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Acts 1:1-11

"The Purpose and Power of the Church"

October 18, 2017

Let's open our Bibles to Acts 1:1. This is my favorite book in the Bible. Any book we're doin' on Wednesday night is my favorite book of the Bible. No, this is really one of my favorite books in the Bible. I have a few. Sixty-six or so. (Laughing)

But it provides for us both the purposes and the plan of God for the church, and you get to see, chronicled out before you, the history of God's beginning work amongst His people - both in terms of what they accomplished and how they did it. Acts tells the church how the church should behave. It gives us marching orders, as far as a church, as what should be emphasized when we gather together. It is the divine, if you will, blueprint for every local body of believers. And if the church, or a church, is not following this pattern, it really finds itself far removed from what God wants to do. It is a book about body ministry because everybody has a part to play. It is a book about personal evangelism and corporate mission. It is the vital nature of church planting and how important it is to the spreading of the gospel. It is a book about the power of the Holy Spirit, a lesson that we cannot take too seriously to heart. We have to get that through our heads. The church exists because He does. There is little left to wonder, if you are interested, about church government, church oversight, church emphasis. It is all found in this wonderful book. It is God's Word. It is the last word on determining how we should live in our generation.

If you compare the Old Testament to the New, there're a lot of similarities. The book of Genesis is really the book of beginnings, and so are the gospels in the New Testament. It is the beginning work of God's salvation laid out before us. The book of Exodus, the leading of the people out of the land of Egypt and the land of bondage, is really equivalent to the book of Acts. It is the bringing of souls out of the world and into the kingdom of God. The birth of the church is found here. Leviticus is kind of equivalent to Paul's epistles, their teaching on life and how God would have us to live it. Numbers is really equivalent to the wilderness epistles that you find in the New Testament - James and Peter and John and Jude. They all deal with the crises of life and the difficulty of living and walking in that life. And Deuteronomy really equals itself to the book of Revelation because now there's the consummation and the entering in of the people into the Land of Promise.

So, Acts is really the history of the church in about thirty years, really, is all. But it is, much of it, told from the personal perspective, first-person personal perspective. Luke will join Paul in his travels in Acts 16, and you will see the changes in pronouns as, instead of "they" and "them," it's "we" and "us." And for the most part, Luke will stay with Paul through all of his imprisonments in Caesarea and in Rome.

The first chapter of the book of Acts connects completely with the end of Luke's gospel. He wrote both volumes. You have volume 1 and volume 2. This is the sequel to the gospel of Luke, if you will. And where Luke ends in his gospel (the ascension of Jesus that he concludes with), he picks up on here; and then the promise of God to send His Holy Spirit. And so, it is a seamless kind of carrying forth of Luke's account.

It is a vital book, I think, for the church to know. It marks the course of the church that I think has been forsaken oftentimes by churches; that we're not so interested in the Lord's work or the Holy Spirit's moving, or even the goal that God sets for the church - that somehow we made a left turn somewhere, and we desperately need to get back on this track because Acts really calls us to be faithful and to be bold and to be continually dependently joyful in the work that God is doing in our midst by His Spirit.

Knowing Acts I think will keep you from getting sidetracked as a body. There's a lot of stuff that the church is into today that the Bible isn't, nor is the Lord very interested in. And yet we find churches that are spearheading things that have nothing to do with the gospel, having nothing to do with the teaching of God's Word. We're just getting kind of turned aside, and we lay aside the one thing that will help a needy world - the gospel of Jesus.

When we read through this book (and I hope you'll be with us on Wednesday nights while we go through it), you might want to write in the margin (as you observe) and ask yourself the question - what kind of person does God use? Because this book will say to you, "Here's the kind of life He uses, and this is the kind of life that God will bless, and this is the kind of power that you will find in the life of someone dedicated to the Lord." And just as you're reading through, make a mark for yourself - here's a qualification or a characteristic of the life that God uses. Because Acts is a remarkable testimony of a work that is far beyond man's capability, far beyond man's best. It is far beyond the wisest intellect and the

wisdom that anyone might possess. When they talked about Jesus in the gospels, they said of him (in Matthew 13:54), "Where does this Man's wisdom come from? And His powerful works?" The same question is asked by the world in the lives of the early saints (Acts 17:6). "Where are these men who have turned the world upside down? Who are they?" And you would hope that the world would still be looking at you and me tonight, saying the same thing. Not shaking their heads at your position but wondering where your power lies and where your strength has come from. "The Acts of the Apostles" is the official name of the book. I think it literally could be called "The Ongoing Acts of Jesus Through the Power and Through the Anointing of the Spirit Upon the Lives of Those Who Look to Him." That's a long title, I know. But I think it better describes what you read in the story. I hope that you will see yourself as the next link in one that stretches all the way back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century because God's work has been uninterrupted. Every generation God picks up, and He begins to work. He works with the same interest: this Age of Grace and His love that has been set before us, and the salvation that is free.

