

"The Mission of The King"

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[0:00] Well, good morning, friends. This morning we're starting a new sermon series in the book of Acts. So would you turn with me to Acts chapter 1. Acts chapter 1. We're going to look at the first 14 verses of Acts chapter 1 today.

So let me pray as we come to God's Word together. Father, we thank You for this morning. God, thank You for Your Spirit who dwells so powerfully among us, and thank You that He has given us a Word through which, God, You continue to speak.

So as we come to Your Word this morning, Father, we ask that we would see not just truths to believe or things to do, but we pray that we would see You in all Your glory, that we would see Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in all of His beauty and grace, in all of His power and sovereignty, and that by Your Spirit we would be formed and transformed as followers of Him. We pray this in His mighty name. Amen.

All right, Acts chapter 1. Let me read 1 through 14 for us. Acts begins like this. In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.

He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, 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 with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

[1:46] So when they had come together, they asked Him, Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it is not for You to know 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 all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the zealot, and Judas the son of James.

All these, with one accord, were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers. Where are we going?

[3:12] Are we there yet? Are you sure we don't need to pull over and ask for directions? These are some typical questions you might hear on a family car ride.

Of course, no one really asks for directions anymore, right? Because now we have GPSs on all of our phones. Now, of course, in the confines of a minivan, such questions can become a bit irksome. But on the whole, they are good questions.

And not just when you're packed into the car for a weekend road trip. Where are we going? It's a good question to ask of one's life, is it not?

And here we are this morning on the brink of a new season, right? For some of us, it's the start of a fresh semester at school. For others, you've moved to New Haven for the start of a new job.

For others, you've welcomed the addition of a new family member. Perhaps you've just arrived to New Haven from another part of the country or another part of the world. Or perhaps you've been

around for some time and are just feeling the air of newness as well.

[4:15] And in this season, it's right to be asking, where am I going? What am I going to be about? What direction will I take?

And of course, it's not just a new season for many of us individually, but also for us as a church, it's the start of a new season. As another school year begins, it's another ministry year for us that's beginning. And so, for us now, it's right to be asking, where are we going?

What are we going to be about? What are we going to be about? So, both individually and corporately, there's a great opportunity before us. An opportunity to set our sights afresh on what God will have us be and do.

An opportunity to kind of get down to the essentials, to sort of clear the barnacles off the hull and to open up the sails and to hit the open water with fresh vigor and purpose and direction.

You see, in any congregation and in any Christian's life, really, there's a danger of kind of falling into what we might call maintenance mode, right?

[5:27] Of settling into a kind of comfortable status quo. But what we see in the book of Acts is the church on a mission.

A church that's not comfortable or complacent, but on the move. But, of course, the shift from kind of maintenance to mission is not easy, right?

Often, we don't like change. We don't like to step out of our comfort zone. But, in addition, it can be a little dangerous. We can rush forward without the proper kind of biblical moorings and priorities.

We can go forth with a frenetic urgency and passion and then quickly lose heat and lose heart.

There will be a lot of talk, a lot of running around, a lot of activity, but no real lasting fruit.

We can launch our ship from the harbor with excitement, with enthusiasm. But if the compass is off just a few degrees, we'll find ourselves eventually lost at sea. Discouraged.

[6:32] Frustrated. Thirsty. But if we come again to the Bible and listen to what God is telling us about our identity to God.

So, what do we learn then? What do we learn about our mission as a church, this mission of the King, from this passage? Well, I want to point out four things this morning that we learn about our mission from this passage.

The first thing we see is what we might call the nature of our mission. What is the nature of our mission? Well, Jesus says in verse 8, you'll be my witnesses, right?

Now, words like witness or testimony, they can often have sort of a religious ring to them these days, right? We often talk about someone giving their testimony in a church service. But instead, picture yourself when you hear this word in a courtroom.

Someone's on trial. Someone's on trial. And you're called to the stand because you've seen, heard, or experienced something that's relevant to the case.

[7:45] In other words, you're a witness and you're being asked to give your testimony. These words have that same kind of courtroom connotation here in Acts.

The apostles have seen and heard and experienced something. And Jesus is telling them that now they're going to share it, to state it, to testify to it.

And that's the first reason why, if we think about it, the first reason why the nature of the church's mission is witness.

The first reason why is because Christianity is, first and foremost, about what Jesus Christ has done in history. What he's done objectively, such that people could see him with their eyes and hear him with their ears and even touch him with their hands.

