

Introduction to Acts

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[0:00] Luke chapter 24 and verse 36. We're going to read two passages this morning, Luke 24, and then we're going to move over to Acts chapter 1.

! So Luke chapter 24, verse 36, we'll read the rest of the chapter, the rest of the book. While they were still talking about this, that's the disciples, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. And he said to them, Why are you troubled? And why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see. A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, Do you have anything here to eat? They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, This is what I told you while I was with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures.

[1:15] He told them, This is what is written. The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

Beginning at Jerusalem, you are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God. Then please turn over to the book of Acts.

Acts chapter 1. And we'll read the first 11 verses. And Luke takes up the pen again and says, In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

[2:27] Until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command. Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised.

When you have heard me speak, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water. But in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

So when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, It is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[3:35] After he had said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going.

When suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Men of Galilee, they said, Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

This morning, we're beginning a new series, a new study on the book of Acts. And we're just going to dive in and expect that the Lord Jesus, by his spirit, will meet with us and bless us by his word.

Now, all scripture is God breathed. It comes from God and it's therefore profitable to us. But the human author of this book, through whom the Holy Spirit spoke, is none other than Dr. Luke, the author of the third gospel.

He's the physician that we find in the book of Acts, traveling along with the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys and ministry. And Luke tells us in this book what he experienced firsthand as he traveled with Paul.

[4:56] You will read that. But he also tells us what he heard from eyewitnesses about other things that he did not experience firsthand. But he got it from those who had seen and had heard.

This is Luke's method, as he tells us in his first book, Luke chapter 1. He had done the research, he tells Theophilus. He had carefully investigated everything.

And then he set forth his findings, an orderly account of everything that had happened. And he did it so that Theophilus and others might be convinced of the certainty of these things.

These are not fairy tales, old wives tales. These things happened. Eyewitnesses have been looked into. And this is the record, the faithful record of the things that you have been taught, that you might be fully convinced.

So that's the author, Luke, Dr. Luke. Now, it was written or dedicated to a man named Theophilus. We don't know really anything more than what we're told in the introduction of Luke and here again in Acts.

[6:09] So we know very little about him, perhaps a man of high rank. He's called the most excellent Theophilus in Luke's gospel. But the name means loved of God or friend of God.

And so that's Theophilus. The book of Acts is a sequel. You know what a sequel is? Sometimes when an author has written a book and it's sold so many millions, they will sit down and write a follow-up book, a sequel to it.

It's kind of like a volume two that followed volume one. And it picks up where the first one left off. So that if you would really understand what the sequel is about, volume two is about, you really ought to read volume one.

And that's what a sequel is. They belong together, don't they? The one is a continuation and builds upon the other. That, I say, is true of the book of Acts.

And we need to think of it as such. I found my own mind being instructed on this point that we need to view Acts as a sequel. It's a follow-up to Luke's former book, the third gospel, the gospel of Luke that bears his name.

[7:24] There, Luke wrote about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, all that he began to do, his miracles and his teaching, his doctrine. It was all about Jesus' death, his burial, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven.

It's all there in Luke's first volume, the gospel of Luke, also written to Theophilus. Now, Acts is the sequel. And notice how it starts in verse one.

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven. Acts is now volume two.

And it continues the story of what was begun in the gospel of Luke. And notice that the book begins where the first volume ended, with the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven.

That's the last thing in Luke's gospel. We had it read for us when the Lord ascended into heaven before his apostles. And we find it here again at the beginning of this book of Acts.

[8:33] And so it becomes the link that ties together the first volume, the gospel of Luke, and the second volume, the book of Acts.

So volume one is all about Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Volume two is now carrying that history forward.

Well, what happened then after Jesus left them? It shows us the effect that Jesus' life and death and burial and resurrection and ascension had on his followers, on these apostles who spent three years with him.

