

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## Clarifying the Mission

Acts 1:1–11

Go ahead and take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Acts. All military planning needs operational objectives. All combat planning needs missional clarity. And soldiers need their marching orders. When there's uncertainty or ambiguity with that, people die in vain.

All military objectives need a mission. They need clarity. And it's the job of the higher-ups in a military conflict to clarify the mission. What's the mission? What are we doing? What's the endgame for the mission? What constitutes success? What constitutes failure?

Well Jesus wastes no time clarifying the mission for his disciples. He doesn't cloud the mission in ambiguity. He tells his disciples where to go. He tells his disciples what (or who!) to wait for. And he tells his disciples what constitutes success for their mission. **And by the way, this mission is a mission, that we, as Christ's twenty-first century disciples, are still engaged in. It's what we will do, as his church, until he returns or we get called home.**<sup>1</sup>

Today I'm going to give you three points from the text of Acts 1:1–11. I've entitled this message today, "Clarifying the Mission." And there are three teaching principles that summarize this passage: 1) God's promise to his disciples, 2) God's mission for his disciples, and 3) God's assurance to his disciples.

And I want us to approach this passage like a soldier who goes off to war with a mission from a commanding officer. Every soldier needs to know what his mission is. He needs his marching orders! He also needs to know what equipment is necessary for the mission. And he needs some assurances from his commanding officer concerning the mission.

Likewise we as Christ's disciples, as soldiers in the army of God, need to know our mission. We also need to know the equipment that is necessary for our mission. And we need a sense of assurance from God that our mission won't fail and his purposes will be fulfilled in the end. We'll see each of those in the text today.

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Let's deal first with the equipment that God gives us for his mission. Look with me at chapter 1, verse 1.

<sup>1</sup> In the first book, O Theophilus,<sup>2</sup>

Now remind me again, who's the author of the book of Acts? Luke. And what was the first book that Luke wrote to Theophilus? The Gospel of Luke.

<sup>1</sup> In the [Gospel of Luke], O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,<sup>3</sup>

There's a key word in **verse one**, that you might miss if you move past this verse too fast. The key word is "began."<sup>4</sup> The idea here is that Jesus's work and teaching has only just begun in the book of Luke.<sup>5</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 63: "The term 'missionary' is understood as describing the activity of 'mission' (Latin *mission*, from the verb *mittere*, 'to send'; Greek *apostole*, from the verb *apostello*, 'to send'), defined as the activity of individuals who distinguish themselves from the society in which they live both in terms of religious convictions and social behavior; they are convinced of the truth of their believe and actively work to win other people for their convictions and for the way of life, 'sent by God and the risen Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel.'"

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 101–2: "A particular parallel is provided by the twofold address of the Jewish historian Josephus to his patron at the beginning of both parts of his work *Against Apion* (1.2; 2.1). The first volume is addressed to 'Epaphroditus, most excellent of men', and the second is introduced with the words: 'By means of the former volume, my most honored Epaphroditus.'"

<sup>3</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 70: "Verse 1 is the only place where Luke directly addresses his readers."

continues throughout the book of **Acts**. And I would argue it continues even today. God promised his people in the OT, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (**Deut 31:6**; see also **Heb 13:5**). Also when giving the Great Commission to his disciples, Jesus said, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (**Matt 28:20**).

Don’t think based on what I said last week, that Jesus just disappears completely in **Acts**, so the Holy Spirit can do all the work. The teaching and the work of Jesus continues.<sup>6</sup> And when the gospel of Jesus Christ is married to the power and work of the Holy Spirit, that’s when exciting stuff happens.<sup>7</sup>

Look at **verse 2**,

*I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up<sup>8</sup>*

“Taken up” is a reference to Jesus’s ascension into heaven. We’ll read more about that in a few verses. *after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.*<sup>9</sup>

So Jesus gave commands through the Holy Spirit about the Holy Spirit’s coming, before he was taken up. Last week, I told you that the Holy Spirit was active in the book of **Luke**. Luke says, “Jesus was giving command through the Holy Spirit to his disciples.” Remember the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove during his baptism!

So we can speak in generalities about the book of **Luke** being Jesus’s coming out party. And the book of **Acts** is the Holy Spirit’s coming out party. But don’t think for a moment that the Holy Spirit wasn’t active in the book of **Luke**. Or that Jesus disappears in the book of **Acts**. He’s active in the book of **Acts**. In fact he makes a cameo appearance in **Acts 9** when he appears to Paul and says, “**Hey, knock it off. Quit fighting against me. You’re going to work for me now!**”

Look at **verse 3**.

<sup>3</sup> He [**that’s Jesus**] presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs,<sup>10</sup> appearing to them during forty<sup>11</sup> days and speaking about the kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Fernando, *Acts*. NIVAC, 50: “If Luke’s first volume describes ‘all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven,’ we can assume that this second volume describes what he continued to do and to teach (through his Spirit) after he was taken up.”

<sup>5</sup> JOHN CALVIN: “Now we see that the sum of the gospel comprises these two parts—the teaching of Christ and his acts—in that he not only brought people the comission [*sic*] committed to him by the Father but also accomplished in deed all that could be required of the Messiah.” Quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts: New Testament*, vol. VI, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 5.

