

You Will Be My Witnesses

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we are excited to begin our study of the book of Acts, to hear what you have to say in your word about your son Jesus Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about the church, who we are, about our mission. And Lord, we want to use this opportunity to examine ourselves, and we want to be stirred up by the examples we see in the Christian brothers and sisters who have gone before us. And we want to be more empowered, filled by your Holy Spirit in our life and ministry.

So please do that, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. That's chapter 1. I will read verses 1 to 14.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, You heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

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

[2 : 33] And when he had said these things as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, to behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

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

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

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the woman, and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. We are in Acts chapter 1, verses 1 to 14, beginning our series in the book of Acts. As I said earlier, the author is Luke, the evangelist.

[3 : 50] That's attested as early as 2nd century, and we see evidence of that throughout the book of Acts because he includes himself in the narrative by using the pronoun we.

And we know that Luke was a companion of Paul's from Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4.11, and other places. And since the last recorded event in the book of Acts took place around 62 A.D., and since the book never mentions several key events in church history and in the history of Israel from 65 to 70 A.D., it seems examples of that would be in the Neronian persecution, death of Paul and Peter, significant events, destruction of Jerusalem.

It seems likely that Acts was finished before that, so the date of composition is somewhere between 62 and 65 A.D. And in verse 1, Luke says, In the first book of Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

So from this, we know that Acts is the second of a two-volume series. And the first volume is the Gospel of Luke, which was also dedicated to this person named Theophilus, who was likely a patron that funded the copying and distribution of Luke's work.

And in Luke 1, verse 3, he has said that having followed all things closely for some time past, that he has written an orderly account of what Jesus did and taught.

[5 : 20] That was what Luke said about his Gospel. So the genre of the book of Acts, likewise, is history, just like Luke. And more specifically, it's biblical history, since it emulates the style and theological themes of Old Testament history.

And I noted in our sermon series through Luke that Luke is a first-rate historian whose attention to detail is noted by many modern historians and archaeologists.

And perhaps this is not surprising, considering that he was a doctor. He's called the beloved physician in Colossians 4, verse 14. And now in this sequel, with the same orderliness and meticulousness we expect of him, he tells us about what Jesus continues to do through his apostles.

But it's important to note that this wasn't just Dr. Luke's hobby or a mere academic exercise because he likes history. He likes to keep a record of things that happened.

There's a reason why the church tradition calls him Luke the Evangelist. Luke sought to preserve this history so that you might believe in Jesus Christ and be saved.

[6 : 35] We saw this purpose clearly at the beginning of his Gospel in Luke chapter 1, verse 4. He said, That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. That's the purpose of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, its sequel.

Especially because the early church was persecuted, so intensely persecuted, and in many cases by the Jews themselves, there were many opportunities for doubt to creep in.

So Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts to reassure people that Jesus really is who he said he was. That he really died on the cross and was raised on the third day.

That he really ascended to the heavens. That he really sent the Spirit of God down. That these events really were the work of God.

And it was the fulfillment of God's promises from of old. And that the church really is the true people of God. And that the apostles are the ones who are continuing the things that Jesus did and taught.

[7 : 45] My prayer is that as we go through this, that you be reassured of these things also. So the intended structure of the book of Acts is made apparent by the summary statements at the end of each section, where Luke mentions one way or another that the Word of God continued to increase, or that the church multiplied and was built up.

These are examples of all the summary statements. Acts 2, 6, 9, 12, 16, 19, and 28. And if you use those as kind of as guiding markers to form an outline, it looks like this.

The church of Christ established and empowered in chapter 1 to chapter 2, verse 41. And then the church in Jerusalem, chapter 2 to 6. The church in Judea and Samaria, chapter 6 to 9.

Peter and the first Gentile convert. And Paul turning to the Gentiles. And then to the end of the earth. And finally to Jerusalem and to Rome in 1921 to 2831. In this particular passage, Luke teaches us that as followers of Jesus, we are to bear witness to Jesus Christ to the end of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's the main point of our passage this evening. And I'm going to talk about that in three parts.

First, the power for Christian mission, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5. Then the purview of Christian mission, verses 6 to 11.

