnesses. Finally the last thing we learn about the followers of Jesus. Is this. They are sent.

Followers of Jesus. Are drawn close to him. By his gospel. They're empowered by his spirit. And then they're commissioned to be sent out into the world. We are drawn in.

Filled up. Sent out. Verse 8 again. You will receive power. Jesus says. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses. In Jerusalem.

In Judea. In Samaria. And to the ends of the earth. There's an outward trajectory. Of the people of God. Filled with the spirit of God. As we witness.

[19 : 25] By embodying the gospel of God. The God of the Bible. Is a God on mission. From the first page. To the last. To reach those who are furthest from him.

The entire narrative of scripture. Is about God striving. To reach the entire world. With his mercy. And grace. And blessing. Unlike every other faith.

That demands adherence. To reach up to God. Through works of devotion. Our God reaches down to us. Saving us from our sin. And selfishness.

Filling us with his Holy Spirit. And then bringing us to Christ. To be with him forever. If you think of the story of scripture. First God sent Israel.

His people. Then he sent his son. Then he sent his spirit. And now he sends his church. That all may be saved.

[20 : 21] So if you follow Jesus. You are a missionary. All of us are. God sends all of us. He sends us to our families.

He sends us to our schools. He sends us to our neighbors. He sends us to our workplaces. He sends us to our enemies. He sends us to the ends of the earth.

That the good news of Jesus Christ may be known. That Jesus may be known. And that his kingdom will extend. So that all will be invited and included.

In Christ's salvation. In four weeks time. We are going to be commissioning. And sending people from within our midst. To go form a new church plant.

King's Cross. So we are going to be sending. A group from St. John's. And I want to finish by speaking. To our dear sisters and brothers. Who next month are being commissioned.

[21 : 21] To form this new church. And my word to you. If you're involved is this. May God bless you. And may he keep you. May you receive the power.

Of God's Holy Spirit. That you will be witnesses of Christ. To East Vancouver. And to Burnaby. And to New Westminster. And to Coquitlam.

And to Poco. And to Port Moody. And to whatever is past Port Moody. To the ends of the earth. If anyone here lives in Pitt Meadows.

I'm really sorry. I'm sure it's beautiful. I've heard of it. I don't know where it is. If you're involved in King's Cross.

You've been called. Commissioned. Empowered. And now you're about to be sent. Now as someone who has in the past. Been sent out from St. John's myself.

[22 : 19] I'm going to be honest. This is a hard place to leave. King's Cross will be amazing. A little jealous. But if you're going.

You will miss it here. And we will miss you. Twelve years ago. Melissa and I. Were sent from St. John's. To go east. To a church in Burnaby.

And then on to another church. In East Vancouver. And during our time. Out east. As I call it. We visited here.

We visited an evening service. And as we drove home. We wept. Because we were so homesick. So I understand the emotion you're feeling right now.

It is hard to be sent. It is hard to leave a happy home. And go. For the sake of the gospel. So I commend all of you for your willingness to listen to the voice of Jesus.

[23 : 19] And go. Perhaps even to deny yourself. To do so. Because that's what all of us are called to. Jesus is alive. The Lord is risen.

Jesus is still at work in the world. Still speaking and acting through his people. Empowered by his spirit. To share his good news. Jesus has ascended.

He's not here. But he's in heaven. At the right hand of the throne of God. And all of us who are in Christ. Have been empowered by his Holy Spirit. All of us have been commissioned.

To be his witnesses. All of us have been called to go in his name. Rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be sent out into the world. To do the work he has given us to do.

To love and serve him. Through witnessing to his gospel. By our words. And our acts. Thanks be to God. Amen.