

# Acts 1:1-11

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen. All right, please have a seat.

If I haven't had the privilege of getting to know you yet, my name is Ryan. I serve as one of the ministers here at St. John's. It's my privilege to welcome you here if you're here in person, if you're online.

Hi, Mom and Dad. They said they were going to watch tonight. They're watching from home. So it's great to be with you this evening as we launch into a new series here at St. John's in the season of Easter, as Jacob mentioned.

So you can think of this as we're in season three of a three-part trilogy or series, right? Season one was encounters with Jesus. The writer was John. He was character development, right?

He wanted us to know who Jesus was to kind of figure out, well, who is this guy? What happens as Jesus interacts with all sorts of different people? We get to meet some of the disciples. Season two was formed by Jesus. We're still in the Gospel of John.

[ 0 : 58 ] Bit of a smaller budget. It's just in one room the whole season. One conversation. And we just get to focus in on one dinner conversation. We really go in depth. A lot of nuance. A lot of lovely scenes. A smaller cast.

But now that we're in season three, a new writer emerges. Luke. And Luke is action-packed. The budget is huge. It's going to be shot on location all around the Mediterranean. And we're going to look at what happens after Jesus has risen again.

So we're going to be all over the place. It's going to be action-packed. Really looking forward to spending time in this book with you, in the book of Acts. So it's called Sent by Jesus. And you want to keep your Bibles open.

We're going to be on page 909. You notice in our readings, we read the Luke reading second. But those events really are meant to overlap, right? Luke's kind of ending his previous book with the events that Acts kind of picks up on.

It's lovely to have them layered like that. So our book starts with the what happens next question, right? On Easter, we celebrated Jesus' resurrection.

[ 2 : 00 ] The celebration, he has risen. He has risen indeed. And then it's kind of like, and now what? What happens? Like what's supposed to unroll next? And Acts kicks us off in this series.

And our passage is going to break nicely into two parts this evening. Verses 1 through 5, then verses 6 through 11. Now in verses 1 through 5, we get a bit of a recap, right? Like as the series starts, you usually have those first like 30 seconds to a minute to figure out like who are the characters?

What's going on? Why are we here? Then verses 6 through 11 propel us into what the rest of Acts will be about. We get the layout for the entire flow of the book of Acts and the work of the church. All right, so here's the big idea. Without the book of Acts, everything that happened in the church afterwards would just seem to be random, right?

Like the gospel spreads to places. You're like, what is it doing there? The gospel is accepted by people. And you're like, how could they be the people who believe? But with the book of Acts shows us this was not random.

[ 3 : 05 ] It was not an accident. It's what Jesus has been preparing his people for and promising what he would empower them to do. So we're going to dive right in. It shows something really fantastic.

Jesus continually at work through the Holy Spirit. And our verses here, verses 8 and 9 in particular, serve as a roadmap for the whole book. They show Jesus before his ascension, literally right

before, preparing his apostles and giving them a promise.

And that's what we're going to talk about, two things, preparation and promise. And as we embark in this new series, one of the things Jordan shared with us as a team this past week is that we pray that it will build all of our confidence, the truth of who God is and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We'll see powerful testimony, be reminded once again of who the God is that we've been called to serve. And secondly, it will inspire our imagination, just as it did back in different cities in the first century.

We pray that it will inspire our imaginations here in Vancouver for how God wants to send us out on mission. All right. So we're going to get right into it. For the preparation part, look on page 909, Acts 1, first five verses.

[ 4 : 16 ] Jesus is setting out to prepare them. Look at verse 1. He says, in the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

The first book, of course, is the Gospel of Luke, which he says, it's an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. All right. So I need to pause briefly and just say, who is this Theophilus guy? I'm partly doing this because I spent way too much time looking into this. I need at least like one sentence or two to justify that.

So Theophilus means just basically translation is beloved or a friend of God. Now, it could just be generic. It could even be directed towards all those who are reading beloved of God.

But there's strong enough evidence that this was a real person, that Luke really wrote this for someone in mind. He wrote it as an open letter, though, imagining that all of us would benefit someday from reading it.

[ 5 : 14 ] Now, this is a little bit of a side theory. It's not a conspiracy theory, I promise. But it's very, very possible that Theophilus could have been the high priest in Jerusalem from roughly A.D. 37 to 41.

Now, I'm going to say this is not going to be essential to your faith. All right. This is just me kind of being nerdy and really liking a detail here. What's fascinating about this, though, is that if that is true, if it was written for Theophilus, a lot of the book makes sense in a certain way.

It makes sense that he would tell a story about a priest in Luke almost right after he introduces the book. It makes sense that the person reading this would be like, I need some help understanding what's happening.