[9 : 10] And finally, prayer and Christian mission, verses 12 to 14. In Luke chapter 24, verse 19, after Jesus' resurrection, we see two of Jesus' disciples on the road to Emmaus speaking about how Jesus was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.

And echoing that language, Luke says here in chapter 1, verses 1 to 2 of Acts, In the first book of Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given command through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

But what exactly did Jesus say and do? What exactly did Jesus command his apostles? Verses 3 to 5 give us more detail. It says, He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, You heard from me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

This verse closely parallels what Luke said at the end of his gospel in chapter 24, verses 46 to 49, which also contains these three elements of what Jesus did and said.

[10 : 33] First is Christ's suffering, which includes his death, his death on the cross. Second is Christ's resurrection. Third is Christ's message about the kingdom of God.

In Luke 24, 46, 47, he unpacks it and says, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

So once again, Christ's suffering, Christ's resurrection, and Christ's proclamation of the kingdom of God, which entails coming under the gracious reign of Christ by receiving forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith.

This is what Christ did and said. He first suffered, died on the cross for our sins. He tasted death for our sake so that we might have eternal life by putting our trust in him.

Second, he was raised. The fact that he was raised is proof that his death, his atoning sacrifice, was accepted by the Father. And the third, it is Christ's death and resurrection that makes possible our repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[11 : 46] And true repentance is not merely a mental ascent, but it's a turning, a reorienting of one's entire life. When you renounce your autonomy and submit to the lordship of Christ, when you renounce your sinful ways and submit to the ways of God, that is true repentance that leads to forgiveness of sins.

And only those who have received forgiveness of sins in this way are reconciled to God as citizens of the kingdom of God. They're no longer under the dominion of Satan, but under the gracious reign of Jesus Christ, the king.

That's why the proclamation, the message of the kingdom, the good news of the kingdom, and the good news of Christ's death and resurrection are intimately related. Jesus did and taught these things.

And the apostles continued to do and teach these things. And now we are to do and teach these things. We are called to suffer as Christ suffered.

The Greek word that's translated as witnesses in verse 8 is the word from which we get the English word martyr. Not all Christian witness involves martyrdom, but all Christian witness involves suffering.

[13 : 12] At the time of Paul's conversion in Acts 9, 15-16, Jesus says concerning him, He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. Being a Christian witness entails carrying the name of Jesus and suffering for the name of Jesus.

If you live the way Christ lived and if you say the things that Christ said, you're going to be persecuted no matter where you live on this planet. Because the enemies of Christ will not leave you alone.

But take heart, because those who suffer with Christ will also rise with him. Those who partake in his suffering will also partake in his resurrection glory.

And so we are being called to follow this pattern that Christ has set for us. But curiously, verse 1 describes the entirety of Jesus' earthly ministry right up to his ascension to heaven as what Jesus began to do and teach.

[14 : 23] Isn't that interesting? Isn't that interesting? In one sense, his earthly ministry is finished. And yet, that's only what he has begun to do.

This is because his ministry now continues through the apostles and through the church. He says, He commanded through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

The word apostle comes from the Greek word that means to send. The Latin equivalent of that word is missio from which we get the word missions. The apostles are missionaries.

Sent out with the authority of the risen Christ. Eleven of these apostles are named in Acts 1, verse 13. The original twelve minus Judas Iscariot, the traitor.

And Jesus began his mission while here on earth. And he now continues that mission through the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the apostles. And that means we too are part of this ongoing mission.

[15 : 30] Because Ephesians 2, 19-21 says that we are members of the household of God that is being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. The people of God, the church, is the temple of the Lord being built up on the foundation of the apostles. We're part of the same building project as

these apostles.

And that's why the mission of Christ, the mission of the apostles is now also our mission. Sometimes we, as followers of Christ, become apathetic because we lose sight of our mission. Your life after conversion is not a victory lap. You're still in the race. Your mission is not yet complete.

The confetti is not falling. You're not supposed to loiter around until you die and go to heaven. I don't know if you have ever been given a trust or responsibility that you felt was so weighty and important that you felt honored by it.

