

## The Mission Continues      Acts 1:1-11

### Introduction

This morning I am excited to be starting our sermons series from the book of Acts

During the past two weeks we laid some ground work as it were by looking at **our identity** in Christ from 1 Peter 2 and **our purpose** as the church from Matthew 28

I hope you will keep the truths we saw in those two passages in mind as we work our way through Acts I will do my best to remind you of them as we go through the book also

### *A little background on Luke*

There is no serious dispute to the fact that the book of Acts was written by Luke

We know that Luke was a Gentile and a doctor as well as being something of an amateur historian and author - but beyond those details we really don't know a whole lot

His name is only mentioned three times in Scripture which is kind of amazing for a man who wrote around 27% of the New Testament!

Luke was certainly **thorough** as his two books are the **longest books** of the New Testament and scholarship has proven that his writings are **accurate** in their details

Paul referred to Luke as "*the beloved physician*" in **Colossians 4:14** and says that "*Luke alone is with me*" in **2 Timothy 4:11** as Paul wrote from prison shortly before his martyrdom

These references tell us something of Luke's character at least indirectly as Luke appears to have been a loyal person who was easy to like

The only other mention is from Paul's letter to **Philemon** that was written from Paul's Roman prison cell where Paul mentions Luke as one of his companions who sent greetings

Of course, Luke is the author of the gospel account that bears his name as well as the book of Acts And Luke begins his gospel by giving us the reason that he endeavored to write it – **Luke 1:1-4**

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

We see here that Luke's intention was to write "an orderly account" based on eye-witness testimony that he had gathered "having followed things closely for some time past"

He wrote his gospel specifically to someone named "Theophilus" who he refers to as "most excellent" and we have been blessed with the preservation of Luke's writings for our edification

And as we will see he wrote Acts to the same Theophilus and Acts is therefore meant to be a **continuation** of Luke's gospel – sort of a **volume 2** that carries on the account he began in his gospel

This morning we are going to consider the first 11 verses of the first chapter of Acts

Luke begins Acts with a **Prologue** of sorts in **verses 1-3**

Then in **verses 4-5** we will see an **Anticipated Promise**

In **verses 6-8** an **Articulated Program**

Then in **verses 9-11** we will see Christ's **Ascension** and a **Prediction**

## I. Prologue (1-3)

### A. Review of Luke's Gospel

Luke begins with a short **review** of his gospel account

In **verses 1-3** he writes: "In the first book, O Theophilus, I 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 a quick glance through Luke's gospel indeed reveals that he concerned himself with the record of Jesus' life and ministry all the way through his ascension

We need to take a brief look at some **other gems** contained in this **prologue** that we could easily read right past if we're not careful

**First** we should note that Luke is the only author to tell us that there were **40 days** between the resurrection and the ascension

Jesus made personal appearances to his disciples over a 40 day span which was clear evidence that he was truly alive and bodily present – his appearances weren't apparitions or wishful thinking on the part of his disciples

Reading through all of the gospel accounts and 1 Corinthians we see that he appeared to the women and Peter at the tomb, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to ten of the disciples, to all eleven disciples, to seven of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius, to the disciples and over 500 of the brethren on the mountain in Galilee, to James, and to the disciples again at his ascension.

**Second** we see that during these appearances, and there may be others we aren't told about, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the kingdom of God

We first read about the kingdom of God in the gospels in **Mark 1:14-15** where we see that it drew near when Jesus began his public, earthly ministry –

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God is at hand**; repent and believe in the gospel."

And then Mark tells us that the kingdom of God was released in power by the death and exaltation of Christ in **Mark 9:1**

And Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God to his apostles became the content of the teaching of the early church

**Third** we want to notice that Jesus himself selected the apostles

Luke told of this selection in **Luke 6:12-16** –

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Jesus spent the night in conversation with his Father and then selected from his followers those who would be his special ambassadors to carry his message after he was gone

## **B. Continuance of Christ's Ministry**

Which points us to the **fourth** item I want us to note -

That Acts is about the **Continuance of Christ's Ministry**

Luke writes that his first book, his gospel account, dealt with all that Jesus **began** to do and teach while he was physically present on the earth

