

Acts 1:1-11
The Church's Commission
Acts: HTCWP

Introduction

I'm excited to kick off a new sermon series this evening for us. **Acts 1. [pg. 530]**

SERIES INTRO

We're calling this series **ACTS: How the Church was planted**. We're going to be looking together at the book of the Bible called Acts, this story of the first 30 years of the Church after the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. We're not going to have a chance to cover the whole book, but we're going to look at specific things that took place asking the question: If we, Citizens Church, as a brand new church plant (in case you weren't aware, this is our second weekly Sunday Gathering ever) if we want to root ourselves here in Charlotte as a Jesus-centered family on mission with Him that helps people know and follow Jesus, if we want to plant roots as a church that lasts for the good of our city and the glory of God - **what can we learn from the very first churches that were planted?**

I don't know if you knew this or not - but church planting is not a new thing. If you're a part of this church, if you're engaging in this work with us as a part of our church family, you are a part of something that has been going for thousands and thousands of years - namely, **the preaching of the gospel such that people get saved and new churches are established in a place. This has been going on for thousands of years, all the way back to Acts 1 and the first followers of Jesus.**

So as we plant this church, what can we learn from this first move of the gospel and the first churches that were planted?

- What should our rhythms as a church look like?
- How do we share the gospel with those around us?
- How do we live in the power of the Holy Spirit?
- How do we suffer well for the faith?
- How do we make sure God gets the glory in all that we do?

That's where we're headed over the next 10 weeks. And so this morning I just want to set us up for that, primarily by focusing on **Acts 1:8. Pray.**

Background/Passage Walkthrough

Acts 1:1-3

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 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.

Alright, pause. Let me unpack a few things for us here.

BACKGROUND - The book of Acts was written by a man named Luke, most likely around A.D. 62. He was a follower of Jesus and a traveling companion of the apostle Paul, and he is the same Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke. In fact, Acts is sort of a Part 2 or Part B to Luke's Gospel. We see that in the

first sentence here, where he writes **In the first book....** Implying that this is the second book, this is the sequel.

Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are written to the same man named Theophilus. It's likely that Theophilus was a Roman government official who had become a Christian and was wrestling with some deep questions of his new found faith in Jesus.

So in Luke's gospel (if you've never read it I would encourage you to) he walks through the life of Jesus - Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived a perfect life - preaching and teaching, performing miracles - gets murdered on a cross, but stays in the grave only 3 days before He rose again defeating satan, sin, and death.

And then after that, Luke says in verse 3, in His resurrected body, **Jesus spends forty days with the disciples.** Doing the exact same thing he was doing before he was crucified - teaching about the Kingdom of God.

4 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; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Jesus is wrapping up His time with the disciples, about to ascend into heaven. And they're going to have a job to do. But first, He tells them to wait. He has already told them before that when He leaves them, they won't be alone, because a helper will come to them. And now Jesus doubles down on that promise - stay in Jerusalem, **because the Holy Spirit is coming.**

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The disciples bring back up to Jesus a question the Jewish people had been asking before Jesus, the Messiah, came and throughout His life on earth. When and how are you going to do what it feels like we were promised you would do? When are you going to restore our kingdom? When are you going to get us out of slavery to the Romans?

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Verse 8 is where I want us to sit for the rest of our time tonight. **It's the summary statement for the entire book of Acts.** Here Jesus says one statement that captures everything that unfolds over the next 28 chapters. There so many tangents you can go into with this book, but this verse grounds us into the purpose of Acts - **Acts is about the Holy Spirit empowered mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.**

This is God's Plan

From the very beginning of time, go all the way back to Genesis 1 - **God's plan has been to create a people for Himself.** That there would be a flourishing relationship between God and humanity - where people worship God because He is glorious and worthy of all praise - and in return they get to enjoy God forever - the greatest gift you could ever imagine.

