

## YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:1-11

Key Verse: 1:8

“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.”

Thank God for blessing our Luke’s gospel study. The book of Acts was also written by St. Luke and picks up where his gospel left off. Acts tells how the work began by Jesus was carried on by his apostles through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. It tells how the Christian church was born and how it spread. Beginning in Jerusalem (1-7), it spread to all Judea and Samaria (8-12), and to the ends of the earth (13-28). Since then, Christian history has had ups and downs. However, God’s heart’s desire is ever the same: to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. In this way, God wants to save all peoples of all nations.

In this first lesson in Acts, we find the mission statement of the Christian church. Acts 1:8 says, “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.” Jesus’ direction is crystal clear. It is to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. The struggle of the Christian church has always been to keep this command first and foremost in the hearts of its members and to obey it practically. History proves that when people are blessed by God, they become complacent. Then they lose missionary focus. Then they lose God’s blessing. But those who maintain missionary focus and obey Jesus’ command are blessed abundantly and continually.

We studied the book of Acts in 1999 and in 2001. This will be the third time in the last five years for us to study the book of Acts. By doing so, we pray to renew our missionary vision and to take action to obey the world mission command. May God help us to be Jesus’ witnesses to the ends of the earth.

First, the Risen Christ is alive (1-3).

Look at verses 1-2. “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, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” The former book is, of course, Luke’s gospel. The recipient of both books is Theophilus. Theophilus means “lover of God.” It may refer to a person, but it definitely refers to all the children of God in the body of Christ. We should all identify with Theophilus and listen to the words of Acts as the very words of God.

Look at verse 3. “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 forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” As we studied in the last lesson of Luke’s gospel, while the disciples were assembled together on resurrection Sunday, the Risen Christ stood among them and showed himself to them. He said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!” (Lk 24:39a) When they saw the nail marks in his hands and feet and watched him eat a piece of broiled fish, they could believe that it was really him. He convinced them that he was alive. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This is the most significant event in human history. Jesus’ resurrection is God’s victory over the power of sin and death and the devil. Jesus’ resurrection marked a new beginning for mankind to live victoriously in this world. Jesus’ resurrection fulfilled the promises of God and revealed that God is the sovereign Ruler of man and the world. Jesus’ resurrection opened the door to paradise for all who believe in him. Men who suffered from fear and despair under

the shadow of death and the power of sin could now have hope in the Risen Christ: as Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we.

How did the sovereign Ruler of the world decide to disseminate this glorious good news? It was through his apostles. They were ordinary men. They were men with weaknesses and shortcomings. But he chose them for this purpose and spent much time teaching them while on earth. After his suffering, death and resurrection, he visited them—on some occasions all together, and in some cases individually—to convince them that he had risen. Here we learn that one person who really believes the resurrection of Christ is very important. Twelve men who are convinced of the resurrection of Christ can change the whole world.

Nevertheless, to convince one person that Christ has risen is not an easy job. Jesus had been teaching the Bible to his apostles for over three years. His struggle to get them to believe his suffering, death and resurrection had been intensive. Only after much prayer and labor on the part of Jesus, and finally by meeting the Risen Christ, did they believe. But when they believed, they really believed. They were willing to give their lives to witness their faith in the Risen Christ. And through their testimony, we also believe. We believe, not because we see the body of the Risen Christ, but because we believe the word of God and the testimony of the Apostles. By believing we can experience the work of the Holy Spirit, who confirms our faith. Here we learn that one-to-one Bible study, focusing on Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, is most important. It is Jesus' way to change the whole world.

Look at verse 3b. "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." At least eleven resurrection appearances have been recorded by the gospel writers and St. Paul (Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:11-18; Lk 24:13-32; Lk 24:34; Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:26-31; Jn 21:1-3; Mt 28:16-20; 1Cor 15:6; 1Cor 15:7; Lk 24:44-49). These appearances happened during a forty day period that culminated in his glorious ascension into heaven. Jesus did not appear just once or twice, but at least eleven times. There were not just one or two witnesses, but there were more than five hundred witnesses. The Risen Christ made it crystal clear that he had risen and is living. The Risen Christ is alive! We do not see the physical appearance of the Risen Christ. But we can see the Risen Christ through the changed lives of those who believe in him. Once, Missionary John Peace wanted to gain self-glory through sports, and succeeded to some degree. But when he studied Genesis he learned that man is made for the glory of God. He repented and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Christ. Last spring, he visited Kiev to serve the spring Bible conference. The Risen Christ visited him through his own Bible message on Genesis 12 and convinced him that he will be a blessing to Ukraine. Tomorrow he leaves as a permanent missionary to Ukraine. Shepherd David Lovi experienced the death of his beloved mother this month. But for the last two weeks he has shared Bible testimonies with resurrection faith. He has real joy in Jesus. The Risen Christ is alive and working in us today.