<sup>6</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: “The Gospels, then, are a narrative of what Christ did and said, while the Acts are of what the other Paraclete said and did.” Quoted in Francis Martin and Evan Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 80–1: “During Jesus’ ministry, there is no reference to the Holy Spirit being upon anyone except Jesus. The Spirit descended upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:22), filled him as he returned from the Jordan (Luke 4:1), led him both in and out of the wilderness (Luke 4:1, 14), and rested upon him in his programmatic sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:18). The introduction of the Spirit in Acts 1:2 is probably not incidental for Luke. He emphasized that the same Spirit who rested upon Jesus in his ministry would empower the apostles for witness. And the same Jesus who taught them during his earthly life would continue to instruct them through the presence of the Spirit once they experienced the Spirit through the presence of Jesus. Formerly they had experienced the Spirit through the presence of Jesus. After Pentecost they would experience Jesus through the presence of the Spirit.”

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 102–3: “Some scholars have proposed that the verb *anelēmphthē* (taken up) refers to Jesus’ crucifixion. Thus, the sequence is thought to be ministry (v. 1), death (v. 2), and resurrection appearances (v. 3).<sup>14</sup> However, since the same verb is used in v. 11 with the words to heaven (*eis ton ouranon*), it is better to see v. 2 as a shorthand way of referring in advance to Jesus’ ascension.”

<sup>9</sup> Vickers, “Acts” in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 333: “The word ‘chosen’ connects to a theme that acts as an undercurrent in Acts—not usually emphasizing eternal election (as Paul does in 13:17, or as conveyed by ‘appointed’ in 13:48) but rather God’s choosing believers for particular acts of service or ministry (1:24; 9:15; 10:41).”

<sup>10</sup> Vickers, “Acts” in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 334: “Resurrection from the dead was no less controversial, and no easier to believe, in the first century than it is today. When Paul speaks of the resurrection at the Areopagus at Athens, he is mocked for it (17:32).”

<sup>11</sup> Vickers, “Acts” in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 334: “The number forty recalls other significant periods in the Bible. Most importantly, the number recalls times of preparation: 10 Moses spent forty days on Sinai receiving the law (Ex. 34:28); Elijah visited Horeb on a forty-day journey, being refreshed before returning to work (1 Kings 19:8); and Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness undergoing temptation before beginning his ministry (Luke 4:2). So now Jesus spends forty days teaching the disciples, preparing them for the new ministry about to begin.” Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 82: “From the viewpoint of chronology it should also be noted that the forty days fit

Now it's important to get the timing of all of this down. Jesus was resurrected on what we call "Easter Sunday." And even that very day he appeared to some of his disciples. There were about ten post-resurrection appearances by Jesus that are recorded in the Bible. Surely there were more appearances than that. But those are the ones recorded in Scripture.

Jesus appeared to 1) Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–17), 2) to the other Mary and Salome (Matt 28:9–10), 3) to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34), 4) to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32), 5) to the apostles (Luke 24:36), 6) to Thomas and the apostles when Jesus showed Thomas the scars in his hands (John 20:26–30), 7) to his disciples twice in Galilee, once to eat fish with them on the shore (John 21:1–14), and 8) once to deliver the Great Commission on a mountainside in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20), 9) to James his half-brother (1 Cor 15:7), 10) and as Paul records to five hundred other disciples, many of whom were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (see 15:5).<sup>13</sup> You could even ask around in that day: "Did you see Jesus after his death?" People could reply, "You bet I did. I'll never forget it."

According to Luke, this happened for forty days. Jesus apparently showed off his resurrection body for forty days between his resurrection and his ascension. Jesus was no phantom being!<sup>14</sup> His resurrection wasn't a "spiritual resurrection."<sup>15</sup> It was a real, bodily resurrection.<sup>16</sup>

And during this time he reiterated his teaching about the "kingdom of God." That was a common theme in the book of Luke—Jesus bringing the Kingdom!<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of

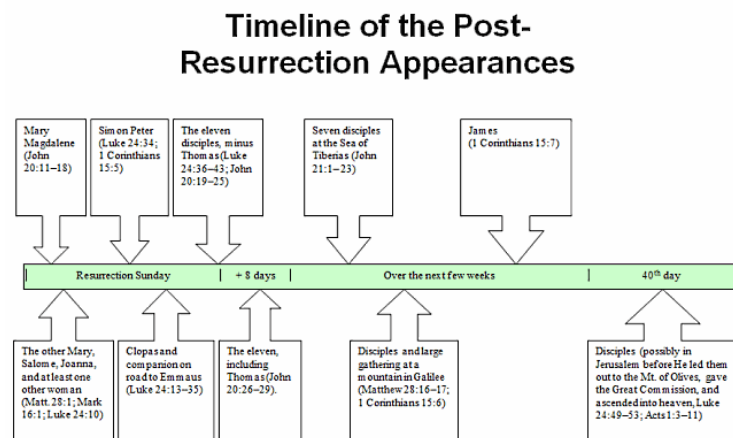
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the dating of Pentecost: resurrection on the third day, appearances for forty days, approximately a week in the upper room (1:12–14), and then Pentecost, fifty days from the crucifixion (2:1)."