[16:44] Maybe you were selected to give a graduation speech as a representative of your class. Maybe it was when you first held a child in your arms. Maybe it was when you were given a special assignment by your boss or by your advisor.

Brothers and sisters, this is the greatest honor of a Christian's life. Our mission is to know Christ and to make Him known.

To treasure Christ and to trumpet Him to the world. The risen Lord Jesus Christ, whose name is exhausted above every other name, has given us personally a mission to fulfill.

We are witnesses of the Lord Jesus. We are ambassadors of the kingdom of God. And don't think that the apostles were special, extraordinary men.

The apostles were ordinary men. Acts chapter 4 verse 13 says that they were uneducated, common men. Not only that, they were sinful men.

[17:57] Men who often failed to grasp the significance of Jesus' teachings. Men who made many mistakes. And yet our merciful Lord gave them their sacred trust.

And He extends that same trust to stumbling disciples like us. That He showed...

I feel that keenly every time I stand on this pulpit because it was enough mercy for Him to save me. That was more than enough. And He could have said to me, Sean, now that I've saved you, just stay back and don't mess up anything I'm doing.

But instead, He says, Sean, can you go and shepherd my flock? The precious ones I purchased with my own blood. Sean, can you go and preach the good news of the kingdom of God?

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus says also to you, here is my gospel, the pearl of greatest prize, the most precious treasure. Will you steward it?

[19:11] Will you share it that others too may be lifted out of their poverty of sin and shame? Here is my emancipation proclamation, the only message that can redeem people from their slavery to sin.

Can you go and break the chains of my children? Brothers and sisters, in your home, at your school, at your workplace, in your neighborhood, among the nations, you have a most weighty and glorious mission in Jesus Christ.

Do you remember it? Do you remember it? If that makes you, if you're champing at the bit to go when you hear that, that's probably how the apostles felt too.

They just witnessed Jesus' resurrection. They're about to witness his ascension to heaven. You'd think they would be antsy and anxious to tell everyone about what they have seen.

But Jesus tells them to hold their horses. He says in verses 4 to 5, While staying with them, Jesus 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.

[20:46] Why does Jesus do this? He feels like calling a timeout when your team is on a roll and scoring all the points. You just was raised from the dead, they couldn't stop you.

Why must we wait? It's because until Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, the Spirit of God cannot descend. Because as Jesus said in John 16, verse 7, If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you, but if I go, I will send Him to you.

It's only as the risen and ascended Lord that Jesus has the authority to send the Holy Spirit. And this is why He spends 40 days on earth after His resurrection, appearing to His disciples and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Jesus' wilderness temptation in Luke chapter 4 was 40 days. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before coming into the promised land. The 40 days leading up to the final stage of Jesus' This 40 days is what's leading up to the final stage of Jesus' inauguration.

His ascension to the throne. His full reign over His people. And when He ascends, Jesus fully comes into His kingdom over the church, over His people as the Messianic King.

[22 : 12] And from there, He reigns and sends His Spirit to empower His believers. And it's imperative that the apostles wait for that. Because without the Holy Spirit, they cannot accomplish their mission.

They must first, it says, be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is an allusion to Luke 3.16 where John the Baptist spoke of how Jesus, who was to come after Him, would baptize people in the Spirit and fire.

To baptize literally means to immerse. Just as John literally immersed people in water, signifying their repentance, Jesus will figuratively immerse people with the Holy Spirit and fire, pointing to the cleansing and purifying work of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit who sanctifies us, consecrates us for His God's special purposes. And not only that, it's the Spirit who empowers us for His mission.

Jesus says in verse 8, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Without this power, the apostles are impotent, incapable of doing what Jesus has commissioned them to do.

[23 : 25] in Ezekiel 37, God paints a dramatic picture of the Holy Spirit's power. God brings prophet Ezekiel and sets him down in the middle of a valley full of bones, very dry bones, it says, which means these people have been dead for a long time.

And God commands Ezekiel, prophesy over these bones and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

It's the toughest preaching assignment you can receive. Tell dry bones to hear the word of the Lord. And yet, when Ezekiel prophesies over them, the bones start to rattle and come together, sinews and flesh start to appear, skin starts to cover over them.

