

New Lord

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you, Father, for the great story into which you've called us. The story of your creation, the story of our running from you, the story of your rescue, and a wonderful story about us participating in your mission in this world.

It's a beautiful story, and we want to be full participants in it. So will you grant by your spirit that we might hear your word clearly, that we may see Jesus clearly, and that we may follow him in every aspect of our lives.

We ask this for your glory. Amen. Please be seated and keep that reading there in front of you. So, we are, I'm very excited today that we are beginning the Book of Acts.

Now, you have to be a pretty brave church to take on the Book of Acts. And that's the case for all sorts of reasons. One is it's a massive book.

Like, it's just long. There's long speeches. There's a long shipwreck narrative that is, you know, just kind of goes on and on.

[1 : 29] And will probably be in this book for at least just about a year or something like that. So, you know, it's a commitment. But you have to be a brave church to take on this book for another reason.

It is a really dramatic telling of the growth and the expansion of the church. Right? This is part of why we like the book so much.

It's a story of the church growing and multiplying. There's accounts of these mass conversions. Thousands of people becoming Christians at one time.

There's great stories of the church bridging cultural gaps that had cultural divisions that had never been bridged before.

There's social action and justice involved. It's a wonderful story. It's an extremely compelling vision for the church. But that creates a problem. And it creates a problem because the compelling vision of the church that the book of Acts presents, it's part of why we like it so much.

[2 : 42] But if we're honest, our experience of church doesn't always quite, you know, get there.

I mean, not here, of course, right? Not us. No. But you know what I mean, right? I mean, there's these wonderful stories about the church. And it's kind of like our experience seems oftentimes to come a little shy there.

And that creates a problem for us. And it creates a problem for lots of Christians as they read this book. And there's a couple different ways of resolving the tension as Christians read the book of Acts.

One approach is what I call kind of the nostalgic approach. And it's when Christians open up the book of Acts and they read it and they say, look how wonderful the church was.

We got to be like that. We got to, come on. We just got to be like that. And depending on kind of what party within the church, they'll say things like, you know, we just got to be baptized with the spirit more.

[3 : 48] Or we just got to witness to people more than we have. Or we got to be more missional than we've been. Or we need more cultural engagement. And you can always tell when there's a nostalgic reading of the book of Acts because the response always begins with the words, we got to.

We got to do this. We got to do that. We got to do more. And we got to do it now. And don't get me wrong. There's a lot to be committed in that kind of a response.

But the problem is, is that you get exhausted before very long. So that's the nostalgic approach. But then there's the cynical approach. And the cynical approach reads the text, reads the book of Acts and says, look how wonderful the church was or was supposed to be.

But come on. Get real. It ain't like that. And I'm not sure it ever was. And so you need to get real. You need to give up. You need to go home. Or you just need to manage your expectations because it ain't never going to be that great.

Now the problem with both of those approaches to reading the book of Acts is that both of them think that the hero of the book of Acts is the church.

[5 : 02] And they're wrong. And they're wrong. The hero in the book of Acts, the centerpiece of the book of Acts is not the church.

Don't get me wrong. It is the story of the growth of the church and the spread of the word and the gospel. But the church is not the very center. The centerpiece of this book is the risen and reigning Lord Jesus.

And as we begin looking at the book of Acts, if we're not clear on that, we will misread, misapply, misinterpret the book of Acts at every point.

So tonight, as we look at these first eight verses, what I want us to look at and focus in on is that Jesus and his resurrection completely guarantees the mission of the church.

And if we can get that, that will become the foundation and the bedrock for everything else we do in the book of Acts. Okay? Let's dive in. Let's dive in.

[6 : 35] Let's dive in.

It's not God's fault. It's our fault. That's fact number one from the Old Testament. Fact number two from the Old Testament is that God promised to take this messed up world and set it right.

And he promised to do that through this group of people called Israel. Now, this is where I'm going to sneak in a sub-point under the second fact. So here we go. God has promised to restore the world, to set things right through the people of Israel.

And according to the Old Testament, you'll know that God has set this place right when the dead are resurrected. That's fact number two. But then there's a crisis in the Old Testament.

And the crisis is that Israel ends up being a spectacular failure. It's all through the Old Testament. As you walk through the Old Testament, the people of God seem utterly and consistently incapable of fulfilling God's mission.

[8 : 07] And it gets really, really bad. And it gets so bad that towards the end of the Old Testament, it becomes evident that Israel needs God to send somebody to show up and fix Israel so that then Israel can participate in God's mission for the world.