It wasn't just a subjective kind of religious experience that they had. Luke kind of goes out of his way, doesn't he, to make this clear in our passage. In verse 3 he says, There is, friends, a kind of facticity to the Christian message of Jesus.

[9:17] And that's why the nature of our mission is one of witness. Because at its root, it's built upon something that men and women had seen and heard and touched and experienced.

And what that means is that Christianity offers itself for genuine investigation. Christianity doesn't ask you to sort of suspend your reason when considering Christ.

In fact, just the opposite. It invites you to come to the Gospels with all your mental faculty sharpened and to ask the tough questions. Friend, don't think that Christianity is threatened by questions.

In fact, it welcomes them. So if we are being true to the nature of our mission, to testify, to witness, to the Christ who acted in history, then our church should be a place where more and more people are asking some genuine questions and seeking honest answers.

But, you know, there's a second reason why the nature of our mission is witness. It's witness. It's this.

[10 : 30] The reason why the nature of our mission is witness is because Christianity is not primarily something that we do, but something Christ has done for us.

Therefore, witness testifying to something outside of us has to be the essential nature of this mission. Think about it. If Christianity were basically a list, right, of rules that we had to keep, then Christ would have said to the apostles, okay, you're going to be my police officers to keep people in line, right?

Or I'm sending you out as judges to evaluate how people are doing. But instead, Jesus says, you're going to be my witnesses because I, Jesus, have accomplished all that's necessary to reconcile sinners to God.

So we testify to what Jesus has done at its core. And what does that mean?

If we're witnessing to something that Christ has done, not something that we have to perform or upkeep. Well, friends, it means that our mission needs to be marked.

[11 : 49] It must be marked. It will be marked by genuine humility. Now, not the kind of humility that's sort of never certain whether anything is true or not, right?

That's not the kind of humility we're talking about. Rather, we're talking about the kind of humility that realizes our own ability and ambitions are not what matter at the end of the day.

This is the kind of humility that realizes we have nothing in ourselves to boast about. This is the kind of humility that sort of forgets itself and focuses on the greatness of Christ.

So, this is the first thing we see, that the nature of our mission as a church is witness. It's testifying to Christ. Second, let's consider the scope of this mission that we have, the scope of our mission.

In verse 8, Jesus says to the apostles, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In short, what we see here is that the scope of the mission of Jesus for His church is worldwide.

[13 : 03] Now, consider just a moment what this verse is telling us about God. In short, it's telling us that God is faithful to His promises, actually, if you were to hear this sort of commission of Jesus in light of the Old Testament, right?

God is faithful to His promises. You know, one way to think about Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria here is that that was the kind of old geographic extent of ancient Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, God said that He would bring His salvation to His people, to His Old Testament people, to Israel. And now Jesus is saying to the apostles, you're going to be the witness bearers of salvation to the Jewish people. You're going to be my witnesses to them. But, you see, it goes further than that. Just like the Old Testament pushed further than that. Because God's salvation wasn't just for ethnic Israel. It was a salvation that God had planned through Israel for everyone to the ends of the earth. Even sometimes when it made us a little uncomfortable, made the apostles a little uncomfortable. In the first century, you'll remember that Samaria was sort of that region sort of north of Jerusalem and Judea.

[14 : 08] It was a place where people who were kind of multi-ethnic lived. They were half Jewish, half Gentile. Their religious beliefs were sort of an amalgam of some Old Testament beliefs, but some beliefs imported in from other cultures.

And because of that, Samaritans were despised by many Jews of Jesus' day. But the gospel was for them too. And then it pushes even further out.

The ends of the earth, Jesus says. Right? To the ends of the earth, which is inclusive of all ethnicities, and all cultures, and all language groups.

And again, in the Old Testament, God had promised that through the Messiah, He would bring His salvation to all people, to the ends of the earth.

That the Messiah, when He came, wouldn't just be Israel's King, but He would be the world's true Lord. That He would bring God's kingdom, that is God's saving rule, God's world-healing reign, and then across the globe, to the ends of the earth, even all the way to the ends of the earth, right here in New Haven.

[15:24] Have you considered, friends, from the perspective of Jerusalem, we are like in the far-flung reaches of nowhere, right here in New Haven, right? And yet, lo and behold, God's faithful to His promise.

Here we are, hearing the message of His salvation. Now, incidentally, this verse here that we're looking at, it kind of provides a rough outline of the book of Acts, if you think about it.