<sup>12</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 335: "We should also note how the term kingdom bookends the book of Acts: Luke identifies the kingdom as one of the two themes of the forty days Jesus spends with the disciples, and at the very end of Acts the theme receives explicit emphasis again, this time in the ministry of Paul, who at the end of the book is described as "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31)."

<sup>13</sup> For a plausible sequence of events in this forty day period of appearances, see Elizabeth Mitchell's article, "The Sequence of Christ's Post-Resurrection Appearances: Where Exactly Did Jesus Appear, and to Whom?" Answers in Genesis, 03-21-12: <https://answersingenesis.org/jesus/resurrection/the-sequence-of-christs-post-resurrection-appearances/>

Here timeline is given here:



<sup>14</sup> AUGUSTINE: "How did they see him go? In the flesh which they touched, which they felt, the scars of which they even probed by touching; in that body in which he went in and out with them for forty days, manifesting himself to them in truth, not in any falsity; not as an apparition, not as a shadow, not as a spirit, but as he himself said, not deceiving, 'Handle and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see me to have' [Luke 24:39]." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 104–5: "One of the aims of these encounters was to demonstrate the physicality of Jesus' resurrection *with many convincing proofs (en pollois tekmeriois)*. So we are told that Jesus invited them to touch him and that he ate and drank in their presence (cf. Lk. 24:36–43; Acts 10:41). He was no phantom, and their experience was not simply visionary or spiritual."

<sup>16</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John–Acts*, ESVEC, 334: "In the resurrection, Jesus is the vanguard of a new, transformed, immortal humanity."

<sup>17</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 105: "Jesus spent this time speaking to the apostles about the kingdom of God, which had been the central theme of his teaching in the Gospel (e.g., Lk 4:43; 6:20; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11; 11:20; 17:20–21; 18:16–17, 24–25; 21:31; 22:16)."

God. And fifty days after his death at Passover is the day of Pentecost (Pentecost means “fiftieth”). So shortly after Jesus’s ascension, the Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost. We’ll see that soon in **Acts 2**.

Look at **verse 4**,

<sup>4</sup> *And while staying with them*

Literally this says, “And while he was eating salt with them.”<sup>18</sup> That’s a curious expression! This is a description of table fellowship. Jesus ate with them not because his resurrection body needed it, but because it was fun. He enjoyed time with his disciples. **Someday we will eat at the Great Banquet before the Lord in heaven in our new resurrection bodies. And we’ll eat not because our resurrection bodies need the nutrients and sustenance that comes from food. We’ll do it because it’s fun. We’ll enjoy that time of fellowship, like Jesus does here.**

<sup>4</sup> *And 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*

This is the Spirit promised by the Father in **Joel 2:28–32**. Jesus promised it too in **John 14:16–17** when he said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.”<sup>19</sup> Now Jesus is saying in the book of **Acts**, “**Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit.**” The Greek construction of this statement is instructive here. This command from Jesus could be rendered “**Stop departing from Jerusalem.**”<sup>20</sup>

Why would Jesus need to tell them that? Well, we have two episodes in the Gospels of the disciples returning to Galilee after Jesus’s death. One episode involves them resuming their fishing enterprise (see **John 21:1–14**). They ostensibly gave up fishing for men and decided to go back to fishing for fish. So we know that there was some migration back and forth from Jerusalem to Galilee.

Jesus says here, “**Enough of that. Stay here! Wait in Jerusalem! Your days of fishing for fish are over! You are fishers of men now.**”

Why did Jesus want them in Jerusalem?<sup>21</sup> Couldn’t they have launched the church from Galilee just as well as Jerusalem? Well Jerusalem had historical and theological importance to Jesus, and he wanted the church to be birthed there.<sup>22</sup>

Galilee, in case you didn’t know is roughly seventy miles north of Jerusalem. Most of Jesus’s ministry took place near the Sea of Galilee before his death. It was a huge deal in Jesus’s ministry when he left Galilee and went to Jerusalem. He came there for the last week of his life and then he was crucified.

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<sup>18</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVPBBNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 1:4: “‘Gathering together’ (NASB) is literally ‘took salt together,’ an idiom for table fellowship. This act was the ultimate sign of physicality (in many Jewish traditions, angels could not genuinely eat human food) and intimacy.”

<sup>19</sup> See also John 15:26; 16:7–13. Jesus promised it as “power from on high” in Luke 24:49.

<sup>20</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 83.

<sup>21</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: “‘He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem.’ Why? Just as when soldiers are about to charge a multitude, no one thinks of letting them issue forth until they have armed themselves, or as horses are not allowed to start from the barriers until they have got their charioteer, likewise Christ did not allow them to appear in the field before the descent of the Spirit, so that they would not be easily defeated and taken captive by the many.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 4–5.

<sup>22</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 107: “They were to wait in Jerusalem because of the historical and theological significance of that city in God’s dealings with Israel. Jerusalem was especially associated with the promise of God to rule over his people and bless them through the kings of David’s line (cf. 2 Sa. 7:1–29; 1 Ki. 8:1–21; Pss. 78:67–71; 132:11–18). So the city of David became a focal point of predictions about the future of the nation as a whole (e.g., Is. 40:1–2; 65:18–25; Zechariah 8).”