Now, that's what they expect the Messiah to do. And that's what the book of Luke is about. The prequel to Acts, if you will. So Jesus shows up and Israel looks to the Messiah as the one that's going to fix things, that's going to set Israel right.

And the expectation is that once the Messiah does his work, then Israel will become glorious and successful and powerful and all kinds of stuff like that. But you know the story. Jesus dies.

And the moment Jesus died, it seems like God's plan to restore the world through Israel was completely dead in the water.

Now, why am I telling you all this? Look back at the reading. Let me ask you a question. Why does the book of Acts begin by emphasizing the resurrection?

[9 : 22] Look at verse 3. To the apostles, Jesus presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Now, here's the question. Why is it so important that we get re-emphasized that over the course of 40 days, Jesus emphasized again and again that he had resurrected from the dead?

This is why. And I want you to get this. Because it is the central fact of the book of Acts. The resurrection of Jesus Christ meant that God's plan to restore all things through Israel could not fail.

What do I mean by that? This is what I mean by that. Remember the plan. God is going to restore the broken world through Israel. And the culmination of that will be when the dead are raised back to life.

Now, follow the thinking here. If the resurrection at the end of time is the culmination of God's plan, but if Jesus has already risen from the dead, then it means that the most important piece of God's plan to restore the world has already taken place.

[10 : 44] What it means, the reason the book of Acts begins with the resurrection of Jesus is because the resurrection of Jesus means that God's heavy lifting in restoring the world has already happened.

And the bottom line for the disciples, when they looked at Jesus' physical body and ate with him and spent time with him and were convinced that he was really physically alive, they knew at that point that nothing could stand in the way of God fulfilling his mission for the world.

Now, stop for a second. Do you see why this is so important for us to grasp as we as a church begin to look at the book of Acts?

Let me put it this way. The only way we as a church will have a prayer of emulating the church in Acts is if we see the buck doesn't stop with us.

The buck stops with Jesus. God's mission for the world does not rest on our shoulders, although we are called to participate in it.

[11 : 56] God's mission for the world rests squarely on the shoulders of the resurrected Jesus. You remember Israel. Israel was a spectacular failure.

And their failure emphasized the fact that they needed Jesus to do for them what they could not do for themselves. The same will be true of the church. The church will be a spectacular failure.

And so many times has been a spectacular failure unless it has its eyes fixed upon Jesus and is clear on what Jesus has already accomplished for us.

So, the bedrock of the church's mission in the book of Acts is that Jesus' resurrection guarantees ultimate success of God's plan for the world.

But if I stopped there, it would sound like we don't really have a role that we just kind of sit here and do nothing. That's not the case. The resurrection of Jesus also means that Jesus is absolutely engaged with this world and he is orchestrating God's mission through his spirit.

[13 : 00] Look at verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, he's referring to the Gospel of Luke there, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day in which he was taken up.

Now, look at that verse and you see the word began, began to do and to teach. Let me paraphrase kind of what Luke is saying. He's saying, Theophilus, which we're not really sure who he was, he might have been a patron of Luke.

Theophilus, I wrote the Gospel of Luke to tell the story of the things Jesus began to do and to teach. And now I'm writing to you the book of Acts to tell you what Jesus is continuing to do and to teach.

Now, that's what the Holy Spirit is all about in Acts. The Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is about, is how Jesus continues his ministry in the world.

And that's why in verse 4, Jesus looks at his apostles and pretty much forbids them to do anything or go anywhere without the Holy Spirit. Stay in Jerusalem, wait for the promise of the Father.

[14 : 11] Wait to be baptized with the Spirit. Do you remember Jesus' baptism? We went over this like almost a year ago, so it might be a little fuzzy. But you might remember the picture.

Jesus is in the Jordan. John the Baptist baptizes him. And the Holy Spirit descends upon him. And the Father speaks from heaven to Jesus.

And he says, You are my Son. You are my beloved Son. And with you I am well pleased. Now, what was going on there? When Jesus was baptized by the Spirit, what happened, or at least part of what was happening, is that the Holy Spirit was uniting Jesus to his Father.

The Holy Spirit was intensifying the love that existed between the Father and the Son. And it was that intensified love that then pushed Jesus out, empowered Jesus, motivated Jesus to go out and serve the world through giving his life and suffering and dying.

His service flowed out of the love poured into his heart through the Holy Spirit. Now, that's what the baptism of the Spirit is in the book of Acts.

[15 : 32] When the apostles are baptized in the Spirit, the Spirit is uniting them to Jesus, intensifying the love that exists between Jesus and the apostles and the church.