We will try to go slow enough to soak it all up. I hope you'll be with us on the journey. I don't think you'll be sorry. "Unless the LORD builds the house, they're laboring in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1), and yet God has a work that He wants to do in us.

So tonight, eleven verses beginning in verse 1, "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." "The former account." Here's how the book of Luke starts out, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." That's how the book of Luke begins and then follows a long report of the ministry of Jesus. If you add this report ("the former account"), and now this account, by volume, Luke wrote 25% of the New Testament - just by volume. I know there're a lot of books, but his two books take up 25% of the entire New Testament. Theophilus is a Greek word that simply means a friend or a lover of God. It really isn't somebody's name. It is a descriptive term. It might be a pseudonym or a nickname, no doubt someone who loved the Lord. That's what he's called. Obviously a good friend of Luke. It is hard to know who this man is,

although there are plenty of Bible teachers that will tell you who he is. I won't bother to bring them up because I'm not sure any of them are right, and I can't really be convinced in looking at what their arguments are. But I will say this to you - notice that in Luke's account, he calls this man "most excellent Theophilus." The words "most excellent," at least in Luke's day, were a title of honor that was given to, usually, Romans who were in charge of something or were in powerful places of leadership and oversight, a high Roman office. That would be the proper title. In fact, if you go through Acts 23, when Claudius Lysias wrote his letter to Felix the governor, he called him "most excellent governor Felix." By the time you get to Acts, and it is certainly a few years later, notice that the title is left off. So he's just called Theophilus now, not "most excellent." He now just has the title of being a lover of God. The conjecture amongst most people is that this fellow had come to know the Lord, and so he wasn't really so interested any longer in his position in the world as he was in being known as someone that loved the Lord. That's plausible, although not defendable. We don't know. The consensus of opinion about Theophilus is that, as a high-ranking Roman official, Luke was probably his slave. Wealthy men in the Roman Empire had doctors (of which Luke was one) as employees in their households. And if that is the case, then Luke probably was sent out by him later to travel with Paul - where he was gone for years. It would have been an expensive venture. This doctor might very well have afforded it, and if that's so, then Luke kept for him a record and wrote it all out longhand - the report of Jesus and all that he did and the birth of the church.

I'll tell you what I'm intrigued by, even though some of this stuff is conjecture as to who he might be. What isn't conjecture is that Luke put in an enormous amount of time and effort into writing to one man to convince him about who God was. Right? That's the way he starts the book of Luke. "I want to tell you what we believe. I want to convince you of what you've been taught in but yet what we have sold ourselves out to." And these two long, long epistles, if you will, writings by Luke, were Luke's effort to just share the Lord with a guy that he cared about. Now, I'm sure that Luke was not at all aware that the Lord was going to pick these up and include them in His greatest hits here in the Bible. He was just writin' to one guy, which begs the question - how far will you go in personal evangelism to communicate the gospel to one person? Because he wrote an enormous amount. This would have taken him weeks and months and years to write. Right? He took exceptionally good notes, he laid it out with very good clarity, he was obviously a well-educated guy. But he puts all of his efforts into one person which, if you compare the ministry of Jesus, Jesus did, too. You can do studies in the gospels,

for years, on the ministry of Jesus to an individual. He put a lot of time into people - whether it was the woman at the well or the rich young ruler or Nicodemus, who came at night, or Zacchaeus, who was up a tree, or the fact that He would leave the ninety-nine to go get the one and secure it in its faith. I mean, Jesus does the same thing; and, here, Luke does all of this for one individual. And you might just say to yourself, "How far will I go, how much will I do, how much will I sacrifice or invest in the bringing of the gospel to one individual in my life? How much will I invest in that effort?" So, Luke writes these two very long reports of the birth of Jesus and then the work of the early church because the work of the ministry is perfected in individual discipleship. In other words, God's greatest work is when He uses you to help establish someone else in their faith. And that's exactly what Luke is doing here.

Notice, in verse 1, that as he begins this second epistle, he says to his friend, "Look, this is everything that Jesus began both to do and teach." That was his first account. That was the first thing. Luke wrote the gospel account as the beginning of the work of Jesus. Jesus said to His disciples (in John 14:12), "He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." Jesus Himself said to the people, "This is just the beginning of things." His salvation, His work, His ministry was not the end of things; it was certainly just the beginning of the church, the work that God desired to do through the church. And this work of God goes well beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It travels all the way to our generation. The fields are still white unto harvest. The church will continue to do what God is interested in - getting the gospel of His Son to a lost generation - and that will happen until those last steps begin when the church is removed at the time of the rapture.