**Holy Spirit. The only other option for us besides working by the power of the Holy Spirit is working in the power of the flesh. And we all know that doesn't please God or produce lasting results.<sup>28</sup>**

**I had a friend once who owned a business, and he had this shop that he ran his business out of. And he'd always get suckered into hiring these inexperienced workers, who didn't know anything about his business. He had a soft heart, so he wanted to help them out. And so he'd ask them, "Do you know how to do this job?" "Nope." "Do you know how to drive a forklift?" "Nope." "Do you know how to swing a hammer?" "Nope." And they would just kind of show up for the party without bringing anything. And it was frustrating.**

**But that wasn't the worst of it. What was worse was when people pretended like they knew what they were doing, but they didn't. And so they'd fake it. At one point one of these hirelings actually drove a forklift into the side of his building. That's not good for business.**

**The only thing worse for the church than having no Holy Spirit power, is having people fake the work of the Holy Spirit and make a mess for everyone else. Jesus says here, "You've got to have it. Don't do anything else! Don't leave the city of Jerusalem! Don't start the ministry of the church without him. Do not pass go. Do not collect 200 dollars! Don't rev up your engines. Don't punch the gas. Don't do anything until the Holy Spirit comes!"**

**"But how do we know when it comes, Jesus?" "Trust me, you'll know." The message for us is very clear here. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you don't have anything.<sup>29</sup> This church is nothing without the Spirit. If we get ahead of ourselves... If we get too big a view of ourselves... If we fail to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit for every single thing that we do as a church then the dross of our labor and activity for God will be consumed by fire. The wood hay and stubble will be burned up, and we'll be left with nothing.**

**Do you remember Moses's prayer to God in Exodus? "If you don't go with us to the Promised Land then we aren't going up there, Lord" (Exod 33:15). In the same way, Jesus is saying, "Don't do anything without the Holy Spirit. Don't do anything without God's power and presence." That's our prayer too. We're not going anywhere without you, Lord. We can't do this without the power of the Spirit.**

**You might say, "I want Holy Spirit power in my life, Tony." I want to be baptized by the Spirit and see his power manifested in my life." If that's the case, here's the first and most important step. You need to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. You need to admit your sinfulness, believe in Christ's death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit will come and dwell inside of you and then you have access to that power from this point forward.**

**But that's not the end of Spirit-empowerment, that's only the beginning. For the rest of your life, you will struggle to learn what it means to "Walk by the Spirit." It's an ongoing process. It's a struggle. But it's a struggle that is filled with joy and fulfillment and power as the Holy Spirit's influence over your life is unleashed before the watching world.**

**My prayer right now is this, "Holy Spirit take control of me. Eliminate those things that quench your power and awaken inside fresh energy and vigor for the gospel. Awaken us as a church, Lord! Unleash your power on this city. Not for us. Not for us, Lord. But for your own glory."**

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**Back to the narrative. Look at verse 6.**

*<sup>6</sup> So when they [that's Jesus and his disciples] had come together [there's another great word for what we might call fellowship... as Jesus and his disciples were hanging out together], they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> MacArthur, *Acts 1-11*, MNTC, 11: "[The Lord Jesus] will empower the apostles (and all subsequent believers) with those resources necessary to finish the Savior's unfinished work."

<sup>29</sup> Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 50: "All Christian ministry depends on the activity of the Spirit in the minister and in the ones ministered to."

<sup>30</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 44: "Not yet realizing what the baptism of the Spirit really is, the apostles were confusing the baptism of the Spirit for the individual believer with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the whole nation in the latter days. That is

Hmmm... Let's deal with this question. Them hanging out together, that's great! But this question is *not so great*. Jesus has already told them, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (**Mark 13:32**).<sup>31</sup>

One of the things that his disciples got bogged down with constantly during Jesus's ministry was thinking that Jesus came to re-establish the Davidic Kingdom, vanquish the Romans, and install them as Jesus's top cabinet members. They even fought at times over who would be the greatest in Jesus's kingdom on earth. Who would be the right-hand man in Jesus's kingdom? They're still struggling with this even after Jesus's resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

Watch Jesus's response in **verse 7**.

<sup>7</sup> [Jesus] said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come<sup>33</sup> upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**"Have you preached to all the nations yet, disciples?" "Uh, no!" "Then quit asking me when the end will come. Go preach the gospel to the nations!"**

**Once when Alastair was little he asked me to be excused from the table. And I noticed that he hadn't eaten even half of his sandwich. So I said to him, "Keep eating." So he'd eat a little and then ask again, "Can I be excused from the table?" Finally I said to him, "It is not for you to know the time that you are able to be excused from the table. You just keep eating."**

**Now we can't be too hard on these disciples. They're like your kids in the back seat of the car travelling on vacation. "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" "No, we haven't even left our driveway yet. I'll tell you when we get there!"** We're the same way sometimes. You can't blame them for anticipating the end and wanting the end to come. I want that too! But it's not for us to know when God will bring that about.<sup>34</sup>

Jesus says in **verse 7**,

<sup>7</sup> It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

**Several years ago, there was that guy Harold Camping. You might remember him. He said, "The end of the world will take place on November 1, 2012." Well that didn't work out so well. Actually when people do stuff like that, they do you a favor. Those people are crackpots. They're actually doing you a favor, because they are saying they know something that Jesus expressly says that there's no way for them to know.**

What we have here, in **verse 7**, is a gentle rebuke from Jesus to his disciples. The disciples are guilty of two things. They are guilty of "eschatological inquisitiveness." And they are guilty of what I'll call "insular thinking."<sup>35</sup> Let's deal with each of these.