Luke's phrasing indicates that Acts will be about what Jesus **continued** to do and teach from heaven through his apostles

There is continuity here - **it is one message** - it's **two stages of the same ministry of Christ**

While Jesus was on the earth his ministry was hands on and in person

In Acts he conducts the same ministry from heaven through the Holy Spirit by his apostles

Jesus appeared to his disciples over a 40-day period in order to definitively show that he was indeed risen but also to continue to teach them

During this post-resurrection period Jesus took pains to prepare his apostles for their part in his ministry and to provide an authoritative connection between his own words and work and the message and mission of the church

Remember how Jesus opened the minds of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus about how Scripture had told of all that had thus far transpired

The apostles were tasked with preaching Christ's message; the gospel message

This "good news" included the Old Testament writings that prophesied about him, his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, along with his future judgment of the world - in other words they were to preach the kingdom of God

### ***Christianity is unique***

All other religions teach that their founder completed his ministry during his lifetime

They each lived and worked and when they died, as with most of us, their work was finished

But the Holy Spirit reveals through the pen of Luke that Jesus only began his ministry during his lifetime

All other religious founders are dead and buried but Jesus is alive

And he is still actively ministering on the earth until the end of the age through his church

## II. Anticipated Promise (4-5)

This leads us to the anticipated promise that we find in **verses 4-5** where Luke writes –  
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."

### A. Reminder of the Coming Holy Spirit

In this command we see a **reminder of the coming Holy Spirit**

This isn't the first time the apostles had heard of the Holy Spirit and his coming  
Jesus had already promised them that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit" would teach them all things and bring to remembrance all that Jesus had said to them in **John 14:26**

And in **John 16:12-15** Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would one day come and teach them additional truths –

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The Holy Spirit had also been promised by the Father

In **Joel 2:28-29** we see the Father saying –

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

And in **Ezekiel 36:27** God says –

I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The apostles had also previously experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives

**John 14:15-17** we read Jesus' words to his disciples –

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for **he dwells with you and will be in you.**"

Notice that Jesus tells them that the Holy Spirit is presently *with them* but that he *will be in them* in the future

They had experienced the Holy Spirit as others in the Old Testament had but the Holy Spirit did not yet dwell within them – that's what was coming

And the words Jesus uses are that they "will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"

### ***Baptism indicates an immersion***

When we baptize a person here at Brick Church we immerse them in water as a symbol of their salvation and identity with Christ and his church - it's a permanent one-time act

To be baptized with the Holy Spirit likewise speaks of a permanent attachment - an indwelling that never goes away – unlike the temporary empowering of the Holy Spirit for a task that had previously been experienced by those in the Old Testament

## **B. Command to Wait**

And Jesus commands them to wait until the Holy Spirit comes "not many days from now"

Jesus had previously told his disciples that he had to leave in order for the Holy Spirit to come and he is clearly still present so some wait is necessary

The "not many days from now" actually turned out to be **10 days** that they wound up waiting

I would suspect that the apostles were revved up

As we'll see in just a few moments, they were excited for what they thought was the next logical step

They had just been down to the **depths of despair** when Jesus was crucified and at the **pinnacle of joy** when they discovered he had risen

Jesus has been joining with them during the past 40 days and continuing to teach them about the kingdom of God

And now he is promising them the baptism of the Holy Spirit

They thought they knew what was coming next and they were eager

What was on the horizon was nothing that they had yet envisioned

And Jesus knew they could not undertake the mission before them in their own strength

To rush out and attempt it on their own would result in miserable failure

So he tells them they must wait until the Holy Spirit comes - and the only hint at a timeline is "not many days from now"

## **C. Significance for Us**

There is significance for us in this situation

Just as the apostles could do nothing effective for the kingdom in their own strength; neither can we

Many ministries and ministers have been shipwrecked on the reef of self-effort

Now, we don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit as the apostles did - we are indwelt at the moment of our salvation

But we still must wait on his leading and his power if we are going to be effective for the kingdom

When it comes to carrying out the commission before us we are foolish to think that we can carry it out alone