I like the fact (and if you think about it, it is kind of a marvelous thought) that God has chosen to accomplish the most important of deeds - saving - through human instruments. In other words, the message that we have we have in these human instruments. Right? That the treasure is in these weak lives so that God might get the glory, sure, but also I wondered, as a young man, whether the Lord ever regretted taking that route. I mean, I look around the church sometimes, and I think, "Well, what in the world?! There's ten people knockin' on doors to share and nine hundred people running in late and runnin' out early. Lord, what happened here to the church, to the passion?" And not just here. I'm just talkin' in a general sense. The key word is "began" because neither the gospel of Luke or the book of Acts tells the whole story of what God wants to do, of His love and of His grace;

that's still being told. You and I are still telling it. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison, with many believers being murdered for their faith, with many living under absolutely unbelievable persecution, and yet the work of God continues forth, and the church will do that, indeed. But God chooses to use human instruments - treasures in earthen vessels. That's you. And lest you think God can't use you, understand that this is the way He chose to work. When you say to anyone who will listen, "I don't think I can do that," or, "I'm not equipped," or, "I haven't got what it takes," you're just verifying what the Lord said. He's going to put His treasure in earthen vessels. He's gonna use you. "Yeah, but I'm no good." "Yeah, that's right. He's gonna use you." "Yeah, but I'm a failure." "Yep. He's gonna use you." "Yeah, but I ain't got what it takes." "Yep! You're qualified." (Laughing) "I can't do anything!" "Yeah, you're the guy He's lookin' for." Because that's the place He chose to work and the method by which He would work. So God makes it abundantly clear in the book of Acts that the church will continue through the frail and through the weak, and it is one of the most exciting lessons of the book - that God will use us even when we beg off. And Moses begged off, "LORD, I can't speak so good." Or Jeremiah said, "Well, I'm only 16 years old. I'm a punk. Nobody's gonna listen to a punk." But in the LORD you can and you must be used by God's Spirit. I remember when I was hired (in 1980) as a full-time pastor. They assigned me to an older pastor that was to help disciple me, and, on the first day at work, he said to me, "By the time six months have passed, you're going to wonder how the church survives at all." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Just look at the idiots you're gonna be working with." (Laughing) And he was right. He was right. We shouldn't survive. But we do because God, by His Spirit, has chosen to use this method through which He will work.

Now notice the order. This former letter (the gospel of Luke) I have made for you, friend of God - lover of God, of all that Jesus began (because it's still continuing). But here's the order - He began to do, and He began to teach. I just want to point that out to you, that it is always in that order. The divine order of things is always the same - you do and then you teach. Just think about raising your kids. You can't really say, "Do as I say, not as I do." It's a hard sell. It is better that you can say, "Do as I do." Right? "Follow my example." So, here, Jesus comes to do, and, as He is doing, He comes to teach us. But before we can be poured out, God has to pour into us. Practice first. Preach second. When David was found out (after a year of hiding his sin with Bathsheba), and he came and he was so sorry, he finally said (in Psalm 51:12-13), "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors

Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You." "But first, me. Get me close so that, then, I can help others get close to You."

So "Jesus began both to do and teach," verse 2, "until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." So the first letter ends with the ascension; the second letter begins with this outpouring of the promise of the Holy Spirit, "After He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles." For several years, publicly, Jesus had been preparing these men and women for the work that lie ahead. Lots of stuff they didn't understand. You read the gospels, and they literally get to the end, and Philip will say stuff like (John 14:8), "Just show us the Father," and Jesus said, "Really?!!!" I'm pretty sure that's in the original Greek. "Really?!!! Have I been this long with you, Philip, and you're still asking for that?!" There's a lot that they didn't understand. On Easter evening, they were born again; they were given the Holy Spirit. Life began in their hearts. Their eyes were opened spiritually. Jesus breathed on them. Luke 24:45, "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures." The Holy Spirit began to move in their hearts, but there's still a lot that they needed to learn. During the time Jesus had risen, for forty days the Lord came and went amongst these believers to show Himself alive after the cross, after the beating, after they had seen and watched Him die. He showed He was alive by many infallible proofs for forty days. So Jesus went out of His way to convince the believers (at least the 120 that are mentioned here; there are many others that are referred to) that He had conquered sin and death, and He revealed Himself to His own. He showed up and spoke to Mary Magdalene in person, spoke to the women at the tomb in person, spent the afternoon of Easter with a couple that were heading home - seven miles out of town to Emmaus. He showed Himself to Peter that day, showed up and spoke to the 120 (minus Thomas) that first Easter evening, came back the next week, showed up and Thomas was with the group. Maybe they had 119, now they had 120 - maybe all the seats were full. He showed Himself to the seven fishermen in Galilee that had decided, at Peter's leading, "Maybe we should just go back to fishing." He showed Himself to five hundred in Galilee, according to the epistles. He showed Himself to James. Look, here's the deal - the church worked because (and one of the secrets of their success was) the disciples were fully convinced that Jesus was alive. So much so that they were willing to go to their deaths rather than to deny it. So these forty days, these six