The eschatological inquisitiveness is their desire to know when Jesus would set up his kingdom. **"Are we there yet, Jesus? Are we there yet?" "Are you setting up your kingdom in Israel now?"** Jesus says

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why they raised the question: "Will the Messianic kingdom come now? Will the times of the Gentiles now come to an end? Will You now reestablish the Davidic kingdom?" In the Gospels, they had been promised that they would sit upon thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30). Hence, they were wondering if this was now the time of the fulfillment of that promise."

<sup>31</sup> CHRYSOSTOM suggests a reason for why Jesus doesn't repeat that statement in Acts. "For he no longer tells them, 'Not even the Son knows the day,' but says, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.'" Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 7. Did Jesus perhaps now know when his return would take place now that his divine set-aside (or "kenosis" see Phil 2:7) is completed?

<sup>32</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 109 disagrees and says, "It is often suggested that the apostles' question was misguided, but this is not so. Jesus did not deny their expectation of the 'restoration'. He endorsed it, but interpreted it in terms of the gift of the Spirit and the fulfillment of prophecies about the restoration of Israel as a servant community, called to be God's 'witnesses' to the nations (Is. 43:10, 12 and 44:8)."

<sup>33</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 110: "The Holy Spirit's 'coming' is not continuous but definitive (the context so delimits the aorist participle *epelthontos* to show that the meaning is temporal and punctiliar here), though clearly the Spirit is available at any time after Pentecost for those who repent and are 'baptized in the name of Jesus Christ' (2:38)."

<sup>34</sup> MacArthur, *Acts I–II*, MNTC, 20: "That Jesus does not deny their expectation of a literal, earthly kingdom involving Israel is highly significant. It shows that their understanding of the promised kingdom was correct, except for the time of its coming."

<sup>35</sup> Fernando, *Acts*. NIVAC, 56 calls this misguided inquisitiveness and also parochialism.

essentially, “Don’t worry about that, men... you just focus on the task at hand. You just get to work fulfilling the Great Commission I gave you.”

But also they are guilty of what I’ll call insular thinking. Notice their question again, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

It’s understandable why they would want the kingdom of Israel to be established. There was an expectation that the Messiah would come and do that. We know that Christ will return and set up his kingdom over Israel. We call this the Millennial Kingdom (see **Rev 20:1–10**). There’s no doubt that this will happen.

But the problem with this is **1) The timing of this is in God’s hands, and 2) There’s work to do among the Gentiles in the meantime before that happens.** Jesus told them already, “Go into all the nations and preach the Gospel” (**Matt 28:19**). Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (**Matt 24:14**). In other words it’s not just about Israel anymore! In fact, even in the OT, there was an expectation that the Jews would be a light to the Gentiles. And also all the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham’s seed. The work of evangelism among the Gentiles needs to happen before the Kingdom of God comes.<sup>36</sup>

And this is implicit in Jesus’s response. Notice what Jesus says in **verse 8**:  
*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Jesus told his disciples earlier in **Matthew 10:5**, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans.” Now they are going to the ends of the earth! What’s changed? Well, everything’s changed! Jesus is raised from the dead now. So now, it’s not **Matthew 10:5**, it’s **Matthew 28:18–20**. It’s the great commission—“Go make disciples of all nations.”

That’s what Jesus is reiterating here in **Acts 1:8**.<sup>37</sup> Jesus says in essence, “**You will be my witness to Jews and Gentiles both. Asians, Africans, Europeans, North Americans, South Americans, city people, rural people, indigenous peoples. Every tribe, tongue, people group, and nation on planet earth. That’s your mission, disciples.**” **And that’s still our mission as a church.**<sup>38</sup>

The disciples had a short-sighted, insular, Israelite focus. Jesus blows up that parochialism. He says, “**It’s not just about Israel! Your mission is a worldwide mission!**” And this is our mission too.

**Write this down as a second point in your notes. God’s promise to his disciples is Holy Spirit Power. God’s mission for his disciples is worldwide witness.**

2) God’s mission for his disciples: **worldwide witness** (1:6–8)

**Let’s do a gut-check with this second point right now. Here are some questions that I think we need to process as a church. What are we doing right now as individuals of VBVF to advance the worldwide mission of Jesus Christ? We have our responsibilities to preach the gospel and make disciples here in Texas. That’s great. San Antonio is our Jerusalem, so to speak. But what are we doing to advance Christ’s mission in other parts of the world? To the “ends of the earth?”**

**Jesus says,** “You will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” **The Greek work for “witnesses” is μάρτυς. We derive our English word “martyr” from this word. We’re not all called to be martyrs for Christ. But we are all called to be witnesses. This is the mission that Jesus gave us. These are our marching orders.**

**Here’s another question. Are we guilty of an American, ethnocentric, insularity like Jesus’s disciples were in the first century? There are numerous ways that you can get involved in the worldwide mission of the church. You can pray. You can give. You can go. Do one or two or all three of these!**

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<sup>36</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 47: “Their job now was not to reign in the kingdom; their job now was to witness.” JOHN CALVIN: “They ask him concerning the kingdom, but they dream of an earthly kingdom, dependent on wealth, luxury, outward peace and blessings of this nature. And while they assign the present as the time for restoring this kingdom, they desire to enjoy the triumph before fighting the battle.” Quoted in Esther Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 8.