And it's that love, that intensified love, that then empowers the apostles, empowers the church to go out into the world in mission, in risky mission, in self-sacrificial mission.

And it's remarkably transformative. Do you remember Peter? Jesus is on trial. Peter denies him and abandons him.

A month and a half later, the Holy Spirit comes upon him. And from that point onward, he boldly proclaims Jesus in a pluralistic Roman society.

And he proclaims Jesus until they kill him for it. Now, that's a remarkable change. And the explanation of the change is that when the risen Christ pours out his Spirit, it intensified Peter's love for Jesus and his sense of Jesus' love for him so that all of a sudden, Peter loved Jesus more than anything.

[16 : 45] Peter loved Jesus more than he loved himself. He loved Jesus more than he loved the applause and the approval of the people around him. And it motivated him for a lifetime of mission.

And that's what Jesus wants to do in the church. And that's what Jesus wants to do in this church. Let me tell you something. If we try to emulate the church in Acts by your own strength, the book of Acts will end up being an unbearable burden for you.

And it will be an unbearable burden for you because you will fail again and again and again and again. It's the problem with the nostalgic way of coming at the book of Acts.

You'll end up just like Peter. You'll follow God when it's going well, but once it isn't, you won't. You'll end up like Israel. You're well-intentioned, but you're ultimately unable to fulfill God's mission.

And this is why, friends, we've got to see that the church is not the hero of the story. Jesus is the hero of the story. And it's his resurrection that guarantees at the end of time that God's mission will succeed.

[18 : 02] And it's his resurrection that allows the spirit to be poured out upon us as his people, transforming us to be motivated by love.

But I've said a bunch of times that the church isn't the hero of the story. What is the church's role in the story? The church's role is to be a witness. Look at verse 8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Tell me if you think I'm right. It seems to me that this idea of witness in verse 8, it seems to me that it is a remarkably humble thing to ask of the apostles.

I mean, I would have thought that the apostles would be like commissioned as like glorious rulers or something like that or like divine, you know, I don't know, ambassadors or something.

And they are. I mean, the word apostle carries some of those connotations, but primarily they're called witnesses. witnesses. And here's the thing about a witness.

[19 : 19] A witness, by definition, is never in the center of the story. Right? A witness is on the periphery of the story looking at the center. A witness is someone who looks and sees and observes what the hero, what the center of the story is doing.

And that's exactly what you see throughout the book of Acts. First the apostles, but then the rest of the church. When they're at their best, they're looking at Jesus. They're looking at the hero of the book of Acts and they're describing him to the world.

In one sense, it's a very humble thing to be a witness. But in another sense, it is an extraordinarily enjoyable thing. You know, the Olympics are coming in a few months.

Like, I don't know, 300,000 people are going to squash into this city and we're all going to be very, very, very close to each other. And it's, anyways, why are those people coming to the Olympics?

They're coming because they want to witness the Olympics. They want to witness the games. Why do they want to witness the games? They want to witness the games because it is fun to look at something you love.

[20 : 39] Right? Isn't that enjoyable? Now, that's what happens when the Spirit makes us witnesses. It's enjoyable. The Spirit increases and intensifies your love for Jesus so that you enjoy looking at Him.

That's what we do when we sing and when we pray and even when we take communion. We're looking at Jesus. That's why it's, it's a joy to the Christian heart to look at Jesus. And you'll see how this plays out in the book of Acts as we go.

But as the church looks at Jesus, the Spirit increases our love and regard for Jesus and that motivates the church to proclaim Him in boldness, to pray to Him in utter dependence, and to practice His life.

To go out and serve the world. But it all comes by witnessing Jesus. First of all, by looking at Him. I need to close, but let me just ask a question as we end.

How will our lives change when the book of Acts gets in us? Or how will our life change when we see that Jesus really is not only the center of this text, but the center of the world and the center of our lives?

[22 : 00] Three things will happen. We will grow in faith, hope, and love. First of all, hope, just because I want to take them out of order. You'll grow in hope.

I think I'm right. We live in a pretty fearful world, don't we? I mean, we're afraid of all kinds of things. We're afraid of the economy, we're afraid of the environment, we're afraid of death, we're afraid of finding out that life is really meaningless after all, we're afraid of losing relationships, we're just afraid.

When the book of Acts gets inside you, and if you begin to see how Jesus' resurrection really guarantees that God will really restore the world at the end, then you'll begin to see that nothing is ultimately uncertain in your life.

What do I mean by that? When you look at Jesus, you'll see that the only failure that really matters can't touch you, not when you're with Him. And you'll realize when you're looking at Jesus that the only future that really matters is certain as long as you're with Him.