weeks between Jesus' rising from the dead and His ascension into heaven (which is covered in the next few verses), took place, and they solidified the believing and the trust of the disciples. They were given what the Bible calls "infallible proofs." When the men were threatened with death, they didn't change their story. They didn't change their testimony. They didn't shut their mouths. You wouldn't always see Jesus during these forty days. He kind of just came and went as He pleased. But He had said this to them (Matthew 28:20), "I'll be with you to the end of the age," and whether they saw Him or not, they were sure He was with them. And it sustained them. So much so that this relationship of sight, which had been so prevalent, now needed to be learned that it wasn't going to be that way. What did He say to Mary? (John 23:17), "Don't cling to Me, Mary," or, "Don't choke Me out here. I haven't left yet." But Mary just wanted that relationship. Paul, when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16, said that "From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." But these six weeks in between resurrection and ascension were great for the disciples to have fully become persuaded that the Lord was with them. He ate with them, He appeared, He said, "Touch Me, I have flesh and blood, handle Me." And He gives them proof, and they needed it! If you read Matthew 28, starting about verse 16, there's this meeting that Jesus had with the disciples up in the Galilee, up in the mountains, and it says, "When they saw Him," (the disciples, indeterminate amount of people) "they worshipped Him; but some doubted." Even though they saw Him with their eyes, they were a little bit skeptical. "What in the world is going on here?" And it was then that Jesus said, "I'm going to send you into all the nations, and you can baptize all of them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe everything that I've taught you and commanded you. I'll be with you even to the end of the age." But, even during those forty days, there were a lot of guys who were just still struggling, as you might suspect, with the fact that He was alive. They doubted Him, but they were convinced of Him.

So, these forty days of separation, if you will, nearly six weeks, they were given "infallible proofs." The word "infallible" means without fail or undoubtable or unailing proofs. And here's one of the things - sometimes when someone sees something or they believe something, they can be deceived, and they say so. When people see it together, there is less chance of hysteria or, if you will, some kind of hysterical decision. You get people that say they saw something, but no one else saw it. But here're hundreds of disciples, and they all met Jesus, and they all talked with Him. So the theory that they're just emotionally distraught or they're

talking out of their hats or they want that to happen - it goes away, it's infallible. It comes from independent sources, all of them who experienced it and, for themselves, saw the Lord.

Well, in those forty days (verse 3), not only did He give them "infallible proofs" after His suffering, but during those forty days, He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God. By the way, Jesus' favorite subject. It means a place where God rules in the kingdom. For now, His rule is set up in your heart and mine. One day He will come, and the earth will hold the kingdom of God. We are told to pray, "Thy kingdom come." Well, it's come into your heart, but we want it to come upon the earth. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). Seek being that servant and that person who belongs to God's rulership.

Verse 4, Luke writes, "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" Now, Luke repeats word for word, almost, what you can read in Luke 24, towards the end of the chapter, at that first Easter evening meeting with these 120 hiding in the upper room. Now you might hear this, and you read Jesus speaking to these men and women as He's been risen from the dead, and He said, "I want you to wait. Before you become My mouthpieces, running with the message, telling the world about Me, before you go, I want you to wait here until you receive power" (as He will mention in the next few verses). You read that in the book of Luke (24:49), and you say to yourself, "How in the world does He expect these guys to do that?" These guys were "schmos." They didn't at all seem to be on board. Peter could quickly deny the Lord just by being questioned by a young girl standing at a door. Or a couple of soldiers with guns standing next to him at a fire. I mean, Peter cashed in pretty quickly. Now you gotta go into all the world?! Yeah, that's a bad idea. That's not gonna work. How can he stand before the world? These men were, at best, ill equipped, they were easily demoralized, they hadn't yet stood up under pressure on their own. Whenever there was trouble, Jesus had bailed them out. Had He not bailed them out, they wouldn't have been bailed out at all. And yet, that night Jesus says to them, "Wait for the promise of the Father," which Joel will tell us (in chapter 2:17-21, in a few weeks) is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had oftentimes referred to. He had told them (back in John 14:15), "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may

abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you," but in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Ten verses later (same chapter, John 14), He says this, "It's important to you that I leave because if I don't go away, He won't come." And then He said this of the Comforter. He said, "He's the Holy Spirit. The Father will send Him to you in My name. He'll teach you all things. He'll bring everything back to your remembrance that I've taught you. You need Him. So don't go anywhere. Don't move. Though you are born again - you've received the Holy Spirit, you understand the Scriptures, you're ready to go (you think) - but don't go anywhere." And Luke goes back to that evening of the resurrection (Easter evening) to set up, if you will, from that day forward this march towards the birth of the church. John the Baptist (as Jesus said) had also spoken about baptism in the Holy Spirit with fire. Remember? It's in Matthew 3:11. So here're 120 very weak and fallen individuals who are told to wait and not just venture out on their own, that they were poorly equipped. Even though the Holy Spirit had come to live in them, He said, "I want you to wait here until you" (receive or) "are endued" (is what the word is used) "with power from on high." The word "to be endued" means to be clothed upon. Jesus said to these men and women, "Don't go anywhere until you've got your Holy Spirit jacket on, until He's wrapped around you; and that you have power." It literally was Jesus saying to these guys, "Go, but not yet. Go, but not now. You need the Holy Spirit." That's really how the book of Acts begins for us. For now, you're supposed to wait. They were waiting even though the Holy Spirit was with them and was now in them. They were waiting even though they understood the Scriptures, and things began to make sense. Read John 20, Luke 24. They're both whole chapters on the evening of the resurrection, if you will. And they had a saving message, and they had a passion to go, but they were told to wait for what John said was coming, and Jesus reiterated it; and that was, "Look, the Holy Spirit needs to be upon your life. You need to be baptized in the Spirit."

God would use some of them in the years to come to write the New Testament. All of them had a message to run with. They were encouraged to be bold and courageous and to preach and to be empowered. They had great enthusiasm. There was great zeal. But no willpower could have accomplished this. They needed to wait for God to work. And I think the same is true for us. If you want God to use you, you need the Holy Spirit upon your life. You can't do this on your own. You can't work this up. You can't be excited enough for people to see life from death. They needed Him to be successful. The Lord made it very clear, before He left,

"Don't go anywhere! Don't try it. Don't you try it." "Well, I think I could do it." "No you can't do it!" "I feel like I can." "You can't! Wait right here until you receive the Holy Spirit to enable your service." And the Holy Spirit's presence and work in the lives of the saints is one of the reasons for the success of the early church. Mark that down. They can't succeed. They can't go. They can't move unless the Holy Spirit comes.

Verse 6, jump ahead to day forty. Jump ahead from Easter evening to day forty. "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' " (or to the uttermost parts of the earth). On day forty - the day that the Lord would ascend into heaven - Luke tells us that the boys meeting with Jesus had questions. And one of their questions was, "Are we taking over now?" One of the things that the Jews had been taught for generations was that, as Hebrew kids, the concept of the Messiah was that He would come to rule and reign upon the earth. So when the Messiah came, whoever their oppressors were would be dealt with, and Israel would get to play a large part in the rule, if you will, of the Lord in the days to come. Their hopes were basically still political and very earthly. It will change as the weeks go on, and they will get more than they ever imagined. And this mysterious, this Age of Grace, this Church Age that they didn't see coming would become, for them, the joy of their hearts. The kingdom of heaven, Colossians 1:13 says, will be established within them. But for now all they had to go on was what they'd always learned. "Lord, are we takin' over now? Is this the day? Are we movin' forward?"

A couple of things. Number one - they had a lot to learn. But number two - here're a bunch of men and women who, forty days before, had gotten saved who now find themselves convinced that Jesus has the ability to restore Israel and that He is their Messiah. That they're sure of. They'd like to have a timeframe, they needed a calendar. They want a time schedule. But I want you to notice that Jesus' answer is interesting. He said, "That's not for you to know." Or if you'd like to put it this way, "More important than when is what you do while you're waiting. It's really not yours to know right now. Here's what you should know." And then you go to verse 7, and you go to verse 8. "Here's what you should know. You've got a job to do while you wait for Me to come and establish the kingdom." So, when is the