<sup>37</sup> I say reiterating, because Jesus gave the Great Commission in Galilee (Matt 28:16). The “commission” in Acts 1:8 is given at the Mount of Olives (see Acts 1:12). See Elizabeth Mitchell’s Timeline above.

<sup>38</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 62: “Jesus’s reply in verses 7–8 does not reject the premise of the question, that the kingdom will one day be restored to Israel, but it does change its focus.”



**I realize that not everybody is called to world missions. I don't want to imply that this morning. But all of us are called to be part of Christ's mission. All of us can play a role in "going into all the world and baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." All of us have a part to play as Jesus's witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." How can you take part in that? Let's do more to fulfill Jesus's command... let's do more to obey Jesus mandate to make disciples of all nations.**

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Okay, back to the text. Look at **verse 9**.

<sup>9</sup> And when [Jesus] had said these things

In other words, when he had given them this mission of worldwide witness...

as they were looking on, he was lifted up

This is a passive verb for "lifted up." So ostensibly Jesus is being acted upon by another, which in this case is God the Father.<sup>39</sup>

as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

So Jesus just disappears into the atmosphere. Imagine that sight! The disciples were watching him and listening to him. But then he gets taken up by a cloud, and he is absorbed by that cloud.<sup>40</sup>

**As I visualize this event, I envision one of those billowy cumulous clouds expanding. And this feels like one of those videos of clouds forming in fast motion.** This cloud expands and surrounds the Lord and carries him up. And eventually his appearance disappears behind the cloud.<sup>41</sup>

By the way, clouds are very important symbols in the Bible. There was the pillar of cloud by day that led the Israelites in the wilderness. Also the presence of God would come in a cloud and fill the tabernacle. This was God's "Shekinah Glory" manifest in the camp.<sup>42</sup>

Something similar happened on the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus was transfigured before his disciples, and his clothes became a luminous, radiant white. And his face shone like the sun.<sup>43</sup> And a cloud in that scene enveloped Jesus and his disciples. And God the Father said terrifyingly, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (**Matt 17:5**).

Something similar to that happens here in **Acts 1**, and the disciples are left dumbstruck.<sup>44</sup> **Because look at verse 10.**

<sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Or it could be the cloud that is mentioned in the next clause.

<sup>40</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 114–5: "Although the ascension of Jesus is distinguished from his resurrection in meaning and significance elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Jn. 20:17; Eph. 4:8–10; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:14; 6:19–20; 9:11, 24; 13:20; 1 Pet. 3:21–22), only Luke gives a description of it as a separate historical event, forty days after Easter... The ascension was not the beginning of his heavenly exaltation. It was the ultimate confirmation of the status that had been his from the moment of his resurrection. The *cloud* which *hid him from their sight* indicated to them his total envelopment in God's presence and glory."

<sup>41</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 48: "The meaning of the ascension is threefold. First, it marks the conclusion of Yeshua's earthly, bodily ministry. Second, His work will now continue through the apostles. And third, it means He has an exalted position at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:33–36; 5:31; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2)."

<sup>42</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: "Why 'a cloud took him'? This is another indication that he ascended to heaven. Not fire, as in the case of Elijah, nor a fiery chariot, but 'a cloud took him.' This was a symbol of heaven, according to the words of the prophet, 'who makes the clouds his chariot' [Ps 104:3], meaning the Father himself. Because of this he says, 'on a cloud,' implying, 'in the symbol of the divine power,' for no other power could dwell upon a cloud. Listen again to what another prophet says: "The Lord is riding upon a swift cloud" [Isa 19:1]. Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 10–11.

<sup>43</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 103: "Luke-Acts emphasizes that the one who was himself especially endowed with the Spirit became the one who eventually poured out the same Spirit at Pentecost."

<sup>44</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC, 341: "At the ascension, a way is made from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. How Jesus moves from one to the other is beyond our perception and experience, but it is clear that Scripture speaks of heaven as a place, God's place, that will one day be joined with a new heaven and a new earth. Here the focus is on heaven as the destination to which Jesus ascends as the divine King. It is a place of finality and authority from which King Jesus directs his kingdom work on earth."

<sup>45</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC, 340: "The account of the ascension in Acts resembles closely the description in Luke, except for the disciples' reaction. In Luke, after Jesus ascended, the disciples 'worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy' (Luke 24:52). In Acts the account itself is similar. Jesus speaks to the disciples about their mission, and then immediately, right in front of

Probably with their mouths wide open!

as [Jesus] went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> and said....