What happened after Jesus left them and went into heaven? And it shows us the birth and growth of the Christian church in the hands of the apostles as it began in Jerusalem and then spread right on out to the ends of the earth as the book ends in the capital city of the Roman Empire, with Paul preaching the gospel there.

And we see the church then is made up not only of Jews but of Gentiles as well as we read through this book. So that's the author, who it's written to.

[9:44] It's a little bit about the nature of this book. It's a sequel. Let's look at the title. We refer to it as Acts. We just say turn to Acts, don't we? The word Acts means actions, doesn't it?

The deeds. But just whose acts are these? Now, sometimes it's referred to as the Acts of the Apostles.

Since it does focus mainly on the work of the apostles, we find the first half of the book especially follows the apostle Peter, doesn't it? And his work with the Jews. But the last half follows the apostle Paul and his work especially among the Gentiles.

And so these apostles, the 12 apostles, form the foundation of the church, Ephesians 2 says, of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

But it's built on the foundation of the apostles and their teaching. So these are the Acts of the Apostles. But then again, the Holy Spirit is prominent in this book.

[10:48] And some would say it ought to be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the big event of the book is the unrepeatable gift of the Holy Spirit to the church of Jesus Christ.

And that happens on the day of Pentecost, chapter 2. That's the big event. And everything before it is leading up to it. And everything after it follows from that reality. God, the Father and the exalted Son of God on the throne of God, pours out his Holy Spirit as a gift to his church to forever indwell them.

And that makes the difference of the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is seen to be actively working throughout this book. So some refer to it as the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Now, what I want to tell you is that there is no certainty as to, well, we have a manuscript here and there that settles this matter.

Sometimes it's just the Acts is how it's spoken of. Later on, some of these other names were given. But there's other evidence in the book that points us to think of this book as the Acts of Jesus Christ himself.

[12:02] Notice verse 1 again. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach. And as we place emphasis on that word began, the inference is that this latter book is all about what Jesus continued to do and teach.

That's what he began to do and teach before he was taken up into heaven. And the inference is that this book is about what he continued to do and to teach after he had ascended into heaven.

The language surely suggests that Christ's words, his work did not end when he ascended into heaven. And that's exactly what we'll find as we go through this book.

We read in it what Jesus continued to do from his throne now in heaven. We see the Lord Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit on the church.

We see the Lord Jesus adding to his church daily those that were being saved. We see the Lord opening the heart of Lydia so that she accepted the gospel message.

[13:12] We see the Lord enabling his servants to speak his word. The gospel message with great boldness. We see the Lord receiving the first Christian martyr, Stephen, when he is stoned to death.

We see the Lord speaking to and converting Saul of Tarsus when he was out to persecute the believers. We see the Lord sending Ananias to Saul, sending Peter to the Gentile Cornelius' house, sending an angel to get Peter and fetch him out of prison, striking Elimus the sorcerer with blindness, enabling his servants to do miraculous signs and wonders, encouraging, directing, protecting his saints.

All these things in the book of Acts were said to be done by the Lord. And we are to understand that as the Lord Jesus, the ascended Lord and King of his people.

And it all makes a good case that the title of this book could be referring to the acts of the Lord Jesus then. So which is it? Whose acts are these recorded here in the fifth book of the New Testament?

We want to say, will the real actor please stand up and identify yourself? Well, I believe we can say it is all the above. I believe we are on solid ground to say that what we're witnessing in the book of the acts are the acts of Jesus Christ.

[14:37] I will build my church. I will, he said before he left. And we're seeing him do that in the book of Acts. We're witnessing the works, the acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, through the operation of the Spirit, who is here as the agent of Jesus Christ and of the Father to do the works of God.

Through the apostles, the Holy Spirit, through the apostles. It's their mouths that preach the gospel. It's their hands that provide for the needy.

It's through the apostles and the church. So what we're witnessing is the acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, through the apostles and his church.

Yes, the Lord Jesus' body is in heaven today. His physical body is in heaven. And from his throne, he rules the world for the good of his church. But his spirit is promised to be with his church.