Lord coming? I don't know. It could be any day. You can beat that to death if you like. But here's the interesting part - we'd better be busy while we wait. Right? We've got a job to do. And when He comes, He should find us doing that job. God's concern should be our concern. And His concern is verses 7 and 8. In the meantime, world evangelism by the power of the Holy Spirit. How concerned are you for world evangelism? I hear people all the time, "Well, the Lord's comin' back. I was readin' this book written by this guy, and I think the moon is in the seventh house, and I'm pretty sure that matters." And they've got all these weird ideas. They spend their lives figuring it out, "It's Gemini, and then I believe.....I think He's comin'!" And then you go, "Have you witnessed to anybody lately? You bothered to support a missionary? Do you send a tract? You go to dinner, do you leave a tract with your tip, or you're just ashamed of your tip?" What are you doin' to reach the world? How are you participating in the work that God says is important for the church - that of reaching the lost? "Will You, at this time, set up Your kingdom?" "Yeah, that's not really for you to know, but here's what you should know. While you wait, get busy." Get busy. Carry your tracts around. I think that all of you - may I encourage you? They cost \$5. Go buy a bag of tracts. Stamp the church address on them if you want. Put your name on them and your phone number. Leave it everywhere you go. God's Word is powerful. It's powerful. People get saved when they hear God's Word. You know that? So just leave it. What do you got to be ashamed of? No, you go out. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Now remember, He said (the Lord said) of the Holy Spirit, "He's been with you." And, according to John 16, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the world is to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Read John 16:7-11. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. He's in the world to convict people of their sin, the sin being that they've set Jesus aside, that they won't believe in Him. So the Holy Spirit is convicting in the world. When you get saved, the Holy Spirit goes from just being with you and convicting you to moving inside your life. You now become a vessel that the Holy Spirit lives within. You become a place where He comes to dwell. You become God's dwelling place. You're born of the Spirit. But there is, after this salvation, this experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and then we find this word "upon." The Holy Spirit comes to fall upon you, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with one really particular reason - to empower you to be a witness for Him. Don't go out to all of these places (in verse 8) until you receive power upon you. But when you do, go out to all of these places. This is now your area of work. So, "Wait," Jesus told them. "Soon you'll be empowered to be a witness for Me by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon your life, and then the work of the saints in the world can begin. Then

you'll be My witnesses." The word is "***martus***," verse 8. It means someone who proclaims and lives what they believe. I know we use the word "martyr," and we mean someone that dies. But in reality, that's true; somebody that dies to themselves and accurately reflects who they're talking about. So a witness, by definition, is someone who believes enough in Jesus to live the kind of life that says "I believe in Him" even if it means you had to give your life for that faith or for that belief. A witness, by definition, is someone that sees something and tells what he knows. Jesus has to save. We cannot. We can be bold, we can be anointed, but they are His Words that we share and His work in us that enables us.

Now, I want you to notice in verse 8 this ever-growing circle of scope in terms of ministry. Because Jerusalem, for the disciples, was their backyard. It was their homes and their families, their communities in which they lived, their neighbors and their friends. Great place to start - in your Jerusalem, wherever that is. Start at home. We have, sometimes, people in the church that will say, "Hey, we're gonna go to Costa Rica," and they go, "Woo! I love Costa Rica!" But they want to go do, in Costa Rica, what they'll never do on Painter Avenue. And if they won't do it on Painter Avenue, they shouldn't be doing it in Costa Rica. Because if it's not in your heart to do it here, you've got no business going there, and you have to question your heart. "Why am I there at all?" So, start at home. Start being that witness for Jesus at home. And the disciples, for an inordinate amount of time, actually, stayed in Jerusalem, and, because they didn't go, the Lord kind of allowed persecution to send them out. Right? Stephen gets killed. Paul showed up with a bad attitude and a desire to kill, everyone scattered. No one would go to Samaria, so Philip went there; running away from the persecution in Jerusalem.

So Jerusalem is your own backyard. Judea is the same country. It's just a different city area. From LA to Orange County or however you look at that. You have the same language, you have the same culture, same environment, pretty much the same government. But Judea was kind of out of town, if you will, a little stretch. You've gone a little further with what God has given you. Samaria was an entirely different culture though it's on the same continent. I mean, the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other. They had deep-seated religious and racial prejudices that had been existing for generations. And, like I said, none of the disciples ended up going there, so the Holy Spirit sends Philip after the persecution in Jerusalem. And he goes there, and he starts doing what the Lord told him. "Start preaching." And he did, by the power of God's Spirit, and people began to get saved right and left, and the news got to Jerusalem, where the