When he appeared to his apostles, the Risen Christ spoke about the kingdom of God. This was the content of his message from the beginning. In Mark 1:15 he said, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." At the Last Supper he told his disciples, "For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Lk 22:16). Even on the cross, Jesus said to a penitent robber, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." In the final analysis, the kingdom of God is most important. Peter grasped this and said, "For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever'" (1Pe 1:24,25a). Therefore, we must believe and teach the message of the kingdom of God.

Second, baptism of the Holy Spirit (4-5).

Believing that Christ had risen was important, but it was not enough to equip the apostles for the task they had to accomplish. Look at verses 4-5. "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 have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. According to Jesus' words, the Holy Spirit would baptize them. We can understand the concept of baptism through John's baptism with water. When John baptized sinners in the Jordan River it symbolized putting to death the old person and the birth of a new person. Nevertheless, John's baptism was symbolic. It did not bring about change in the inner person. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit changes the hearts of believers. The baptism of the Holy Spirit puts to death the sinful nature and creates a new life that is pure and holy in the image of Christ. St. Paul explains this well. Romans 6:5-8 says, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." Simply speaking, the Holy Spirit puts to death our sinful nature and raises us to live in the presence of the Risen Christ as his servants and coworkers (Ro 8:13). We can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit when we believe the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the beginning point of being Jesus' witness.

Third, you will be my witnesses (6-9).

Look at verse 6. The apostles expected Jesus to restore the kingdom to Israel according to the Jewish thought of restoring David's kingdom. Jesus did not repudiate their thought completely. But he taught them that it is not for them to know the times or dates that the Father has set by his own authority. Down through the generations many people have tried to systematize their Bible knowledge and develop timetables and charts to foretell the Second Coming of Christ. They have all been wrong. Only God knows when Jesus will come again. We must respect God's sovereign rule of his redemptive history.

Then what should Jesus' apostles do? Look at verse 8. "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." Jesus says that his apostles will be his witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives his people the power to testify about Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit no one can testify about Jesus. Instead, according to the calculations of their delicate minds and the cravings of their sinful natures, they talk about the things of the world with much enthusiasm. Or they talk about themselves with much fervor. But when the Holy Spirit comes, he gives us the power to testify about Jesus. In John 15:26,27 Jesus said, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." When the Holy Spirit works in us, we are compelled to witness to Jesus with burning hearts.

Witnessing to Jesus is not only done with words; it also involves action. We can witness to Jesus by showing unusual courage that comes from faith in a time of crisis (Ac 4:13). We can witness to Jesus when we love others sacrificially in a selfish world (Ac 4:32). We can witness to Jesus by being thankful and joyful in a time of suffering (Ac 16:25). The Holy Spirit enables us to witness to Jesus by word and deed.

Look at verse 8 again. “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.” Jesus revealed his plan of evangelism. The apostles must begin witnessing in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and died. There were hostile forces in Jerusalem. But there were also many people whose hearts were ready to believe the gospel. It is where God chose to start the work of the Holy Spirit. Generally, we should begin witnessing to Jesus where we are. But some think that the place where they are is not a good place to begin for many reasons. The real problem is that they do not receive the Holy Spirit’s power to be Jesus’ witnesses. When the Holy Spirit works in us, any place can be a fruitful mission field.

The gospel would spread to Judea and Samaria. These were the nearest provinces to Jerusalem. Jews and Samaritans had experienced centuries of hostility toward each other based on cultural and racial prejudice. But the gospel of Jesus is universal. It applies to all men. All men are sinners and all men can be saved when they simply repent of their sins and accept Jesus’ saving grace by faith. The spread of the gospel to Judea and Samaria foreshadows the destruction of all human barriers and the coming of true peace in the world.

Then the gospel would go to the ends of the earth. This reveals God’s universal love for all people. God loves all people of the whole world. He is not willing that anyone perish, but wants everyone to be saved. For this, he sacrificed his one and only Son Jesus Christ on the cross as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. For this, he raised Jesus from the dead and made him the source of eternal salvation to all who believe in him. For this, he was sending his apostles out into the world to be his witnesses.

God does world mission according to his own plan. In 1985, Dr. Samuel Lee gave a prayer topic to pioneer Russia with the gospel. At that time, the Iron Curtain seemed impregnable. But it was God’s plan. Now we see that not only has Russia been pioneered, but she is beginning to send missionaries. In 2002, Mother Barry gave the prayer topic to pioneer Muslim countries and North Korea with the gospel. Again, it seemed impossible. But we see that God is working. Muslim people are opening their hearts to the gospel in many places in the world. Being Jesus’ witness begins where we are. But we also share God’s vision and prayer topic for the whole world.

Look at verses 9-11. “After he 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.’” Jesus’ ascension reveals heaven to us. It also reveals his Second Coming in power and glory. This same Jesus who was a good shepherd for his people will come back as King and Judge to establish the Kingdom of God forever. Sometimes we want to be spectators watching for his return, like the disciples looking intently into the sky. But the angels urge us, “Don’t just stand there! Participate in world mission by being Jesus’ witnesses.”

In this passage we hear the Risen Christ. Let’s read verse 8 again. “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.” May the Holy Spirit empower you to be Jesus’ witness where you are and make you a prayer servant for world mission.