How long? To the very end of the age. That was his last words to them. I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.

[15 : 55] I, Jesus, with you, in this task of making disciples, building the church. So what he began to do while he was physically present on earth, building his kingdom, he now continues to do through the Holy Spirit working in his apostles.

And his church. And of course, Acts 28 is not the end of Christ's work of building the church, is it? The work continues, doesn't it?

As important as the apostle Paul was, the story does not end in chapter 28 with him preaching the word of God unhindered in Rome. No, the work continues.

The Lord Jesus continues to build his church today. It goes on and we're a part of that work. And new chapters are being written every day. Not new chapters to be added to scripture.

We cannot do that. But added in the sense of the unfolding history book of church. Church history is continuing to be written. Jesus is continuing to build his church through the Holy Spirit in his church as it takes the gospel to lost sinners all over the earth.

[17 : 17] You know, there is today a network of churches that have taken the name of Acts 29. You may like it or may not like that idea of taking that name.

But I think it does this. It shows us, doesn't it, that what Jesus was doing in the book of Acts is not over. And if we can just learn that and let that illustrate that point. Yes, we're reading 28 chapters here of what Christ did through his spirit through the church.

But it's not over. And the work goes on. And he's still equipping, still empowering his church to complete the unfinished mission.

So believers in Jesus, what an encouragement, what a privilege to be co-laborers together with Jesus Christ as he builds his church. To be involved in a task that is so dear to our Lord that he died for the church.

He bought it with his own blood. That is so central to this stage of the kingdom that that's the agenda for today, as we'll see, to take his gospel to the ends of the earth.

[18 : 25] I just ask you as we begin, how much of your life is vitally connected, vitally connected to his grand command, to the unfinished business of our Lord?

Well, as Luke begins this book, he's reconnecting with where he left off his earlier history in his gospel. Remember, he ended with the ascension of Jesus.

And so that's where he's going to pick up this account. And he even backs up to this period of 40 days between Christ's resurrection and his ascension into heaven. This period of 40 days.

And he tells us what Jesus was doing during these last 40 days. Two things, principally. Number one, he was giving many proofs of his resurrection. You see that in verse three?

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. First, he just appeared to them. They saw him with their own eyeballs.

[19 : 25] That was a proof that he was alive. He ate food with them, showing that he was no phantom. There's a real body. And he eats food in their presence. Not just a spirit without a body.

He had them touch him. Again, to see that it was indeed the Lord. He showed them the nail prints in his hand and the wound in his side, the spear mark in his side. They were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ.

There was no human eye that witnessed the resurrection itself, that actually saw Jesus go from being a corpse to being a living human being. But there were eyewitnesses who saw the risen Christ.

And these apostles were some of them. Principally were them. They saw the Lord in the flesh before them as eyewitnesses.

They could no more deny that Christ was risen than they could deny their own existence. Their eyes had seen, their ears had heard, their hands had handled, as John says.

[20:28] And all of that speaks of the importance of the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ physically from the dead. We dare not get sloppy with the resurrection, the bodily resurrection of Christ.

It's critical. Jesus spent that period of 40 days, we're told here, giving them many convincing proofs that indeed he was risen.

Now this is something that will confront us throughout the book of Acts. And we'll see it. And it ought to be a corrective to us. We'll see how the resurrection of Jesus was emphasized in their gospel proclamation. Yes, the cross is central, and they preached the cross, but they went on and preached the resurrection.

And they said that you must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved. There's far more of the resurrection, I find, in the book of Acts than what we find in modern presentations of the gospel.

We'll find them saying in chapter 3, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead and we're witnesses of this. They understood how central it was to the good news because if there is no resurrection of Christ's body, there is no good news.

[21:47] Our faith is worthless. We're still dead in our sins. We still stare into the grave hopeless, without hope, of all men most miserable if Christ is not risen.