This guy, Jesus, Theophilus would have been at his trial. He would have been there when he was sentenced to death. He would have known he was crucified. But now, 30 plus years after his death, the church is spreading like wildfire.

And he must be figuring out what is going on. I would even imagine he's beginning to have some thoughts. Maybe this Jesus guy is who he says he is. Again, this is not essential to faith.

[ 6 : 15 ] But I think it's a super interesting detail. And it helps me feel a little bit better about some of the rabbit trails I went down as I prepared this. Anyways, but it does help us understand how Luke wants to set the record straight.

He cares so much about details. He cares about naming names and places and showing you that these were things that happened. You can look and know that these were real people in real places.

Alright, so anyways, getting back to the preparation question. Continuing in verse 1. Note that Luke says here that it was all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Now, it's an interesting word to say. Not all that Jesus had taught. But all that Jesus began to do and teach. This says that it's still ongoing. Now, John Stott, who is an Anglican minister, wrote one of the best commentaries on Acts.

I would highly recommend it as we launch into this series. He said something interesting about this point. He said, It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from all other religions.

[ 7 : 18 ] Other religions regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime. Luke says Jesus only began his. Did you hear that?

Almost all other religions the founder has done. Finished. Upon their death, it's over. Their influence, their work, done. Not so in Christianity. It's still ongoing.

It's still unfolding. It's still something that's in progress. And Jesus' preparation continues in verse 3. And in verse 3, we actually find out what he was doing during the 40 days after his resurrection.

Have you ever wondered? Like, what did he get up to? How did he spend his time? Well, Luke tells us. It says he does two things. He was presenting himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs.

I like the word many there. It suggests they needed a lot of convincing. He needed a lot of reminders. He really was alive. And secondly, he was speaking to them about the kingdom of God. So, we see this pattern showing up in other places in Luke, right?

[ 8 : 17 ] The story of Thomas. Jesus appears, shows them his side and his hands. He eats food with them. And then it says, while he's there with them, he teaches them about how all of Scripture points to him and his resurrection.

And the road to Emmaus. You might be familiar with this story, right? Two disciples are walking along. A strange visitor walks with them. And that visitor explains Scripture to them.

And then is made known to them in the breaking of bread later. So, this is what he's been about. During these 40 days, he's continuing to show them that he really is alive.

In bodily form. It's real. Not something they're imagining. Not something that they had just fantasized or hoped for. And secondly, he's teaching again and again. And what he's teaching them is not just something like, yeah, forget all that old stuff.

I got something new for you. He's showing that all of Scripture had pointed to him. So, that's another way he's been preparing them. Preparing them by showing them he's alive. By pointing them to Scripture.

[ 9 : 14 ] And finally, he's preparing them in verses 4 and 5. Notice he tells them to stay and wait for something. And the thing they're to stay and wait for is the promise of the Father.

Now, what is this promise of the Father? Now, this might be a part of the season where you see a little flashback episode, right? From a previous season. We're going to jump right back into John for just two seconds. And we might have like a scene show up where Jesus is talking to the disciples, the apostles over dinner.

At the Last Supper. And he says, but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

So, this is the promise of the Father that's waiting for them. This is what they are to wait for. Now, Jesus talks about this promise in John. But it actually goes way back into the Old Testament. The coming of the Spirit would mean that God's kingdom and reign would begin.

This is the thing that they are waiting for. It's a big deal to them. But as we're going to discover in just a little bit, it's not quite going to be what they expect it to be. So, in these first five verses, Jesus is preparing them for what happens next.

[ 10 : 27 ] What happens after his ascension. He's risen. He's among them. He's showing how they're joining a story that's already in progress. That's just beginning. And he's proving that he really was bodily alive.

And Scripture really spoke about him. And he's preparing them through their waiting for the gift from the Father. So, that's how he's preparing them. That's what he's doing. He's investing them. He's pouring into them for all that's about to happen as he's about to ascend.

So, now we're going to move to the second part here, verses 6 to 11. And we're going to talk about the promise. You could call this section a tale of two kingdoms. And we know what was going through their minds because in verse 6, they ask kind of an interesting question, right?

He tells them to stay and wait. They get together. And I like to imagine it's Peter that's speaking here, right? Peter is always the one who's like the first to charge in.

He speaks before thinking. He acts before thinking. So, someone blurts out, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now, this is an interesting thing to ask about.

[ 11 : 31 ] And one of the church reformers, John Calvin, said something not too nice about their sentence here. He said, nearly every word in the sentence is wrong.

I hope none of you have ever received a paperback from a teacher that said nearly every sentence in this paper is wrong. Okay. I'll say why he said this. But to cut them a little bit of slack here, the Old Testament does speak about the coming of the Spirit.

Being poured out and it being God's presence among them. But this teaching had slowly been warped over the years, right? Their idea of what that meant for God to come back started to become more and more inwardly focused.