And God commands Ezekiel, prophesy to the breath. Breath is the same word as spirit in Hebrew. Prophecy to the breath, thus says the Lord God, come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain that they may live.

And when the breath of God enters what was once dry bones, the breath came into them and they lived and stood on their feet an exceedingly great army. And afterward, God explains to Ezekiel, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

[24 : 51] Behold, they say, our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are indeed cut off.

Therefore, prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God, behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people.

And I will put my spirit within you and you shall live. There can be no spiritual quickening, no spiritual awakening apart from the Spirit of God.

Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1 says that all unbelievers are dead in their trespasses and sins. And preaching to dead people is futile.

Now, I guarantee you that at the end of that prophetic vision, Ezekiel was not patting himself on the back thinking what a great preacher he was.

Look at me. Look at these bones coming together. But isn't that exactly what we do sometimes?

[26 : 05] It's easy for us mistakenly to think that people are saved by the eloquence of our preaching, the zeal of our evangelism, the efficiency of our organization, or the brilliance of our strategies, but souls are never saved by such things.

When a spiritually dead person is made alive in Christ, when a spiritually blind person is made to see, it is always the mighty work of the Spirit of God.

And so Jesus doesn't tell the apostles, hey, go and brainstorm for a little while, come up with a five-year plan for world domination. No, he tells them, go, wait for the Holy Spirit.

Because the Holy Spirit is the power for Christian mission. Now look at the purview of Christian mission in verses 6 to 11.

In verse 6, the apostles start to wonder, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They thought Israel's hope had been dashed with the death of Jesus, but now that he has risen from the dead, they were beginning to entertain thoughts of a national revolution and a political hegemony again.

[27 : 38] Jesus had already corrected this misunderstanding in Luke chapter 17, 20 to 21, when the Pharisees asked him, when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, look, here it is, or

there, for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

In other words, the kingdom of God is unobservable to the physical eye, yet already the kingdom of God is in our midst, it's among us, wherever Christ and his followers are, wherever Christ the king and his subjects are, that is where the kingdom of God is, because the kingdom of God is the dominion of the realm of God's rule.

sometimes we too can be tempted to speak of the kingdom of God in geopolitical terms. In much the same way, the ancient Jews expected the establishment of the kingdom of God through the overthrow of the Roman Empire.

But the kingdom of God does not come in observable ways. No matter how Christian its history and values are, and no matter how Christian the United States becomes, this country or any other country for that matter will never be the kingdom of God.

Rather, the kingdom of God becomes manifest when we live in submission to God's rule as his people. And this kingdom continues to grow and spread until it takes hold among every nation on earth.

[29 : 16] And then Christ the king will return in glory to consummate his kingdom. over all the earth. And until that time, political power or military triumph is not the lot of God's people.

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

They will receive power, all right, but not the power to crush Roman armies, not the power for political domination, not the power to rule over the heathens, but the power to bear witness to Jesus among them.

Jesus masterfully adjusts the worldly dynamics of power that the apostles had uncritically accepted. Furthermore, Jesus tells us that it is not for us to know when the end will be.

Instead of being unduly preoccupied with predicting the end, we should be occupied with bearing faithful witness till the end. As Matthew 24, verse 14 says, And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

[30 : 51] The focus should be on what Christ commands us to do in the meanwhile and not on when Christ will return. We know that Christ will return and that's enough.

We do not need to know when. And this is what Jesus commands us to be my witnesses, he says. A witness affirms or attests to something, something outside of themselves.

Followers of Christ are commanded to attest to and give testimony regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. His life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

Our mission is not to create platforms for ourselves to rise to prominence ourselves, to proclaim ourselves and our experiences. But it is to make Christ prominent, to proclaim Christ, who he is and what he has done.

And we can't forget this, brothers and sisters, we're not the saviors of this world. Christ is the savior that this world needs and our task is to point the world to him, the only person who can save.

[32 : 03] It is not our job to save this world. That's what we're witnesses. Christ is on trial before the eyes of our neighbors.

Christ is on trial before the eyes of the watching world. And they're asking, is Jesus who he really claimed to be? Is Jesus really the messianic king? Is Jesus really the son of God?