In the book of Acts, what we're going to see is that chapters 1 through 7 deal with the apostles' witness in Jerusalem. And then in 8 through 12, we consider Judea and Samaria. And then in chapters 13 through 28, we see the gospel beginning to go to the ends of the earth.

Or at least it makes it all the way to Rome, which was the center of the empire at the time. Now, this scope of the mission that we see here, what does it tell us?

It tells us about the universality of the gospel, right? The Christian message is good news for everyone. No matter what country or culture you're from, the message about Jesus is the message that you desperately need and that God graciously offers.

[16:40] Now, of course, that's the thing that kind of trips many of us up when they consider Christianity, right? How could you say that Christianity is the truth for everybody? Sounds a little exclusive or intolerant, right?

There can't just be one answer for everyone, right? We think that. And yet, friends, what if? What if as humans, there were one problem that we all shared? One problem that we all experienced and acknowledged and spent our whole lives living under, many of us spend our whole lives ignoring, right?

What if there was one problem we all experienced and what if there were one person who actually overcame that problem? What if there was someone who actually defeated that problem for good? Wouldn't you want to share the news about that person with everyone? Wouldn't you want to commend that person to everyone you know?

I mean, think about it. You listen to a podcast, it gives you some, like, hot takes on how to improve your sleep, and you're like, you've got to hear this, right? But, friends, there is someone who has come who has solved the problem of human existence.

[17:53] Because, listen, each of us is going to die one day. It is the universal problem, and there's only one person who's ever overcome death, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He rose from the dead never to die again. Why? Because in His death and resurrection, He defeated the cause of death, which is sin, the very thing that separates us from God, the life giver of all things, and separated from God through our own waywardness and idolatry, we die.

And yet, Jesus has overcome that and risen from the dead. He has conquered death. No other great world leader or religious figure can make such a claim.

Right? If Christ has risen, then surely all people should know about Him, should they not? Both here in our Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, as we might say, and to the ends of the earth.

The scope of this mission shows us not just God's lordship over all cultures and people groups, but the scope of this mission tells us about God's love for all cultures and all people groups.

[19:15] All the earth is His. God doesn't play favorites. His grace extends to everyone who will receive it, no matter what their background or language or ethnicity. All are welcome to come to Christ and receive the newness of life that He offers.

Now let me say just a quick word of application before moving on to the third point. First, Trinity, our church, we want to be a church that continues to invest in the global mission of the church.

The work of God in the world is so much bigger than what's happening here in New Haven. So friends, take some time to learn about the missionaries that we support. Pray for them in your quiet time in your small group.

But second, we need to continually remind ourselves of how strategically we are placed as a church to impact the worldwide mission of the church.

People come to New Haven from all around the world. Some people come to New Haven even from countries where Christianity is illegal, where Christians are persecuted, and where most people have little or no exposure to Christ, and God providentially brings them here right into our backyard, as it were, right into our apartment complexes and our residence halls.

[20:31] And all this means, what it means is that you and I here can reach the ends of the earth with the gospel without having to walk to the end of our street. Right?

Let me be somewhat direct. Do not think that God brought you to New Haven simply so you can get an education, or work for a few years, and then move on.

God brought you to New Haven to be a part of His kingdom work. So whether you're going to be here for four months and move on, or four years and move on, or whether you're going to be here for the rest of your life, join a church, get in on the action, and don't miss out.

The scope of this mission is worldwide, and the world's right here, right at our doorstep, ready to hear the good news. So that's the scope of the mission.

Third, we see in this passage not just the nature and the scope of the mission, we see the power, the power of mission. Now at this point you might be thinking, how in the world can I, can we, possibly do this?

[21:40] Right? The first obvious problem, given the nature of our mission as witnesses, is that we aren't eyewitnesses of Christ, right? The apostles, whom Jesus chose, are fundamentally different than anyone else who came after them because they were literal eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ, of His ministry, of His death, of His resurrection, and of His ascension.

We aren't witnesses in the same way the apostles were witnesses. In what sense then can we be witnesses at all? Right? And second, given the immensity of the scope of the mission to the ends of the earth, how can we possibly even make a dent in that?

It seems overwhelming. Well friends, the answer, actually, to both of those problems is found in verses 4 and 5 and in the first half of verse 8.

In a few days, Jesus told His disciples, you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And in verse 8, He says, you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

The Holy Spirit, God Himself, the third person of the Trinity, the Lord, the giver of life, as the Creed says, the Holy Spirit is the power of our mission.