That was God's plan. But we know sin has broken this relationship. That because of sin, all of us are unholy and born separated from God. But God has continually, throughout History pursued and chased after and set apart a people for His own. That's kind of an abridged, one-sentence not fully fleshed out summary of the Old Testament - **God pursuing the Israelites to make them a people for Himself.**

But that was not God's final goal. He had a bigger kingdom. He had a bigger plan. He sends Jesus. Who, as we talked about last week - came down as the great high priest, and the one-time sacrifice for sins. **Who created a new way for a new people of God - not based on nationality, but based on faith in Christ.**

So here is Jesus. He has accomplished what He set out to accomplish on the earth. He has defeated satan. He has defeated sin. He has defeated death. He has inaugurated His kingdom. The Kingdom has begun - **but now the world needs to know!**

So He gathers his disciples, and he gives them this great commission. This great charge: **8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**

I need you to go tell the world the good news of Jesus! Not just the people in **Jerusalem** (your own city), but in **Judea** (which is the larger region Jerusalem is situated in), and **Samaria** (the neighboring nation, the people that they didn't like and looked down upon), and **to the end of the earth** (to the nations).

They are called to be witnesses for Christ! That's their commission. That's their marching orders.

And what does a witness do? **They see and experience something great, and they go tell others about it.**

Apostles as Witnesses

In his gospel, Luke records this same conversation between Jesus and the apostles, and He includes an extra part to what Jesus says.

This is **Luke 24:45-49:**

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

For the apostles, they had walked with Jesus, they had lived with Him for 3 years, they had seen the miracles He accomplished, they had heard his teachings and parables, they observed how he lived, they saw him die, and they saw him rise again.

Jesus tells them in vs 48 - you are witnesses of these things - how I suffered and died but also how I rose again. **And now they're to go tell others what they've experienced → this Jesus who offers forgiveness of sins and life everlasting with God.**

That's their mission → Wait for the Holy Spirit. Then go.

Early Church Mission

And go they did:

- Just a short while later, about 120 people will be gathering in Jerusalem, praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit.
- Holy Spirit shows up, bam. Catches the attention of a crowd in the city. Peter gets up and preaches. And through one sermon, 120 followers of Jesus turns into 3,000.
- Those 3,000 spread out across Jerusalem, healing the sick, caring for the poor, gathering together to worship, continuing to preach the gospel. **(And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...)**
- A little while later, an early deacon in the church - Stephen - is stoned to death for preaching Jesus. A great persecution starts. And we read in **Acts 8:1 - "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."** (Remember - And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria.)
- And the gospel will continue to spread and spread until you have in the final chapter of the book, Acts 28, Paul finally gets the gospel to Rome. The end of the known world at that time. **(You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.)"**

This is how the gospel spreads. This is what God does. He accomplishes His purposes of getting the gospel to the nations through His Spirit indwelt people.

Theologian Michael Green: **"Three crucial decades in world history. That is all it took. In the years between AD 33 and 64 a new movement was born. In those thirty years it got sufficient growth and credibility to become the largest religion the world has ever seen and to change the lives of hundreds of millions of people. It has spread into every corner of the globe and has more than two billion putative adherents. It has had an indelible impact on civilization, on culture, on education, on medicine, on freedom and of course on the lives of countless people worldwide. And the seedbed for all this, the time when it took decisive root, was in these three decades. It all began with a dozen men and a handful of women: and then the Spirit came."**

This is our Commission too

Now, here's the point: Acts is our history.

If you're a follower of Jesus, if you've turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus for salvation - you are a part of Christ's Church, His people, and this is your story! Reading ACTS as a Christian is like being an American and watching Hamilton. This is how we got started. We're here today worshipping Jesus on January 10, 2021 in Charlotte, NC because 2,000 some odd years ago the Holy Spirit was poured out upon 120 men and women in a prayer room in Jerusalem and they did what Jesus commanded and commissioned them to do - to take the gospel to the nations.