His death did not accomplish what it set out to do if Christ is not risen. The resurrection proves that the cross is successful, that God the Father is satisfied.

He paid enough on the cross and the Father shows it by raising his son from the dead. And so, Christ is risen.

That's part of the gospel. Part of the good news, our Savior is alive and well and therefore he's able and mighty to save. We have a living Savior. And right now, if you call upon him, he will save you. He's alive. He's saving people today. Today. The good news rests on the historical fact then of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And so, Jesus does not go directly from the tomb to heaven.

[22:59] As he's raised from the dead, he's not just immediately ascended and that's the end of it. No, there's a period of 40 days. And what's he doing during those 40 days? He's showing his apostles many indisputable proofs that he's alive.

Brethren, our gospel rests on proof, historical proof, eyewitness proof of those who saw him and heard him and touched him over a period of 40 days.

And then, when they come later on in this first chapter to replace Judas, they need another apostle to replace him. What we'll learn is that seeing the risen Christ is so important that no one is to be an apostle unless they have seen the risen Christ.

Again, the importance. One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. It's essential for salvation. And it powerfully changed these men.

It became a truth that they were willing to die for. Now, when it says in verse 3 that he appeared to them over a period of 40 days, we're not to think that he was with them continually during those 40 days.

[24:11] Rather, from time to time, he made sporadic appearances to them over the period of 40 days. He would appear and then leave. Suddenly show up sometimes and then suddenly leave.

We see that on the day of his resurrection, don't we? We read of it. He just suddenly appeared in the upper room with them or in that room where they were behind closed doors and then he just suddenly left.

We see it on the road to Emmaus. He appears to the two walking and then suddenly he's gone. That's the way the Lord appeared to his apostles over the period of these 40 days.

There's at least 10 appearances spoken of in the New Testament during this period. There may have been more. But that's the nature of his appearing. He's proving he's alive.

The second thing he was doing during these 40 days was teaching them about the kingdom of God. You see that? He was teaching them about the kingdom of God.

[25:13] Spoke about the kingdom of God. Verse 3. Now that's what he'd been teaching them for three years, wasn't it? We've seen that in our Sunday school that the whole message of Jesus can be summarized and is summarized over and over in the gospel accounts is that he preached the good news of the kingdom.

It was all about God's kingdom. So now after his resurrection he has precious little time to prepare these men and his last words to them, preparing them for his absence and for their great assignment, it's all about establishing the kingdom of God on earth.

And how would they do that? They would do it by preaching about Jesus, about his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his coming judgment. It's by preaching the gospel, making disciples that they would see the kingdom of Christ come to earth.

Now here we see the overlap between the kingdom of God, the concept of God's kingdom and of the church. They're not exactly synonymous terms. Rather, the church is the expression of the kingdom of God.

It's the place where God's rule is acknowledged and his blessing is being experienced. It's God's people in God's place under his rule and blessing.

[26 : 31] The church, the present expression of God's kingdom. So this is what Jesus was doing during the 40 days after his resurrection and before his ascension.

Proving his resurrection and teaching about the kingdom. Now Luke, in the rest of the verses that were read for us this morning, gives us two samples. He just samples two of those appearances when Jesus came to his disciples.

The first sampling is verses 4 and 5. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is the promised gift of the Father.

Indeed, this is the main event of the book of Acts. We said, we're leading up. Luke is introducing it. It will hit us right at chapter 2. And then everything will be the result of that as the book unfolds.

[27 : 37] This is the main event and Jesus is here telling them about this once-for-all event of the Spirit being given to his church. The Old Testament prophets had foretold this, that the age of Messiah would be a day in which the Spirit of God would be poured out in great measure.

And notice Jesus now tells them it's just a few days away. Boy, you talk about stirring up their expectations of the glory days of the kingdom of Messiah.

That'll do it. Just a few days from now we're going to see Messiah's age brought to its completion, its fulfillment, and its greatness by the pouring out of the Spirit of God.