No matter how educated we are and how much Bible knowledge we can muster we will find that **facts are not enough**

No matter how excited and motivated we are we will soon find that **enthusiasm is not enough**

No matter how sincere and passionate we are we will soon find that **emotion is not enough**

We too must work in tandem with the Holy Spirit if we want to be successful

### III. Articulated Program (6-8)

That the apostles were eager is verified in **verse 6** where they ask what is really a **natural question** for them given their mindset and understanding

And when they asked it Jesus responded by giving them a **supernatural answer** and telling them what was expected of them as he **articulated his program**

#### A. A Natural Question with a Supernatural Answer

The Jews had long expected Israel to be restored to power as they longed to be removed from the rule of Rome

And the disciples had previously shown an interest in the restoration of Israel's power

They had previously disputed about having position of authority in the coming kingdom and Jesus had told them that they would one day be "sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" in his kingdom (**Luke 22:24-30**)

**It's only natural that their thoughts would return to the question of Israel's restoration when they heard Jesus speak of the imminent gift of the Holy Spirit because they saw it as the next logical step**

But the promise of the establishment of the kingdom of God was going to be fulfilled differently than they imagined

Because the kingdom of God has nothing to do with making Israel a mighty power to rule the world

**Isaiah 49:6** says –

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

When we read about God calling Abraham in Genesis 12 we see that God's intention was that all nations would be blessed in Abraham

**Rather than making Israel a world power God is in Acts restoring Israel's primary vocation as a witness and a blessing to the entire world as the disciples spread the good news of God's kingdom**

The apostles were expecting a political, nationalistic kingdom that would be established immediately so they asked about that as was only natural that they would

But Jesus gave them a **supernatural answer**

Jesus told them that only God the Father was qualified to know such things

Jesus used two different words in describing what the apostles were prevented from knowing

"**Times**" which indicate **the interval** before the kingdom would be established

and "**Seasons**" which speaks of the **critical events** that would accompany the establishment of the it

The Father himself had established the timing and the order of events that must occur prior to the kingdom's consummation and it remained under his exclusive jurisdiction

Note how in **Mark 13:32** Jesus was talking about his *parousia* - his second coming - and he said that no one, not even the angels in heaven or the Son knew the day and the hour that it would occur - only the Father knows

The timing of future events was not for the apostles to know - they are exclusive to the Father

## **B. A Job To Do**

Then in **verse 8** we come to that little word "**but**" that **indicates a change in direction**

The apostles weren't going to be told when the kingdom would be established but they would be busy in the meantime

Luke writes – 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 end of the earth.

Jesus tells them that they wouldn't be receiving political power at this time but they would instead be the recipients of spiritual power through the coming of the Holy Spirit

Just as when Jesus was baptized by John and the Holy Spirit descended upon him bringing power as he began his ministry so would the apostles now receive power as they continued his ministry - his work

And that work was to be accomplished through their witness-bearing to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit

God had established Israel to be his witnesses to the world as we read in **Isaiah 43:10**

Jesus had picked up the mantel and witnessed during his earthly sojourn and now he shares it with his disciples

Jesus was going to continue his ministry from heaven through the apostles

## **C. Significance for Us**

Again, this has significance for us in that from this point on Jesus called on his disciples to be a succession of witnesses

Some faiths speak of apostolic succession in regards to leadership in the church

While that isn't found in Scripture the succession of apostolic witness is

The job of a witness is to speak from personal knowledge about facts and their significance

The apostles were eyewitnesses and therefore witnesses in a unique sense that no one else is

But those of us who accept, appreciate, and appropriate their testimony are also witnesses

And it is our job to be Christ's witnesses "to the end of the earth"

Until the last person is saved and the church age ends we have a job to do

## IV. Ascension and Prediction (9-11)

Having given this last final instruction Jesus left their presence once more only this time he would not join them again as he had been doing

### Verse 9

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.