apostles were, and immediately they sent John and Peter down to go, "All right. We can help out." But they didn't go there, initially. But Philip did. So Samaria was a place of different cultural practices, lots of hatred, racial and religious prejudice. And yet they needed to hear the gospel. And finally, the Lord just throws in, "And go to the end of the earth." From sea to shining sea. If you want, at least in what they understood in that day, "Go from Jerusalem to Rome." That was about as far as you could go. But I want you to notice that we are sent out, as the church, to be witnesses for Jesus. We are not sent out into the world to be witnesses of American politics or western ideology. Whether you like those things or not, or think they're important, the church is sent out with the message of Jesus boldly preached, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Go buy any biography book. Buy the one of Moody because he was able to write some of it himself. Or of Finney. And they will tell you, "Our ministry started when we realized that we needed the power of the Holy Spirit upon our lives." And when they gave themselves over to the work of God's Spirit, their ministries just came alive, and the fruit just poured in. This model for church expansion is a good one to follow. If you're faithful in the little, God will give you much. If you're faithful in the little, God will give you much. There's a verse in Proverbs 14:25 that says, "A true witness delivers souls." "A true witness delivers souls."

So, here's the way God's intention was for us, the believers, to take the message of Jesus and what He has done to the world around us. From here "to the end of the earth." Same message, same pattern. If you go to college, especially if you go to seminary, they will spend months and months teaching you about cultural awareness and fitting in and a hundred other things. And I guess those things can be helpful. But you should know, if you're going to go there, the way people get saved is the same. Every culture, no matter what their practices are, they are men and women lost in sin, and Jesus came to die for their sins. And the message works everywhere and every language and every geographical area because God blesses His Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit touches their lives.

So that's pretty exciting, that you and I have been called to that work. Here's where it starts - walk out the door, and you're in Jerusalem. I don't care where you go. Go to your job, you're in Jerusalem. What are you going to do now? How's God going to use you by His Spirit to have this workplace know you? Before I was hired at Calvary Downey, I worked at Hoya Lens of America. It was a large Japanese company, and I think I was the youngest (and I know the only American) manager in the business. My wife and I were offered a house in Japan to move to,

and we contemplated going, when the Lord opened the door for me at Calvary Downey. But I was the only Christian amongst 1100 people, the only one. I asked if I could bring my Bible to work, and they kind of, "Well ....." But what a mission field! And yet what a challenge. What are you going to do in the mission field? You have to walk out the door and say, "This is the mission field. This isn't my world, man. This ain't my home. This is my mission field. What am I going to do here? How am I going to have the Lord use me?" That's the key.

The book of Acts records, by the way, the progression or the spread of ministry outlining verse 8. Chapters 1 through 7 have just one subject - reach Jerusalem. Chapters 8 and 9 - reach Samaria, reach Judea. Chapters 10 through 28 - reach the uttermost parts. And, as such, the kingdom of God is comprised of every tongue and nation and language and people. You find them all in Revelation 7, sitting before the throne of God.

Now, I said when we started, the book of Acts only covers thirty years - from about 33 to 63 A.D. (roughly in that time frame). Within thirty years, without any modern tools of communication, the entire world (according to Paul's letter), hears the gospel. The entire world is reached in thirty years. The work of the Holy Spirit is all that we need, and that should be our confidence. Now, if you sit down and read the book of Acts - and I don't know if you've done it before in one or two sittings - it might take you a couple hours to read through the thing from cover to cover. I tend to read through every book I teach every day for the fifty or sixty days before I teach it just so I can kind of get back into my head what the Lord is doing and know what's coming up in chapter 5 so I don't cover something in chapter 2 that we're going to get to in chapter 5. But, anyway, those are my problems. But here's my point (that I got way off on) - if you read through the book of Acts, you might leave it saying to yourself, "We need more miracles. There are miracles in the book of Acts. We don't see what they saw." Okay, here's the deal. Thirty miracles in the book of Acts. Thirty years of time covered. By just math (I'm not good at math, but), that's, like, one miracle a year, at least in the progress and the chronology of the book. It wasn't so much the miracles. There are, certainly, miracles in our lives today. That's not what we need. We need the Holy Spirit and the preaching of God's Word. He'll do the rest. Always had, always will. It isn't a business model we need. It isn't some vivacious presentation of the gospel. We don't need some big presentation, or lights shining off the stage in your face, or some guy every week up here that, "Woooo, I love that guy!" (Pastor Jack is clapping) "I love watching him! Let's have him back." We need the Holy Spirit to