Is Jesus really the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Can Jesus give me hope and cleanse me from my sins? Can Jesus reconcile me to God?

The world is literally dying before our eyes. And worse, they are perishing forever, spiritually.

Spiritually. And there are those who perish even now without hearing one witness.

Stand up for Christ and say, yes, I know this Jesus. He is my Lord and King and he is everything he says he is. this is why we have to go and make disciples of all nations.

[33 : 25] He has asked us be my witnesses. And where should we go?

Jesus tells us you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. This verse functions as the thesis statement of the entire book.

The entire Gospel of Luke had a movement toward Jerusalem where climactically Jesus would die and be raised from the dead. And then the entire book of Acts is a movement away from Jerusalem.

Following the apostles for spreading the good news of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. The mission of the church begins in Jerusalem because that's where Joel chapter 2 verse 32 prophesied that the promised Holy Spirit would come.

Jerusalem, the ancient capital of Judah, the city of David, where the temple of God is, the very center of Jewish worship. This is, that's the origin from which the reign of Christ, the Messiah, the ultimate king spreads.

[34 : 52] Then it moves to all Judea and Samaria which includes the territories that were once part of the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel after the division during the days of Rehoboam.

And then the end of the earth, finally, is the known inhabited world. At the time, Acts was written that was considered to be Scythia to the north, Ethiopia to the south, which is modern-day Sudan, Spain to the west, and India and China to the east.

And since Luke explicitly mentions Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, and since Paul mentions the Scythians in Colossians 3.11 and also expresses his desire to go to Spain in Romans 15, it seems that the apostles took this command quite literally that they were to go to the end of the earth, as far as they possibly can go.

And if they did this on foot, with their limited understanding of world geography, we who have uncovered the farthest extremities of earth have no reason not to go.

But this commission is not merely geographical in scope, it's also ethnic. As I mentioned earlier, Jerusalem was a center of Jewish worship.

[36 : 20] And further out, in all Judea and Samaria, you found more folk and syncretistic expressions of Jewish faith. For example, Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and that name, Samaria, gets sometimes used to refer to the entire northern kingdom.

And when the Assyrians captured Samaria in 722 B.C., they deported all the Israelites of substance and means and then settled the rest of the land with foreigners. And these foreigners then intermarried with the Jews who were left there, leading to a form of syncretized religion.

And because of this, Jews, who had been deported and then later returned to their homeland from exile, they viewed these Samaritans not only as children of political rebels, compromisers, but also as racial half-breeds and syncretistic, adulterated believers.

But the apostles are called to go even to the Samaritans. And then finally, the end of the earth.

This is where you find the Gentiles, the pagans who are farthest removed from the Jewish faith.

That was me and many of you.

[37 : 51] That this ethnic scope is in view here is confirmed by the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 49, verse 6, which Acts 1a alludes to. It 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, some translations say to the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Reaching the end of the earth means to go to the nations. And that word nation refers to ethnic people groups. This is also confirmed by the parallel in Luke chapter 24, verse 47, where Jesus says that He died and rose so that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Once again, referring to ethnic people groups. So this command to be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth not only traverses geographic boundaries, but it also transgresses ethnic divisions.

this is why as a church we pray each month for a specific people group of a country. For the Sheikh people in Bangladesh, the Sunda people in Indonesia, the Persian people in Iran, the Bammar people in Myanmar, the Hausa people in Nigeria, and so on.

[39 : 21] All of these people groups we pray for are considered unreached or least reached, which means no more than 2% of their population are gospel-believing Christians, which means they lack the sheer numbers and the resources necessary.

they need witnesses of Jesus to be sent among them. And I pray that God sends more laborers into that harvest even from among us.

This is the purview of Christian mission. Our mission is global in scope because it is too small a thing for the Lord Jesus who is exalted above every other name to save the Jews only, to rule over Israel only.

He will instead save and reign over Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, people from all the nations. We live in Cambridge in Boston, the Jerusalem of modern education. And because of this, we have people from these very unreached people groups coming into our city from all over the world. The nations are among us and so let's be faithful to bear witness to them. [40 : 45] The fact that we live in a highly transient city also presents a unique opportunity for us as long as we remember that our identity is as witnesses of Jesus, that we are sent ones.