Over the past 40 days they had likely grown used to Jesus' comings and goings but this time it was different

### A. Jesus Ascended in Glory

This time **Jesus ascended in glory**

The cloud that took him out of their sight is understood to be the shekhinah glory of God

In the Old Testament we read about the cloud that covered the tent of meeting showing that the glory of God was present

In **Exodus 40** we are told that as long as the cloud was present over the tabernacle the Children of Israel camped but when it was taken up they pulled up stakes and moved on

We see the cloud three times in connection with Jesus

The **first** was at his **transfiguration** when God spoke from the cloud and said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased"

The **second** is in our passage today at his **ascension** when the cloud took him to heaven

And the **third** is in foretelling of his **second coming** when he will come back in a cloud

Each of these occasions are about showing the glory of Christ

### B. Angels Predicted His Return

It's this third instance that the angels address with the apostles

Luke describes the two as men because that's what they looked like but they are clearly angels based on their dress and their authoritative and knowledgeable way of speaking

The angels tell them "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come again in the same way you saw him go into heaven."

What did they mean when they said Jesus would come back "in the same way" that he went?

I believe we can see three truths in their words –

**First**, it will be an actual physical return

Jesus will come back bodily - the angels said "this Jesus" not some other Jesus or an image of Jesus

Jesus' return will be a **literal, personal return**

**Second**, it will be a **visible and glorious return**

Jesus' ascension was done in a way that highlighted his deity - he was taken up in glory

And when he comes back in glory and power people will know it

In fact, it will be somewhat different because whereas this was a local event we are told that all will see his return

**Third**, it will be **according to God's own timing**

Just as the apostles didn't expect for him to ascend when he did his return will also be unexpected

We know Jesus can come back at any time and his return is imminent but we also need to remember that no one but the Father knows just when it will be



### **C. The Implication of the Angels' Question**

I've often found the question the angels asked to be kind of amusing

Put yourself in the apostles place, Jesus has just risen into the air and been taken out of your sight and the angels ask, "Why are you standing here looking into the sky?"

It's kind of an odd question when you first read it but it has a serious **implication** behind it

The angels are basically issuing a mild corrective to the apostles

They are telling them that there is work to be done - after all Jesus had just given them the huge task of being his witnesses - and that work doesn't involve gazing into the sky

To be charitable, some of the apostles had been present at the transfiguration and seen the cloud envelop and hide Jesus only to pull back and leave him present

I think they could be excused for having a similar expectation this time

But there is the sense that their "looking" was more than that

It seems that rather than a brief look they were looking long and with intention

Perhaps they were wishing Jesus was back and things could be like they were before

Maybe they were longing for heaven or desiring for Jesus to come back immediately and establish his kingdom

And a return to the good old days or a leap to the brighter future was not the plan

**We can easily fall into that same trap and spend too much time pining for the past or longing for a time that is not yet due**

When Jesus came into this world he brought with him a sense of the age to come

And we know that the time will one day come when that age will completely replace this one

However, we live during the time in between where we are physically in this present age and spiritually in the heavenly kingdom and we long for and anticipate its coming

And if we're not careful, we can let our longing get in the way of our work

John Stott put it this way – "Curiosity about heaven and its occupants, speculation about prophecy and its fulfillment, an obsession with 'times and seasons' - these are aberrations which distract us from our God-given mission. Christ will come personally, visibly, and gloriously. Of that we have been assured. Other details can wait. Meanwhile we have work to do in the power of the Spirit."

That seems to be the sentiment that was behind the question the angels asked and it is wise for us to keep their admonition in mind

## **Conclusion**

Last week we saw that our job is to "make disciples" and that we are to do that job until "the end of the age"

This week we have seen Jesus' final words while he was on this earth and his expectation that those who follow him will be his witnesses to the entire world

Clearly we have our work cut out for us - thankfully we don't have to do it alone or in our own strength

Last week we saw that Jesus issued his commission to us in light of his complete authority and the power that comes with it and that he would be with us as long as the task needs doing

And this week we saw the power that the Holy Spirit brings as he indwells each believer

We are living in the gap between the ascension and the parousia with no idea how long the interval will last

But while it does, for as long as it does, we have work to do

Our job, our commission, is to carry on the work that Jesus was engaged in while he walked the earth

### **The mission continues**

Next week we will be looking at **Acts 1:12-26** as the apostles replace Judas Iscariot

Let's pray