move in our hearts. That's what we need. That's what we will always need. So, when you read the book, be careful that you don't start going, "Well, we certainly don't have any of that." Don't we? The greatest miracle in the book of Acts is that people got saved. Peter stands up to give his first sermon (we'll get there in a couple of weeks) ten days after Jesus ascended. At least three thousand people showed up because there was a lot of noise going on in the upper room. Things were going on that were freaking people out, and it was 9:00 in the morning, and everyone came running from everyplace because they were in town for the big holiday. Peter, not your greatest speaker - I doubt very dynamic, although I'm sure he was very loud. He's done more harm than good, it looks like, up till this time. He's a guy you'd love to hang around with, but you don't really want to admit to knowing because he'll get you in trouble. He stands up, and in a forty-second message, clearly thought out, completely planted in Scripture, speaks and sees three thousand people get saved. I don't know how many people were in the audience, but three thousand of them went, "What do we do?" and Peter couldn't even finish his message. They interrupted him. "What do we do? Hey, stop talkin', Peter. What do we do?" And they get saved. Not because he was a great speaker or he was so dynamic; he was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Without Him, no church can get off the ground. Without Him, no church can go forward. Does that make sense? These are Jesus' final words on the earth to His church. "Are You going to restore the kingdom?" "Yeah, it's none of your business. Here's your business - the world. Go get the world, as you are filled with the Holy Spirit." His final words to the church. Mark that down because anybody that's leaving, here're their final words. They're important. These are Jesus' final words.

Verse 9, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.' " Before the Holy Spirit can be poured out, the Son of Man has to return to the right hand of the Father. John had said that in chapter 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." So this needed to happen. Right? Jesus needed to leave so that they could now wait for the Holy Spirit.

So Luke paints the picture for us - two men stand by with these awestruck disciples, all with their mouths open (Pastor Jack looks up with his mouth open). "There He goes." Two men in white apparel, pointing out that Jesus will come in the same manner that they'd seen Him go. There are commentators again, Bible commentators, who tell you this is no other than Moses and Elijah, the ones who spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Or maybe they're angels. I don't know who they are. There're two guys, and they're wearing white. Could be Pat Boone and somebody else, I don't know. (Laughing) I don't know. But here's the important thing - the Lord's coming back in the same way that He left. And we know from the Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 4, for example) that, when the Lord comes back for the church for the rapture, He's not really coming to earth to land. He's going to come to the clouds. The trumpet is going to sound, and the voice of the archangel is going to call, and the dead in Christ - those who have died before us - are going to rise first; they're going to get their new bodies, and we that are alive, men and women, are going to be changed in an instant; and we're going to be caught up to the heavens with Him. "*Harpadzo*." We're going to be grabbed up. Right? And so shall we ever be with the Lord. And the Lord is coming. The same way that they saw Him disappear in the clouds, He's coming for us. In the second coming, He's going to come with you and me, and His foot is going to land on the Mount of Olives. And then all kinds of things are going to happen.

But this was the word to the church. "You've seen Him leave. Now the church is about to be born. And when the church is finished, this is the way He'll be coming back - to gather you." In between there is the work of the church and the work that God intends for us to follow.

So, His first coming is over, His second coming now becomes the focus of the rest of the Bible. But in the meantime you go back to verse 8. This is the work that you have to do. As the physical body of Jesus disappeared, the mystical body - the church, the place that He dwells, His kingdom is set up in the earth, in their hearts. With that, the disciples are left to wait for Pentecost. They don't know what's coming in ten days. We do. In order for us to get there, though, we're going to have to work through the rest of chapter 1. The rest of chapter 1, if you want to outline the book as we go, you just call it, "While We Wait." It's ten days - verse 12 through verse 26 is ten days. For the next ten days, that's exactly what happens there. Those are ten days. Easy enough to follow. In the meantime, we keep busy. But for them, they have to wait. For you and me, we don't have to wait. You can call that, "While We Wait," but we don't have to wait. The Holy Spirit's

already been poured out. You can be filled with the Spirit. But know this, as you go running around with your Christian life - and I hear people all the time about God's blessing and, "How's God going to answer my prayers?" And "I need one of these," and "I gotta have a couple of these," and "I want God to come through for me on that" - that God's greatest concern for the church is that they take the gospel of His Son to a world that's lost. Salvation is why Jesus died. Salvation is what He longs for. Fellowship with man is what He desires. So, to that extent, if you're involved in that, then you're right where God wants you. If that isn't part of your spiritual experience, then you're probably spending time in the wrong place in terms of effort because God could care less about anything but the souls of those around you. That's why He doesn't just take you home. Don't think for a minute that when you get saved the Lord wouldn't rather just take you home and hug you. He'd like to have you right here just like you'd have your kids. But there's work to be done, there's a world to be reached, and here's how. Not because you're smart or you're bold or brash or loud or obnoxious. No. God's Spirit will work in your life. We need Him to work. We're going to pray that in the next several months, as we go through this book, God will pour His Spirit out on us. And we'll see what the Lord will do. Won't we?

So, read ahead. Every week I'll tell you what we're doing next week. We're going to do verses 12 through 26 next Wednesday night. So, get on it. Take notes for yourself, and see what the Lord will teach you.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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