It will increase your hope, it will address your fears, it'll increase your hope, it'll increase your love.

[23 : 19] We already talked about this a little bit. But we live in a world that is desperate for relationship. relationship. And when the Spirit comes upon you, and again, we're looking at Jesus and seeing who He really is, and as your love for Him increases and your sense of His love for you increases, then you will realize that He gives you the relationship, the only relationship that can truly satisfy your desires.

And that's what made the church so compelling in the book of Acts. I mean, it's their love for Jesus and their love for one another, it just stood out in the early years.

Look at how they love each other. Hope, love, and then faith. I mean, we know that we live in a culture that is very suspicious of any kind of religious message.

We're afraid of manipulation. We, and so we're very subtle and we're very quiet, very cautious about speaking, sharing openly anything.

But when you begin to see the hope that Jesus gives you and when you sense the love that He pours out in your heart through the Spirit, then you will realize that Jesus really is the solution to the world's biggest problems.

[24 : 44] and it, and it increases the faith. It increases courage. It increases courage so that you point people not to religion, not even to the church again, although that comes.

It comes, and we'll see that. But you point people first of all to Jesus. And as they look at Him, they will see the one that they desire.

And that's what made the church just so remarkably bold in pluralistic Rome. I'm excited about beginning the book of Acts. And I, I'm certain that Jesus wants to renew us.

And He will renew us when we see that He is really at the center of it all. That He's the center of this text. He's the center of your life. He is the center of history.

And that's how He'll change us. Let's pray. Father, we ask that You would, by Your Spirit, come and focus our attention upon Jesus.

[25 : 52] Will You grant us to adore Him? Will You grant us to be so filled with Your Spirit that we may indeed be humble and joyful witnesses to Him?

We ask this for Your glory, for the good of the church, for the extension of Your kingdom. Amen. Amen. Dear Father, we thank You for what we've just seen in the book of Acts.

We've spent a year now looking through Luke, learning about Your gift to us in Jesus Christ. We sent Him.

He came and died for our sins on the cross. And that is shown in so many amazing and powerful ways. And we thank You for that.

And we look forward to learning through the book of Acts, which, as Jim has told us, is a continuation of Jesus' work in the world. Father, we pray that You would humble us and send us and send us and send us Your Spirit throughout this year and that through Your Word, specifically in the book of Acts, that we would come to be Your people and we would grow in our walks with You.

[27 : 20] We thank You for the Acts Day, which happened yesterday, where David Short gave us the big outline of the book of Acts. We just look forward to it with excitement and pray that Your Word would cut into our hearts.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. Father, at the beginning of the year, we are made aware of the many blessings You pour down upon us.

You have given us so many good things. We live in an amazing city, a beautiful city. We have food to eat, clothes to wear, houses to live in, and we thank You for all that.

And more than a city, Father, You've given us a church where we can come, their friendly faces. Your Word is proclaimed and we thank You for that. But, Father, let us not forget the most important thing that You've given to us.

You have given us salvation. We have Jesus Christ and our eyes quickly fall away from Him because we're sinful and we forget about Him.

[28 : 24] But, Father, send us Your Spirit so we could, once again, fall before You in repentance and know that You have given us Your Son and by that we will be saved.

Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. As we approach the book of Acts, we understand more and more about how Jesus is the Lord of the church.

In particular, Father, He's the Lord of our church and we pray that He would be the focus of everything that happens here. We pray for the evening service. We heard earlier about home groups.

We thank You that we can come together in groups and study Your Word and have a friendship to do that in. We pray that You would bless those and that through that growth would come.

We also pray for the decision in the court case which is coming up soon. Father, we commend this building into Your hands and no matter what happens, You will work it out for the best and through it we will grow and we just pray that You will be glorified in this city through us.

[29 : 42] Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer. And finally, Father, we pray for Your wider mission. You have Your hand at work in this world and the primary way You work is through the church.

We pray for Your wider church. We thank You that we can be part of the global Anglican communion. Father, we pray that Your Word will continue to be proclaimed day by day, week by week in the churches to the world and that through that Your glory will be brought to everywhere.

We pray in particular for our sister churches in Malawi. We thank You that we have the opportunity to be in fellowship with people who, although are poor in money, they are rich in spirit and they show us the things that are important.

We pray for the continuing growth of that relationship and pray that they too would grow in Your Son through the Spirit. We pray all this in Your name. Amen. And we finish by praying the prayer that our Savior Christ has taught us.

Let's pray together. Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

[31 : 07] Give us today our daily bread. forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Well friends, we're now going to move into a time of continued singing and we'll receive