The second sampling, that's just one time our Lord appeared to them and we're told what he said on that appearance. The second sampling of our Lord's appearances to his disciples over this period was actually his last appearance.

Indeed, it was the Ascension Day itself and we have that verses 6 to 11. And verse 6 gives us the question from these confused and curious apostles.

[28 : 47] They asked him on this occasion, so when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

Their question shows that they're still greatly mistaken about the kingdom of God, both as to its timing and to its subjects, its citizens, its ethnic makeup and identity.

Notice the question about the timing. Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Now we can understand why they might expect the glory days of Messiah's kingdom to happen at once.

They knew that Messiah's kingdom would be marked by the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as the prophets had said. And on an earlier occasion, just some days before, maybe even less than days, maybe it was the day before, Jesus had said to them, that event is just days away.

Is this the time when it's all going to happen? They asked him on this meeting? Now, remember what we said about the sequel.

[29 : 55] These are not different men than what we read about in the volume one, Luke's Gospel. So let's remember that. These are the same guys that we've been reading about in Luke's Gospel.

Indeed, all the Gospels. These guys had lived with Jesus for three years under his teaching about his kingdom. And yet, with all that information, they were still plagued with wrong ideas about the kingdom, weren't they?

Volume one showed us their earthbound expectations of Messiah's kingdom. They're expecting Jesus to free the Israelites from what? From their Roman oppressors who held them captive.

They're expecting Jesus to conquer their political enemies and set up his reign in Jerusalem with themselves reigning as kings with him in great prosperity. We found them in volume one arguing with each other as to who's the greatest and who's going to have the seats of highest honor in his kingdom to sit on his left and his right.

And they're all ready for it. And three years with Jesus did not cure them of faulty ideas about the kingdom. Volume two now opens and it shows us that even Jesus' death did not cure them of their faulty views of the kingdom.

[31 : 17] Right after his death, two of them spoke for the rest of them when they said in Luke 24, we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.

Remember that? We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. But they thought that on his last trip to Jerusalem that this was the time that the full glory of God's kingdom would happen.

That he was going to appear, that this kingdom in its final stage was going to appear at once, Luke 19, 11. Oh, but the Jews and the Romans, they crucified him.

And with the death of their king, their earthbound hopes of his kingdom died as well. Oh, but he arose from the grave. Their king was alive.

And with the resurrection of their king, their hopes were resurrected again. Those same earthbound expectations of the kingdom rose again with Jesus.

[32 : 16] And so now they're asking their newly risen king, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Surely now, surely now that death is conquered, now that the gift of the Holy Spirit is just a few days off, is this the time?

Now, from our perspective, we can see that they were only off a couple thousand years, right? And that should be a caution to all current date setters that arise from time to time.

Is this the time? But notice, they were not only mistaken about the timing of God's kingdom, they were also mistaken about the citizens of God's kingdom, the ethnic nature and identity of the kingdom's citizens.

Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Now, the kingdom of God was established in Israel in the Old Testament, and they're expecting that it will always be an Israelite thing, a Jewish thing.

they cannot escape from their Jewish nationalism, and they're still thinking of the kingdom of Messiah as being an exclusively thing for the Jews.

[33 : 29] And if Gentiles are to be brought in, they must become Jews, and then they can perhaps be brought in. But the citizens of the kingdom are Israelites, God's chosen people.

Well, now, the book of Acts will reveal just how deeply embedded this idea was in the followers of Messiah. You who've read the book know that this was a stumbling block with them.

It will take a vision in which a cloth with unclean animals is lowered down three times to Peter, and he's told, rise and kill and eat, and he'll say, not so, Lord, I've never eaten anything unclean.

And the Lord will have to tell him, don't you call unclean what I call clean. May have been unclean in the old covenant, but this is a new covenant, Peter.