[22:52] Now, we're not going to go into all of the detail we could concerning the Holy Spirit this morning because His ministry is going to unfold as we walk through Acts this year. And if you want to go even deeper, you can come to the adult ed class starting next week at 9 o'clock.

We're going to explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit in more depth. But for now, here's the relevant point that Jesus is pulling out in the context of mission. Jesus is promising that the Holy Spirit will come upon His disciples in abundance and they will be empowered by the Spirit to carry out this mission.

Think about that word baptize, right? Baptize means to immerse something, to plunge something underwater. And Jesus promises them that in a few days they're going to be plunged into the Spirit's presence and power.

Just like the prophets, like Joel and Isaiah and Ezekiel had promised, just like John the Baptist had promised, the Holy Spirit was going to flood their lives, as it were.

Now, of course, again, these earliest disciples, especially the apostles, they occupied a unique place, right, in the history of redemption. They had a unique place. I mean, one of the ways in which they were unique, right, is that they were followers of Jesus before Jesus had completed His redemptive work and before He inaugurated the New Covenant.

[24:12] So they sort of received the Holy Spirit in New Covenant fullness after they had already become disciples of Jesus, as it were, right? But today, we are in the position living on this side of Pentecost that we are baptized with the Spirit, we are flooded with His presence upon our conversion to Christ, upon receiving Him.

Now, we can experience fillings with the Spirit, no doubt, right? These fillings can range in depth and duration, but friend, every genuine New Testament Christian has been baptized, so to say, with the Holy Spirit.

Now, what does that mean? Well, it means a lot. It means that God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is present to believers today in a real, personal, and powerful way through the Holy Spirit.

we may not be eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection like the apostles were, but we have their eyewitness testimony preserved for us in the New Testament, and that Spirit-inspired written witness still speaks today.

And moreover, we have the same Spirit dwelling in us as in them, so today, we may not be able to physically experience the risen Jesus, but we can still no less experience His spiritually transformative power through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

[25:40] We can hold forth the apostolic testimony and witness to our own experience of the risen Lord Jesus at work in our lives through His Spirit.

But what are the power Jesus promises? It is true that on our own, we are too weak to carry out our mission, but God has given us exactly what we need.

Zechariah 4, 6 says, not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts, right? So the question is, and the question we have to ask ourselves is, what power are we relying on to fulfill our mission?

At the end of the day, are we relying on our clever intellect? Do we think we can argue or reason people into the kingdom of God? Are we depending on our kind disposition?

Do we think that if we're super nice to people, we'll win them to Christ? Are we relying on massive programs or flashy technology to produce spiritual transformation?

[26:50] Friends, listen, all that stuff has its place. God wants you to use your mind. God wants you to use your love. God wants you to use the tools at your disposal to witness Him, but the truth is, none of that is going to do a hill of beans without the Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit shining the light of the glory of Jesus into our hearts. Without that ministry, the Holy Spirit, we can argue and we can love and we can program all we want and it won't make a difference.

But here's the good news. Just as Jesus promised, the Spirit's power is at work in us. We can rely on Him in our speaking, in our loving, in our planning to do the real work of changing hearts through those means.

And what does that power look like? You know, when we think about the power of the Holy Spirit today, we immediately tend to think of the so-called sort of miraculous gifts, things like healing or speaking in tongues and prophecy.

And we're going to talk about those as we go in the book of Acts. But can I share with you one of, I think, one of the key passages about the Holy Spirit's power in the New Testament?

[28:07] It's from Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 through 19. And it says this. It's actually a prayer of the Apostle Paul. Paul says, Oh, why?

For what? So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints.

Notice the power language? Strength to comprehend what? What is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

When the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, how do we know? It's when Christ dwells in our hearts. It's when the love of Christ shines forth in all of its multi-dimensionality, its height, its depth, its length, its breadth, when we're filled with all that fullness of God's grace and love for us. That's the Holy Spirit's power at its core. When instead of our hearts being caught up with false gods, right? When instead of that, Christ dwells there.

[29:52] When instead of seeing the love of Christ as a small thing, we gape and we gasp and our intellect reaches its limit because of the immensity of Christ's love for us.

We know something that surpasses knowledge. In short, the Spirit is powerfully at work, not just when there are signs and wonders, but when our hearts are filled with the assurance of the love of Jesus in the gospel.

When we know that Jesus has forgiven our sins and reconciled us to God, when the reality of that washes over us, then we will speak and we will serve with extraordinary boldness, just like the early church.

Friends, that is the power of our mission. The power of our mission is the Holy Spirit. All right, fourth, finally, last point.

