

Acts 1:1-11

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[0 : 00] Lord, may the words in my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight! O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen. Feel free to take a seat.

And thank you for having me this morning, St. John's. As a reminder, my name is Jude, and I'm from normally at St. Peter's Fireside downtown, but I'm delighted to be back here with y'all on the first Sunday of Easter.

I'm glad that I can finally say hallelujah again. As we enter into Eastertide, we're beginning a new series through the book of Acts that we're calling Sent by Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus means being sent by Jesus into the world that he died and rose again to save.

And over which he currently reigns as Lord. Jesus gives us his spirit so that we can be his witnesses in the world. This sermon series in Acts is meant to give us a spirit-filled imagination and spirit-like creativity for what this looks like in our own time and place in God's unfolding mission.

Today we're looking at the first 11 verses of Acts, which is essentially Luke's roadmap for the entire book. So if you haven't already, please open your Bibles to Acts chapter 1, and that is page 909 in your pew Bibles.

[1 : 25] Now Acts is a book about the work Jesus does. It's titled The Acts of the Apostles, but it's about the work that Jesus himself is doing. It's continuing what the Gospel of Luke started.

Luke himself says in verse 1 that his first book talked about all that Jesus began to do and teach. So although Jesus ascends into heaven in our passage today, he is still at work in the world.

In our passage today, Luke focuses primarily on Jesus' last words to his disciples. And we're given these last words in verses 6 through 8 of our passage.

And in these last words, we learn about two things. We learn about the power given to Jesus' disciples, and then the purpose of the disciples' ministry.

And this is going to be our focus for our time today. First, we're going to look at the power that's given to the disciples, and then look at the purpose of the disciples' ministry.

[2 : 26] So first, let's look at the power given to Jesus' disciples. In verse 6, the disciples ask Jesus a question. They say, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

I love moments like this in Scripture, because it's so clear that the disciples have no idea the scope of Jesus' work in the world. They think, oh, okay.

Jesus died. That was unexpected. But now he's risen. That was also unexpected. We're back on track. He's finally going to overthrow Rome. He's going to liberate God's people.

He's going to make life easy and comfortable for us. They still see Jesus primarily as a God-anointed political leader, kind of like King David. But I have to remind myself that if I was in their shoes, I probably would have asked him the same question.

The disciples don't seem to have a mental category for the work that Jesus is doing. They have no conception of this multicultural, international community that the church will eventually become.

[3 : 34] But Jesus graciously answers the disciples' ignorant question. Although in classic Jesus style, he doesn't give them a straight answer. So look at verses 7 and 8.

Jesus said to them, It is not for you to know the 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.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. In short, Jesus' answer is, You don't get to know God's timeline.

And now is not the time to rest. It's actually just when my work is getting going. And it's for way more people than just the Jews.

Jesus says they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. In other words, Jesus is promising them that soon, God will come and send his Spirit to be with them.

[4 : 33] And this Spirit will give them power. Now this Spirit power is not a reference to political might or cultural influence. It's instead a more humble power.

It's the power to reflect Christ well in the world. It is the power to become little Christs, which is originally where the word Christian comes from. And Jesus will, in fact, be in them through the Holy Spirit.

This means the disciples are going to be able to do the things that Jesus did. Even though Jesus ascends into heaven at the end of our passage, He is still present on earth because He's working through His disciples.

This leads into the second thing that we learn from Jesus' response here, which is the purpose of the disciples' ministry, why they received this power.

Look back at verse 8 with me. After promising that the Holy Spirit will come to give the disciples power, Jesus tells them that they will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then ultimately to the rest of the known world.

[5 : 40] Jesus is sending His disciples to extend the scope of His work. They are, of course, supposed to start where they already are. They're supposed to start at Jerusalem. But then they are told to go to all their fellow Jews.

And then, after that, they're told to go to the Samaritans, which would have been shocking for a Jew. And then, after that, they're told to go to the Gentiles, which is just off-the-charts bizarre for a Jew.

Jesus is telling them that the concept of Israel as God's chosen people is expanding. God's people will no longer be one single geographic nation-state.

It's going to be much broader than that. In the first century, it was common for messengers of a king to be sent out across a kingdom when a new ruler was put on the throne.

It was their job to go to the farthest reaches of the king's domain to bring the news that the new king, or in Rome's case, the new Caesar, was ruling. And this was what Jesus was telling His disciples to do in verse 8.

[6 : 47] He wants them to go and tell the world, starting in Jerusalem itself, that a new king has taken the throne of the universe. Jesus is telling His disciples that His kingdom is already here.

He's telling them, My kingdom is here, so go let people know. And that brings me to one final thing I want to point out before we close. And I want to focus on that word, witness, that Luke uses.

In the Greek, the word that we translate as witness is *martus*, which, as I'm sure you know, or you might guess from the way it sounds, is where we get the English word martyred.

But this word originally just meant someone who testifies about something they know to be true. Kind of like you might have a witness in court. But Luke is using this word and transforming its meaning.

The book of Acts will make clear that for followers of Jesus, witness is also tied to death. Now obviously this doesn't mean that all of Jesus' disciples will be executed for their faith.

[7 : 58] After all, some of the apostles even, like John, simply died of old age. But there is a kind of death that is required for all of Jesus' disciples. Jesus says, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. And that's from Luke chapter 9. So death to self is required of each person who chooses to follow Jesus. And that's required of us as well. Just like the disciples in our passage today, Jesus calls us to submit all our desires, all of our hopes, all of our fears to him.

Our top priority must simply be to witness to Jesus. Acts is ultimately an unfinished story. And that's beautiful because we are intended to be the continuation of that story.

We are commanded to go out to the far reaches of our individual lives to share the good news that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. And in a world that is full of wars and corrupt leaders, it is our job to speak hope to others.

[9 : 17] But our witness goes beyond that. Like a good doctor, we must diagnose the disease that is at the root of all the world's unrest and chaos. And the disease that we are sick with is sin.

We have grown in malformed ways, and we need Jesus, the great physician, to heal us. And that is what he has done. But our physician is also our king.

And as our king, he commands us to acknowledge that he deserves our allegiance. And then he calls us as his followers to invite others into that allegiance.

Now, I really struggle with evangelism. I always have. I'm an introvert. I'm a people pleaser. And a very conflict-diverse person, which is not exactly the recipe for evangelism. Often I find it much easier to just not be a witness in our secular society. But as I've been preparing this sermon, I felt convicted by the Lord to pray for courage and wisdom to discern how the Spirit wants to work through me.

[10 : 25] And I've been asking myself, where is God asking me to die to myself today? Which, to be honest, is one of the hardest prayers to pray, in my opinion.

But it forces me to cling to Jesus' promise. And I want to bring us back to our text here. Jesus says, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. That's promised language.

And I think that should bring us encouragement. So, as we enter into this coming week, I'd invite you into a similar prayer. Consider asking yourself, and lifting this up to the Lord.

Say, God, where are you calling me to die to myself today in order to bear witness to you and to your life and your good news? So, let's close in prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, you promised your first disciples that they would receive power through the Holy Spirit so that they would announce your rule over everything to a broken world.

[11 : 29] Would you pour out your Spirit on us today, Lord? Grant us wisdom, discernment, and boldness. And in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.