And there's a new commission. And the Gentiles will be gathered into the kingdom. And he's sent where? To Cornelius, the Gentile's house.

[34 : 34] And what does Peter say as he comes into his house? He says, now I see that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what's right. Now I understand. Didn't understand it here.

Acts chapter 1. It will take a vision from the Lord to convince Peter. And then we even see him prevaricating when some Jews came up and Paul had to reprimand him to his face.

Chapter 15 will show us that a church council must be held to settle this matter. There was almost a church split early on between the followers of Jesus at Antioch and at Jerusalem and they needed to hold a church council to once and for all decide.

What is the nature? Who are the citizens of Christ, the Messiah's kingdom? Are they just Jews?

And do the Gentiles have to become Jews first, be circumcised first, keep the law first and then they can join?

Or can they be citizens just as they are as believing Gentiles? You remember that church council.

We'll see that. This was a stumbling block even to the apostles of our Lord well into the book of Acts.

[35 : 44] So we see this wrong idea in the question asked of Jesus. Is this the time you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Now notice how Jesus responds in verses 7 and 8.

He corrects both of their mistaken views. He said to them, it's not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sumeria and to the ends of the earth.

As for the timing, the when of God's kingdom coming in final glory, it's none of your business is Jesus' response. Isn't it? It's not for you to know.

The times and the seasons. That's my Father's business. Your business is to be my witnesses. That's what he tells them. To make your concern to tell others about me.

You are witnesses of me. You're to tell them about me, about my life, my death, my resurrection, my ascension, my coming judgment. That's what you are to tell them.

[36 : 53] All that you've seen and heard and know about me. Tell them what you know. Do you know, if you know enough to be saved yourself, you know enough to tell someone else about Jesus. And so the man that was blind and healed, the Pharisees said, who do you say this Jesus is?

He's a sinner. I don't know who he is, but all I know is this, that I once was blind, but now I see. He told what he knew. Can you not do that?

I once was under the wrath of God for my sin. I had no peace before God. But then I came to see that Jesus took the punishment that my sins deserve and he lived a perfect life I couldn't and he put all that righteousness to my account when I trusted on him and he took all my sins to his account.

There's this great exchange and now I'm right with God through Jesus, through his perfect life and through his atoning death, all I know is I once was lost, but now I'm found.

I once had no peace with God. Now, it is well with my soul because my sin, not in part, but the whole, was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

[38 : 11] That's your business. Not the timing of Christ's return and the final glory of Christ's kingdom. the work of the kingdom to be my witnesses.

That's to be your focus, your business. This is not for you to know. This is for you to do. Calvin says he cures their morbid curiosity by recalling them to present duty.

It's not for you to know the times and seasons. It is for you to be my witnesses. And how we need to beware of distractions as the church of Jesus Christ.

Distractions from the main thing. Why are we still here, church? It's because there's unfinished business. There are lost people on their way to hell and if they die on their way home tonight, today, they will go to hell eternally.

We are to tell them. We meet with them. Some are in our family. Some are our neighbors. Some we work with. Some are on the far other side of the earth. And we're to tell them. Here's your business, church.

[39 : 17] Don't swerve from it. Church history is full of things that distracted the church from the main task, the unfinished task of the great commission, the grand command.

But notice how Jesus not only corrects their foldy ideas about the timing of his final kingdom, but the ethnic identity of the kingdom, the citizens. He tells them, my kingdom is not a little Jewish thing at all, like you think of it.

It's a universal kingdom. It's for all the nations. My father has said, it's too small a thing for me just to gather back the people of Israel.

That's too little of a thing for the sacrifice that I'm going to perform. No, he's going to call in all the nations. Yes, you'll begin with Jerusalem, the Jews at Jerusalem.

Yes, you'll go to all Judea. And if they repent and trust in me, their Messiah, they will be saved and join the kingdom of God. But you're not to stop there.

[40 : 23] In Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, on out, beyond just the ethnic Jews. These are Jews who had intermarried long ago with the nations that were shipped in.