And the gospel spread over geography and history to where someone at some point in the past shared the gospel with someone else, who then shared the gospel with someone else, who then shared the gospel with someone in your life - a family member, parent, grandparent, friend, pastor - who then turned around and explained the gospel to you and the Holy Spirit moved like He has for thousands of years and you put your faith in Jesus.

But what you have to understand as a follower of Jesus is that the moment you put your trust in Jesus, this commission is now given to you! You are now called to go be a witness for Christ to the ends of the earth. The gospel isn't meant to come to you and stick and stop. It's meant to come to you, you believe, Holy Spirit comes and changes you from the inside out, and then you're sent back out to take the gospel to others.

The gospel doesn't simply come to you, it goes through you.

So this commission Jesus gives to His disciples - to be His witnesses, **this commission is our commission**, our calling, our command, our marching orders as followers of Jesus - we are called to be witnesses for Christ!

We are all Witnesses

If you are a Christian, you are a witness. You are a commissioned and sent ambassador and witness for Christ. As Christians, we are witnesses to Christ's saving work in us. We were dead in our sin and hopelessly separated from God. But at some point, we heard the gospel and Ephesians 2 says we were **"made alive together with Christ"**. When we believed the gospel we were given a secure future and a new heart that now desires to be obedient to God. Our lives now look differently than they did before knowing Christ.

We have been changed, set free, forgiven, made new, and brought into God's family! We are witnesses of the incredible saving grace of Jesus. **And what do witnesses do? They tell others what they have experienced!** They tell others about what has changed their life and captured their affections!

Have I ever told you guys about my love for cruising? Hard shift, I know. Stick with me. I love cruising. I love it.

- Over Christmas Break my Junior year of college I went on a cruise with friends of mine, and I can honestly say I've never been the same.
 - It was the most magical experience. I just caught this cruising bug.
 - Some nights I have actual dreams about stepping onto a cruise ship.
 - I watched cruise vlogs on youtube. I'm on message boards.
 - I'm fine, I'll confess my idol at Group on Tuesday ok.
- But I need to tell you - **If you've never been on a cruise, you're missing out.**
- I mean think about it - it's an entire world created on a massive ship in the middle of the caribbean ocean solely for you to enjoy.
 - All you can eat food (including choc soft serve ice cream - Am I right Lindsay!?).
 - Basically 24/7 entertainment. There's trivia, music, Broadway shows, magicians, game shows, pools, hot tubs, water slides, artificial waves to go surfing on, go-karts, a full arcade.
 - Imagine this day: You wake up. You go eat a giant breakfast with basically whatever you could imagine. You go hang out on a tropical island all day. You go back to the ship, have a fancy sit down dinner of lobster and steak with 2 desserts. You go to a show, you go dancing. You go to bed, and you wake up and do it all over again.
- **Also, I know what your fears are** - they make really good medicine and you barely feel the ship rock or sway at all, so no you won't get bored **AND** you won't get seasick.
- Now, WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO GO ON A CRUISE!?! Especially if you get to go with me, because I'm fun.

Did I just convince you? **That my friends, is called witnessing.**

We know what it means to be impacted by something so much that we just can't help but share.

- Just ask all of the Taylor Swift fans who haven't stopped posting about Folklore and whatever else for 5 straight months!

How much more is this true of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

He has saved you. He has redeemed you from the pit. He has washed you clean and made you new. He is the saving hope of the world. We are witnesses to what He's done in our lives personally and what He's done in history through His Word. And we're called to take this greatest news and greatest hope for all people to the world.

Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 5, when he says:

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been reconciled to God! But it doesn't stop there. You are then given the ministry of reconciliation. You have the task, the charge, the command - to go take this good news of grace to a lost and dying world. To implore them, to beg with tears, to not let up - **will you be reconciled to God?**

Obstacles to Witnessing

But if you're anything like me, there can be a big disconnect between knowing I'm called to be a witness for Christ, and actually doing it. Sometimes I see opportunities, in my neighborhood, in my friendships, and my heart isn't always there. Sometimes I don't want to engage and build the new friendship. Sometimes I don't want to put myself out there and ask the hard questions and have the conversations and do the slow, hard work of building friendships. A lot of times it's way easier and less nerve-wracking to talk about sports, or food, or my kid.