What is the end? What's the end of our mission? Well, the end of our passage, well, the end of the passage about the ascension shows us that there is a hope to our mission.

[31:12] We're going somewhere. We're headed in a direction. There's actually an end, a goal of our journey. And that end, that goal, is what?

It is the kingdom-restoring, world-renewing return of Jesus Christ. This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven. Now, of course, we don't know when Christ will return to restore all things, and there's no use speculating about the end, right? Jesus tells us the Father has set the time by His own authority,

and it's not for us to know. It's funny how often in the history of the church we've sort of ignored that very clear command of Jesus, right?

But we know that Christ will return, and when He does, He will restore and renew all things. Brothers and sisters, here's how our story ends. Here's how the story of Trinity Baptist Church ends. Here's how the story of your life ends if you're a believer in Jesus. God wins. The church prevails.

[32 : 29] And of course, it doesn't look often like that's going to be the case. The world's full, right, of injustice and unbelief. The church faces persecution from without, dissension from within.

At times, we are tempted, just like the apostles who witnessed Jesus' ascension, to just kind of stand here gazing into the sky. Do you wonder what must have been going through their minds that day when Jesus ascended to the Father's presence?

Certainly one part amazement, to be sure. Wonder? Awe? But I wonder if it was another part confusion. In fear and maybe doubt. Because what the ascension meant was that Christ was returning to the Father definitively.

That the 40 days of His appearing to them, teaching them, being with them after the resurrection was coming to a close, coming to its conclusion, its consummation as He was going to be enthroned in heaven.

He was no longer going to be present with them physically and that probably scared them a little bit. How on earth were they going to make it without Him? So they gaze longingly into the sky, partially afraid that with Jesus gone to heaven they would be abandoned and alone.

[33 : 49] But the angels remind them that the end is secure. After all, Jesus is not abandoning them.

Did you notice in the first verse of this passage that we read, the first verse of Acts, Luke sort of starts this book which is the second part, right, of a two-part work that Luke wrote.

The first one we call the Gospel of Luke or better, the Gospel according to Luke and then he wrote the book of Acts. And Luke says, kind of picking up his second volume, he sort of looks back at his first volume, the Gospel of Luke and says, well, my first volume I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

And what's the implication? That this second volume is going to be about all that Jesus continued to do and teach. You see, the ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand means that He is enthroned as the King of the whole creation.

And the ascended King Jesus has poured out His Spirit on the church so that His work might continue through them. And moreover, Jesus Himself, this same Jesus, will return to bring all things to their conclusion.

[35 : 09] So no matter what the present holds, we know how the story ends. There's no need to sort of wistfully gaze at the sky longing for the good old days, right?

Or despairing at our perceived weakness and in abilities. Friends, Christ is on the throne at the Father's right hand when it says, a cloud took Him up.

What are clouds in Scripture, right? He wasn't talking about a collection of moisture in the sky, right? Clouds in Scripture are manifestations of the presence of God's glory.

Like the cloud that followed the people through the wilderness, like the cloud that came down in the temple, like the cloud that was there when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. Jesus, when He ascends visibly before His apostles, is taken up into the glory of God to take His place as the King of all.

Christ is on the throne at the Father's right hand. His Spirit has been poured out on us. And He's going to return in glory to draw all things together when He returns. Sure, along the way, we will face setbacks and discouragements and disappointments.

[36 : 16] There will be times when it seems like the mission feels a little futile, but remember, the end of the mission is not dependent on us. Just as God's grace sets our mission in motion at the beginning and keeps it burning with the light of the Spirit, so God's grace will bring it to completion when Christ returns.

So friends, with that hope before our eyes and God's Spirit in our hearts, don't you see this mission that we're on? It cannot fail. Let's pray.

Father, we ask that by Your Spirit that You would renew our minds and our hearts with Your grace so that we might receive fresh boldness and wisdom to faithfully witness to Jesus, our resurrected

and ascended King.

Jesus, we praise You. Thank You for Your ministry. It certainly didn't stop when You ascended to Your rightful throne. But Lord, thank You that You continue Your work extending Your reign of grace and peace through the outpouring of Your Spirit, through the proclamation of Your saving work in the Gospel.

Father, we pray that as we study Acts this year that You would shape our minds and our hearts, that You would capture our wills and fire our imaginations to live as Your people, people of the risen King, witnesses to Your kingdom and grace.

[37:46] Pray this in Your mighty name, Jesus. Amen. Amen.