Now, capture the scene in your imagination. **There they are gazing up at the sky like a deer in headlights.** They are awestruck! They are dumbstruck! They are starstruck! They are thunderstruck.<sup>46</sup> And these two men (angels right?) just sort of saunter over to them and say something. What do they say?

Look what they say in **verse 11.**

<sup>11</sup> .... “Men of Galilee,<sup>47</sup> why do you stand looking into heaven?

I’m sure the disciples were like, **“Hello, did you not see what just happened? Jesus just rode a cloud into the sky like it was a gondola. How could we not look at it? We’ve never seen anything like it. Have you ever seen anything like this? Oh wait, you guys are angels... probably you have seen this before.”**

Notice what these angels say.

*This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”<sup>48</sup>*

I see another mild rebuke here for the disciples. This time it comes from the angels. They tell them essentially, **“Quit dawdling here, disciples! Quit staring up at the sky! You heard Jesus. Get back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit.”**

Now Luke tells us in **verse 12** that they are at the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem when this ascension happens. Here’s a picture of The Mount of Olives today in Jerusalem.



**Figure 2: Mount of Olives<sup>49</sup>**

This mountain was just a short walk from Jerusalem. In fact here’s a modern-day view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

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them, ‘he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight’ (Acts 1:9). The difference is in the disciples’ reaction. In Luke they worship; in Acts they are awestruck. These two accounts are quite compatible.

In response to Jesus’ ascension, the disciples look up and keep on looking. They have witnessed a supernatural event unlike any before or since—not even the departure of Enoch or of Elijah could compare. Thus angels must come and summon their attention: ‘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’ (v. 11). It is at this point, once the disciples gather themselves, that I can imagine them worshiping Jesus. Thus Luke 24:52 and Acts 1:10–11 fit quite well together.”

<sup>46</sup> Sproul, *Acts*, 28–9: “He came in humiliation and returned on the glory cloud, being elevated into heaven to the right hand of God. The disciples stood there transfixed and watched until the ascending Jesus was nothing more than a speck on the horizon.”

<sup>47</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 49: “They called the disciples Ye men of Galilee since all eleven of the apostles were Galileans.”

<sup>48</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 116: “Jesus himself predicted that his second coming would be personal, glorious, and powerful, ‘in a cloud with power and great glory’ (Lk. 21:27). But it will not be as private as his ascension was. When he returns, ‘every eye will see him’ (Rev. 1:7), and he will not be alone (Lk. 9:26; 1 Thes. 4:14–17; 2 Thes. 1:7). As the lightning ‘lights up the sky from one end to the other’ (Lk. 17:25), so his second coming will somehow be obvious to people everywhere.”

<sup>49</sup> This picture is part of “The Museum Collection” of Todd Bolen and A.D. Riddle. They are used here with permission.



Figure 3: Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives<sup>50</sup>

The Mount of Olives, according to **Zechariah 14:4** will be significant for Jesus's return, the eschatological "day of the Lord" mentioned throughout the OT. So these angels aren't kidding when they say he's coming back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.<sup>51</sup>

These angels may have been referring to the Mount of Olives with their "this Jesus... will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" statement. Or they may be referring to the cloud. Because Jesus said in **Luke 21:27**, "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Also **Daniel 7:13–14** says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

All that to say that when Jesus returns, he's coming back with power. He's not coming as a little baby born in poverty in Bethlehem. He's coming with power and authority to judge the quick and the dead and the sons of men.

**And let me just issue this word of warning to everyone here this morning, when he comes to judge the world and destroy his enemies, you better be on the right side of that battle. Who cares about being on the right side of history as people define that in our day! You better be on the right side of Jesus's return when he comes back. You better have saving faith in Jesus Christ.**

**I say that in love not in anger. Because I don't want you to be a recipient of God's wrath when the end comes. Receive the free gift of salvation and embrace Christ as your Savior today, and you will be spared that future sorrow.**

The angels here tell the disciples that Jesus's return is a sure thing. They don't issue it to them as a threat or even a warning. They issue it to them as a comfort. **"Don't worry boys, Christ is coming back."** They issue this statement to the disciples as assurance. Christ is coming back. **"As sure as the rising sun, Christ is returning. So don't sit around dawdling or worrying about it. Be confident. Be encouraged. And do what Jesus said. Get back to Jerusalem and await the Holy Spirit."**

**Write this down as #3.**

3) God's assurance to his disciples: **Jesus's return** (1:9–11)<sup>52</sup>

Jesus's promise to his disciples is his promise to us as well: Holy Spirit Power. **That power is available to us as the church. Jesus's mission for his disciples is our mission as well. We are his disciples too. Our**

<sup>50</sup> Part of "The Museum Collection." Used here with permission.

<sup>51</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 49: "The statement does not mean that Yeshua will return to the same place. In fact, the initial place of the second coming will not be the Mount of Olives, but Bozrah (Isa. 34:1–7; 63:1–6). Eventually, Yeshua will return to the Mount of Olives, but again, that will not be the initial place of His return. He will return in like manner, just as He had left, in the clouds of heaven (Mt. 24:30; Mk. 13:26; Rev. 1:7)."