This is how Timothy Paul Jones and Daniel Montgomery talk about it in their book *Faithmapping*:

[When it comes to being a witness] I am either apathetic, embarrassed, or unashamed. If I am apathetic, I lack any compassion for the lost, and thus I lack motivation to share the gospel. If I am embarrassed, my compassion for the lost is overshadowed by my fear of rejection. If I am unashamed, then the gospel has broken through to give me compassion and boldness. I am a witness for Jesus. I am a light, an ambassador, sent by the King of kings.

- Some of us are apathetic - we need gospel softness.
- Some of us are afraid or embarrassed - we need gospel courage and identity.
- All of us face very real spiritual warfare - we have an enemy who doesn't want us to share the gospel. And we need to pray and fight in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Faithful, Ordinary Ambassadors of a Kingdom

You know what's crazy about all this? God knows how fragile we are. God knows how bad at this we are, I am. He knows our apathy and laziness. He knows our fears, embarrassments, doubts, and worries. He knows how sometimes we just go through life doing our thing and don't even think about it or look for opportunities.

And yet, we're still His plan to get the gospel to a lost and dying world. Look around you. Look around you at the other believers in this room. This is God's plan! Us. We are it. For better or for worse, God decided to use us.

I mean, think about who Jesus is talking to in Acts 1:8:

- **Peter** - who not even a few months ago was denying that he knew Jesus out of fear.
- **James and John** - who were so prideful that in the days leading up to Jesus' death were asking him to elevate their status so they could sit next to him in heaven.
- These guys who fell asleep in the garden the night before the crucifixion, too tired to pray like Jesus' asked them.

A ragtag bunch of sinful, prideful mess ups. **And those are the ones who we have names for.** Most of the people who are responsible for the spreading of the gospel in Acts don't even get named.

Part of the beauty of the book of Acts is that it reminds us - the people God uses to take His gospel to the nations are a bunch of **unnamed, ordinary, sinful men and women who have experienced the life changing power of the Holy Spirit and can't help but tell people about Jesus, no matter the cost.**

That's how the gospel spread then. That's how the gospel spreads now. When the people of God take seriously their identity as missionaries and their calling to be witnesses and they own the mission of God in the place He has put them.

If you are a Christian:

You have a calling - God has saved you.

You have a purpose - God has commissioned you.

And you have a place - God has put you in a particular spot at this particular time.

Which means you have a job to do.

This is God's plan A. The church being the church and taking the gospel to the world is God's plan A. There is no backup option. This is it. We are it.

All of us have a circle of influence right now - a workplace, a neighborhood, an apartment complex, a friend group, a gym. Don't think because you don't live overseas or you're not a pastor or on a church staff that you're not a witness sent by God. Don't think COVID gives you a pass. God's people have shared the gospel in more trying and uncertain times than this.

You are where you are because God has placed you there as an ambassador and witness for Him.

I love the way pastor Tony Merida says it - **"The only difference in a believer sitting in his or her American home and a foreign missionary on the field is *location*, not *identity*."**

Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus tells His disciples: **“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”**

There is a lost world without hope right around you. You sit in a harvest field, and God has seen fit to put you where He has put you as His plan to reach those around you!

Can I tell you about the place and harvest God has put around our church? 1324 The Plaza. I want to show you how great the gospel need is right here in this area.

****Packing Peanuts Illustration****

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

And listen, this is WAY bigger than Citizens Church can ever do on our own. This is way bigger than our individual church, or your individual group, or you can handle.

But we trust God with what He wants to do, our call is to be *faithful*.

And so we're gonna talk about some of the practicals and specifics in our groups this week and later on in this series. But right now I want us to feel some amount of overwhelmedness. Some amount of “oh crap. We need the Holy Spirit to move.”

Time of prayer.