More and more about themselves being where they thought they should be. And less and less about God and where God knew he wanted to be. You see, in the Old Testament, Israel was always supposed to be a light to the nations, right?

A light gathering them. A light shining truth. And God's presence and blessing were always going to be going out from Jerusalem. As we saw very aptly demonstrated in the spike ball demonstration.

[ 12 : 34 ] But it shifted, right? Some ideas snuck in about being put back on top. About Israel finally judging all the nations around them. People getting what they deserve.

It was kind of a desire to kind of make Israel great. What it's supposed to be. At least their ideas. So here's why John Calvin said that nearly every part of this sentence is wrong.

Notice their focus. Right away they said, Lord will you. He's just risen from the dead. And they're continuing to say, Okay, what do you got next? What are you going to do next? Right? Their focus is on what is Jesus going to do.

And then they say, At this time, Are you going to do it right now? Restore the kingdom. They're thinking of a national political kingdom. To Israel. And they're focused on themselves, right? So every single part of that was subtly misguided, misdirected.

But we see right away that Jesus gently corrects this. Now, I don't know how you imagine Jesus in these scenes. And maybe this isn't very charitable. But I can tell he sometimes gets frustrated with his apostles and disciples.

[ 13 : 40 ] So I wonder if this moment after this question, If he had to just take a second and just like center himself a bit, you know? He'd been teaching them all about scripture. He'd been showing them he's alive. And they're still not quite getting it.

I know he's more gentle than that. But you've got to wonder it sometimes if he let his frustrations come through. So why was this wrong? Well, they needed an imagination correction and an expansion.

It was like they didn't even have a category for what was going to happen next. Right? But we see in the very next verses that Jesus is going to give them a promise. Instead of an answer to their question, he gives them a different kind of promise.

And in this promise is a purpose. So look at verse 7. He responds to their Lord will you with a you in response. It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

Gently kind of saying, actually, that's not really a thing you need to worry about. Let's put a pin in that. We're going to table that. We're going to come back to that another time. And he continues with another you statement.

[ 14 : 40 ] Notice he hasn't said anything about I yet. He says, but you will receive something. It's not going to be a kingdom for Israel. It's going to be 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 end of the earth. Notice this reorientation. Right? He reorients them away from a when.

Instead towards a power they're going to receive. And it's interesting in this tale of two kingdoms when they're asking about a physical political kingdom. Thinking that's going to be the source of the power they need.

But instead, Jesus says, actually, the power I'm talking about is going to be something in you. Not located in a place, but located in a people. And with that he moves on to a purpose.

In the second part of verse 8, notice he says, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. So let's talk about witnesses. What is a witness?

[ 15 : 41 ] You think of court scenes. It means someone who has seen or experienced something. It's primarily about facts. Providing testimony to something. Right? And Luke loves this word witness in the gospel, in the book of Acts here.

You're going to see this come up again and again. Think about witness. It's the same word for martyr. To be a witness. To be a martyr. Same Greek word. And a witness here isn't primarily concerned with feelings about something or ideas about someone.

But facts and experience. Things seen. Things heard. Things known. And that's where they're going to be called to be witnesses to Jesus in word and in deed.

And at least 10 of the 12 apostles will also die as the ultimate witnesses. As martyrs for Jesus and his word. So let's talk a little bit.

That's the kind of thing he's preparing them to be. That's why he's investing so much in them. So they can go out and speak confidently about saying, yes, I have first-hand knowledge. This is probably how we have the book here in Acts.

[16:49] Luke talks to them. For one of their first-hand knowledge. Got their accounts. He then gives them a road map for this journey. And this is huge. And this is what you're going to see structures the rest of the book.

There's a little hint here that Jesus isn't just talking about, you know, geography. He's not pulling out an atlas and be like, you guys know Jerusalem, right? Okay, you're going to take a left by the tree and head over to, you know, Judea.

He's not primarily concerned about directions. He's also concerned about the kind of people who live there, right? So first they would have heard Jerusalem. Probably would have been like, cool, cool, right? Jewish people on it.

All about that. All of Judea. They're like, okay, Judea is still mostly Jewish. Don't know about the all part. We're getting a little bit nervous. Samaria. That's probably where they would have gotten real quiet and kind of shuffled their feet back and forth.

Looked at each other and said, did he just? He said, you heard him say Samaria, right? And then to the ends of the world. This was crazy. You know, they thought God would come and judge all those places.

[17:51] But now he's telling them that they're going to receive power to go and be witnesses in those places. That actually it's the good news that's coming to the people you would at least expect it to come to.

So instead of the kingdom focused inwardly and just a select few, he's reorienting them both geographically and theologically. This good news and the spirit-empowered witness was to be for all people.