They were half-breeds. They were despised by the Jews. Jesus says, they are to be invited into my kingdom too. And if they believe, they will be equal partners of the kingdom.

And you're not to stop there, but you're to go on out to the ends of the earth. Those who you consider Gentile dogs are to hear my gospel and to be brought in. You're to go to the farthest places of the earth and there claim my people.

I have died to gather from every land, every nation, every tribe, every language. Blessing is to come to all nations through me.

What a contrast from Jesus' first commission to these twelve apostles. You know what he said the first time? Matthew 10, 5, and 6. Do not go among the Gentiles. Do not enter any town of the Samaritans.

[41 : 32] Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. That's what they did. Yes, it was to be to the Jews first, but not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles.

And now is the time because the new covenant established by Jesus' blood requires a new commission. And the new commission is Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. All nations are to participate. Everyone who believes from any nation will become my citizens. So don't stop bearing witness of me until the furthest places have heard.

You know, this is one of those uttermost parts of the earth when you think about Jerusalem, isn't it? And blessed be God, it's reached us and it's not to end with us. There's others here in this uttermost part of the earth that need to hear and there's other parts of the earth that need to hear.

And Acts 1-8 becomes a rough outline, kind of a table of contents for the rest of the book. As chapters 1-7 talk about the church as it grows and evangelizes there in Jerusalem and then 8-12 how it moves on out into all Judea and Samaria and then 12 to the end goes to the ends of the earth.

[42 : 49] And who's Jesus talking to? Some ordinary, weak, often stumbling and bumbling men that we have read of in volume 1.

And Jesus knows their weakness and so he says, well, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. I'm not going to send you to make bricks without providing the straw.

I'm going to provide everything you need, the resources to carry out this grand task to the ends of the earth. And he is none other than the second person of the Godhead, the promised gift of the Father that will be given to you.

And we see that happening in chapter 2 at Pentecost. So here's the equipping to do the assignment of bearing the witness to the lost people of the earth. This is how they would be clothed with power from on high.

Nothing less than God the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. And so their work of making disciples from all the nations is a work that they are totally unfit for without supernatural equipping.

[43 : 59] It's the power of God that's needed to overcome your own fear of man and to enable you to boldly speak of Christ. It's the supernatural power of God enabling you to overcome your prejudices against Samaritans and Gentiles and people who are very different from you.

It's the power, supernatural power to overcome their prejudices against your king and their hatred of your gospel and of Christ's laws and Christ's ways and their love of sin and their blindness and pride and unbelief and their fatal apathy to the whole business of their eternal soul.

It's nothing short of everlasting supernatural power that's needed to help you in your task and that's what Jesus says I will give you.

There's obstacles in me and in my ears that nothing but God can overcome. You'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. That's what happened at Pentecost.

You know those very words are used by Dr. Luke when he explains how it was that the Virgin Mary was enabled to conceive and bring forth the Son of God.

[45 : 09] Remember her question? How can these things be since I am a virgin? The angel said the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

The same words used now of the apostles. How are we a motley group here going to take this gospel to the ends of the earth? The Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will receive power by that very act.

The birth of the church is no less supernatural than the birth of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The conversion of one sinner requires a new birth a supernatural birth and so it tells us that our work is way over our heads.

What we're out to do at Grace Fellowship Church is way over our heads. All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One come down. Brethren, pray. Pray.

Pray. That's the application. And do your work depending on the Holy Spirit who has been given to equip us. Go forth in His power.

[46:16] And He closes the section with the account of the ascension for after He said this. The same occurrence the same appearance to them after He had said this He was done talking suddenly He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid Him from their sight.

Now this is no secret disappearance into heaven. It's in full view of His apostles' eyes. It's another event that they are to bear witness to. And it's no sudden disappearance as other times during the 40 days when He would suddenly appear and suddenly disappear.