So if you're not here for a time just to get your degree or finish your research or project or to work a job until you move to the next step, while you're here, you are witnesses of Jesus Christ. And when you leave this place, you are not just going to another place to do something else, you're also sent out there as witnesses of Jesus Christ. And after giving the apostles this charge, Jesus ascends to heaven in verses 9 to 11, and when he has said these things as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

This verse intentionally parallels the account of the transfiguration in Luke chapter 9, where his clothing also became dazzling white. He was joined by two men there, and then a cloud came and overshadowed them.

[42 : 12] And the difference is that the transfiguration was only for a moment, but at his ascension, Jesus is translated into glory permanently. And Jesus' ascension is the guarantee that he will return in glory in the same way he went up.

And that reality should give us hope as we bear witness to Jesus, because though we might be rejected, and we will be, though people might not believe us, though people might persecute us, we bear witness knowing that Christ will return to vindicate us.

He will come back in glory. And that brings me to my final point, prayer and Christian mission. Please follow along with me as I read verses 12 to 14.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

All these, with one accord, were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. After Jesus then sends to heaven on the Mount of Olives, the apostles make their way back to their abode in Jerusalem, wherever they were staying in Jerusalem.

[43 : 36] And then they head up into the upper room where they were staying. It's possible that this is the same upper room where Jesus had the Last Supper, but Luke does not specify, and there were many such upper rooms, so it's impossible to say for sure.

But what's important is what they do there. And it says what they're doing as they're waiting for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. It says in verse 14, all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.

The verb devote means to be busily engaged in something. Too often, we as modern believers are too busily engaged in other activities to pray.

But the earliest believers were devoting themselves to prayer. What would your biographer say that you were devoted to in life?

That you were devoted to your spouse, your kids, your work, your studies, to a hobby, a football team, sports?

[44 : 49] Traveling? Drinking? What would a historian writing about our church one day say we were devoted to?

The early believers were devoted to prayer. And they were also doing this with one accord. It says in unity, not only together in one place, but also together in one heart and one mind.

If you remember from the Gospel of Luke, before every pivotal moment of Jesus' life and ministry, Luke tells us that Jesus was praying before he's baptized and the Spirit of God descends on him and the Father speaks of him saying, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Jesus is praying before that. Before he chooses his twelve apostles, Jesus is praying. Before he teaches them how to pray with the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is praying. Before Peter's breakthrough

confession that Christ, Jesus is the Christ of God, Jesus was praying.

Before the transfiguration and his transform into glory, Jesus was praying. And before his betrayal and death, Jesus was praying.

[46 : 23] And Luke is going to continue that emphasis throughout the book of Acts. And once again, we see here, before the descent of the Holy Spirit to empower the church for mission, prayer.

And the believers are not just waiting about doing nothing. They are devoting themselves to prayer. Prayer is a hallmark of faith.

It's one of our greatest Christian vocations. None of us are apostles. Yet all of us can pray like the woman disciples that are mentioned here.

And Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers who are praying with the apostles. Not everyone can be preachers and pastors, yet all of us can pray.

And as the 19th century English pastor Charles Spurgeon puts it, prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.

[47 : 33] successful Christian missions work is never a calculable result, a predictable result of correct methods and strategies.

It is always the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. And for that reason, it is always the fruit of concerted prayer. So missiologist Wilbert Schenk puts it this way.

Missionary obedience is first of all an act of submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Strategic thinking ought to begin and end with the prayer, your will be done.

And that's my prayer this evening. That we would bear witness to Jesus Christ to the end of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit and that we would be a people who devote ourselves to pray in preparation for that, for the empowerment that we need for that.

Let's pray. God, we do seek this power. Lord, please wake us up to our senses to realize how impotent we are, how futile all our endeavors are apart from the empowering work of your Holy Spirit.

[49 : 14] Grant us that power, Lord. Fill us with your Spirit, Lord. Move us to prayer, Lord. That we might bear witness to the name of Jesus to the end of the earth.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.