<sup>52</sup> Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 70: "The unit deemphasizes an excessive eschatological hope that engages in date setting, but it assures that the end will come."



mission is worldwide witness. And thirdly God's assurance to his disciples is our assurance as well—Christ is coming back. Jesus will return in glory.<sup>53</sup>

**Don't sit around idly waiting for that to happen. Don't waste your life pontificating when his return will happen. It'll happen when it happens. We're on a need to know basis as Christians. And Jesus said we don't need to know when that's going to happen. So be okay with that. And get busy doing the work that God called us to do.**

**Look, there's two mistakes that Christians can make in relation to Christ's return. The Bible tells us to be watchful and also to be witnesses. We watch and wait for Christ's return.<sup>54</sup> But we are also called to witness. We've got to do both at the same time. We can walk and chew gum at the same time as Christians. We run the earth and watch the sky.<sup>55</sup>**

**If we are watchful, but not witnesses, that's a mistake. That's dereliction of duty. If we are witnesses who aren't watchful, that's a mistake too. Jesus said, "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:42). Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."**

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**So, let me distill this down into three application points as we finish up. I want to give you three ways to respond to the text. Three applications that you can start doing this week in an effort to respond in obedience to God's Word. Here's the first.**

**1) Pray for the Holy Spirit's power to be manifested afresh in your life**

**If you are saved... if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you, then I say, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!" But that doesn't mean that you can't have more of the Holy Spirit's influence over your life. We are all in process, and there is a war that wages inside of us between our flesh (our sin nature) and the indwelling Spirit.**

**Ajith Fernando writes this in his commentary on Acts, "Someone once said that 95 percent of what happens in many evangelical churches could be done without the Holy Spirit."<sup>56</sup> Is that true? Can that be said of VBF? God forbid that that would be true of us. Pray that God would move powerfully afresh in our church, because if he's not in it then we aren't going anywhere as a church.<sup>57</sup>**

**Here's a second application.**

**2) Don't sit on the sidelines waiting for Jesus to return**

**Get in the game. Get busy doing the work that God has called us to do. Avoid the eschatological inquisitiveness and prognosticating that leads to so much idleness for many Christians.<sup>58</sup> Christ is coming back. Be assured of that. It'll happen when it happens. In the meantime, be a witness in your own personal Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth.<sup>59</sup>**

**Where has God called you to be a witness for him locally, here in San Antonio? What are some ways that you can make an impact for him globally? You don't get a second chance at life. Don't waste it. Don't lollygag your life away. Let's make the most of our time here on earth.**

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<sup>53</sup> CHRYSOSTOM: "For indeed with the flesh he comes to judge the world, with a flesh that is impassible and unmixed. We too will advance toward this, when our body conforms 'to the body of his glory'" [Phil 3:21]. Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Vickers, "Acts" in *John-Acts*, ESVEC, 338: "Only by believing that the time is set by God can the disciples go out with both confidence (God is in control) and urgency (God will certainly bring everything to his appointed end)."

<sup>55</sup> MacArthur, *Acts 1-11*, MNTC, 20: "Such continual vigilance and anticipation, through all generations of believers who were looking for Jesus to return, has served as true incentive to live with urgency and minister with passion."

<sup>56</sup> Fernando, *Acts*. NIVAC, 66-67.

<sup>57</sup> Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 65: "The missionary work and the pastoral ministry of the apostles depends entirely on Jesus, the risen Lord, who sits at the right hand of the Father and who has granted to his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>58</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 111: "Christians have to live with the tension of knowing that the work of the gospel is central to God's eschatological plan, but never being able to calculate the exact date of the end."

<sup>59</sup> MacArthur, *Acts 1-11*, MNTC, 21: "There's a sense in which believers do not even choose whether or not to be witnesses. They are witnesses, and the only question is how effect their witness is."



**John Wesley was once asked what he would do if this day was his last and he answered, “I would spend it just as I intend to spend it now.”<sup>60</sup> And then he read off his schedule for the day. I’m not there yet where I could say the same thing that Wesley said. But I want to get there.**

**Remember Jesus’s words from his parable of the wise servant, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (Matt 23:45–46).**

**And thirdly,**

**3) Get a Biblical, global view of God’s purposes in the world**

**When we insulate ourselves off from the rest of the world and God’s global initiative, we miss out. We become self-centered and self-focused and ignorant of God’s global work. So let’s ask God how we can be part of his mandate to take the gospel to all nations to the very ends of the earth.<sup>61</sup>**

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**Many years ago, there was a famous missionary to the Muslim world named Henry Martyn. And Martyn said, “The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions, and the nearer we get to him, the more intensely missionary we must become.”<sup>62</sup> Why did he say that? What are Christ’s marching orders for us? Jesus couldn’t have been clearer. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth.” This is our mission. These are our marching orders. Let’s get after this!**

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<sup>60</sup> Fernando, *Acts*. NIVAC, 65.

<sup>61</sup> Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, 113: “Acts provides only selected illustrations of the way God’s purpose was advanced in the first few decades, and the narrative concludes with the task uncompleted. Readers are left with an implied challenge to continue the work of worldwide testimony to Jesus.”

<sup>62</sup> Fernando, *Acts*. NIVAC, 57. Martyn died at the age of 31 preaching the gospel to Muslims and translating the Scriptures into different languages. You can read more about his life in Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, second edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), 236–8.