No, this was different. It was protracted. It was drawn out. He's done talking and He just starts floating. He's just lifted up and up and up and up He goes and they watch and they watch until He's unfolded by a cloud and the cloud hinders them from seeing any more.

And they're looking intently up into the sky and suddenly two men dressed in white are found standing beside them. They're angels. And they've got a gentle rebuke and encouragement for these men.

Men of Galilee, why? There's the rebuke. Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you've seen Him go into heaven.

[47:43] The gentle rebuke, why? Why standing and staring? It seems they were shocked by His departure. Yes, He had told them He was going to leave them in the upper room and then that He would return to them, but hadn't He left them?

In death and for three days and hadn't He returned to them? Three days later in resurrection, it seems they thought that they had Him back for good, expecting Him to be always with them, establishing a worldwide kingdom with Him present, ruling from Jerusalem's throne.

But now this. And they're left staring into the empty sky. Why? Why? Why do you stand there looking into the sky?

Calling them back, you see, to their task. Don't just stand there. Remember what He said. Get busy and do what He said. Show your love to the Savior by obeying His last command.

And then they encourage Him with this same Jesus that's just gone up from you. He's going to come in the same way, visibly, physically. Every eye will see Him, we're told. So get busy.

[49:00] And verse 12 tells us that the apostles went back to Jerusalem just as they were told to do, to wait for the power from on high, to equip them for worldwide evangelism. And that's what the rest of the book is about.

And as they do it, they know that Jesus is reigning and that He's with them. He's with them. These are the acts of Jesus Christ acting in and through His apostles through the influence of His Holy Spirit.

What an encouragement this should be to us then in this task of the unfinished business. What an encouragement to Bob and Kathy's self as they move next month into inner city Atlanta.

People so different from them, but they know the greatest need of everyone they will meet on the street. It's the same Jesus that saved them and they'll be able to tell them so.

What an encouragement to David and Nicky Vaughan as they returned just a few days ago to hard, unbelieving Frenchmen who don't even think there is such a category as God.

[50:06] To know that Jesus is with us and almighty power of the Holy Spirit is with us to open the hearts of people that have been closed fast against the gospel.

What an encouragement to you and me as we return home this morning and we return home some to family members that are lost and some to neighbors that are lost and relatives and work associates that are lost. We're not left alone.

We've been equipped. The Spirit has been given. Christ is with us to the end of the age. Let's be encouraged. Let us show our love to the Savior for what He's done by asking, Lord, is there one person I could talk to this week and tell about you?

Ask Him for that. Then have your eyes open and do it. Open your mouth and depend upon the Holy Spirit to help you just to tell others what you yourself have come to find.

That only Jesus can do helpless sinners good. Lost person, can you see something of Jesus' love for you in this passage?

[51:14] There you are neglecting your great salvation, this great salvation just going on your way and it's all you need to do to be lost, just to neglect it and what's He doing here?

He's gathering His people together and He's not going to let you forget. He's going to send His people out to remind you and everyone else of Jesus Christ and your need for Him and how He

alone can satisfy your greatest need of a Savior.

What a Savior. What a great salvation. Let's respond by crying out for the Spirit of God to strengthen us in this task. Number 244 in our hymnal.

244. Holy Spirit, gift of the Father and of the Son to all of your church, to every believer, thank you that we are, you've opened our eyes and given us light to see what we were blind to, even the Lord Jesus and how He saves from sin.

And we pray that you would fill us with His love and you would fill our words, our mouth with words when we open our mouths that we might be burdened with a love of Christ for sinners and then open our mouths and speak a word for Jesus.

[52 : 36] clearly, boldly, as we ought and open eyes even among us this day, Holy Spirit, as you've been given to point people to Christ, show them this day.

Don't let them ignore so great a Savior and so great a salvation, but bring them to trust in Him today and we'll praise you, Holy Spirit, Father in Heaven, Lord Jesus, on the throne, we pray in your holy name, Amen.