Jew, Samaritan, Greek, right? If you know the history, Samaritans were kind of seen as like sort of Jewish, but not really. They really didn't like each other. You know all the stories about this, right? That's why there's the story of the good Samaritan. It's supposed to kind of shock people. That's why Jewish people often went way out of their way to travel around it. Jesus says, no, you're going to go right into the middle of it, right? The ends of the world, the Gentiles, they're often referred to as dogs.

Jewish people thought of them as not even humanizing terms. He says, no, those are the exact kind of people I have in mind for you to go to. And the rest of the book of Acts is going to tell this story.

[18:52] I think John Stott, to quote him again, captures this really beautifully. He says, That's the kind of mission he's sending them on.

So as we prepare to close out of episode one of season three, sent by Jesus, Jesus here is preparing his disciples for what comes next. And he's doing so by giving them a promise.

Our passage then closes in the final verses with Jesus ascending. And, you know, a brief little comment here. It's just like at first the apostles are too earthly minded. They're thinking about an earthly kingdom.

But then we see it says Jesus here ascends. While they were, he had said these things, verse 9, they were looking on. He was lifted up. While they're gazing into heaven, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?

So at first they seem to be too obsessed with things on earth. And now they kind of need to be brought back to earth, right? Like men of Galilee, men of earth. Let's come back. Let's come back now. Let's get on to our task.

[20:17] Now, this ascension is not just Jesus like peacing out. He's not just like heading off. I've got more important things to do. I'll check in with you guys later. Let me know how you're doing. His ascension was his ongoing reign and work to be exalted at the right hand of the Father.

Now, you might know this living in a place like Vancouver. Have you ever walked into an elevator and pressed the button for the floor you need a special key to get to? Do any of you have the special key in the building?

You know what I'm talking about? You have to put your fob in the elevator to actually get the key to light up? Maybe I'm the only one who's ever been in an elevator like this before. Okay, I see a few hands. Thank you. I've always wanted that key, right?

It's like you can mash the button, but nothing happens. The elevator doesn't move. But here, they have some preparation for what's happening. They get it, right? The presence of God was seen always as coming with a cloud.

And Jesus ascending to the heavens was a sign that he really was who he said he was. He was going to the right hand of the Father. He was heading up to the C-suite, right? They got to watch him press the button and go to the position of power and know that he would come again just as he left.

[ 21 : 25 ] So we know their reaction to this. Luke says the reaction to this was joy, right? They didn't walk off like confused and murmuring and discouraged. They went back brimming with joy, with excitement, with energy and power for what God would enable them to do.

And we'll know in future series that in ten days that promise would be fulfilled at the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them in an amazing way.

And you would begin to see the evidence of all that Jesus had poured into them during those 40 days, as they testified to Jesus' resurrection, his ascension, and to the words of Scripture.

But for us today, just to kind of land this plane a little bit here, and to give us a sense for what, so what? That might be helpful to know what was happening way back when, but so what? For us, the message is mostly about our origin story.

How we got our start. How Jesus prepared his apostles and gave them a promise to be his witnesses with power. So I think the lesson for us is a simple one. God prepares his people for his mission with his power.

[ 22 : 27 ] God prepares his people for his mission with his power. And we're all part of this legacy today, this apostolic ministry. Through their ministry, we have God's holy word, through the Holy Spirit.

This is the result of that apostolic ministry. And we witness to the world today through this word. Our witness to their witness. And through the Holy Spirit's work in our lives as individuals and as a church.

And I want to leave you with the same promise Jesus made to them. Jesus will prepare you. He is preparing you for a work that is already in progress.

And he promises to empower you with nothing less than his personal presence. To take the witness stand when the time comes. In word and in deed.

And over the next several weeks, we'll get more chances to have our confidence bolstered and our imaginations inspired. For what this looked like for the early church. And what this might look like today. Here in Vancouver, wherever you might live.

[ 23 : 33 ] We're part of the same story. Now there's a passage in the Lord of the Rings, the Two Towers. Where Sam Gamgee is remembering the old tale. Sam Gamgee, Samwise Gamgee, right?

A friend of Frodo. Helped him carry the ring to Mordor. But in the book, Sam and Frodo are kind of recollecting the old times. The old tales. The old legends. And Sam is recounting all these amazing stories of things that happened ages ago.

When suddenly a light turns on. And Sam says to Frodo, Why? To think of it. We're in the same tale still. It's going on.

Don't the great tales never end? And here at St. John's, we're in the same tale still. We are part of this legacy. Continuing this legacy. Now it's ironic that we call this the act of the apostles.

Listen that Luke sat down and wrote that out. It actually should be called the acts of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. And we pray the same for us. That our lives and our community would be known by the acts of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in our midst.

[ 24 : 43 ] Witnessing for Christ in our city. Amen.