

Acts: Empowered by the Spirit

Acts 1:1-11 - Jesus Reigns, the Church Advances

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Sermon Points

- Jesus Rose from the Dead: The Resurrection Secured Our Salvation (Acts 1:1-3)
- The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven Secured His Throne (Acts 1:6-11)
- Because Jesus Reigns, His Church Advances
 - Dependent on His Spirit
 - Obedient to His Command

Introduction

Open your Bible to the Book of Acts Chapter 1.

Here we find Jesus-just a little over 40 days prior to this account-He was nailed to the cross, where at this climactic point in human history earthquakes-like thunder-shook the earth and the sky was darkened.

The Son of God fulfilled the plan of salvation, a plan that had been unfolding since the very beginning. Jesus-God in human flesh-who never sinned-willingly gave His life up, dying in our place, the innocent (Jesus) dying for us the guilty.

He could have called legions of angels to destroy the earth-but instead, in love, He satisfied God's justice and died in our place.

He did not die in defeat-He won the victory by paying the penalty for sin and winning our salvation.

He was taken off the cross-physically there was no life in His body. He was placed in a borrowed tomb. And on the third day He rose again.

Jesus is not dead. No, the grave could not hold Him, for He is the resurrection and the life.

The good news for every one of us is that Jesus died for us, securing our salvation, and Jesus rose from the dead, securing our eternal life. Yes-glory be to the risen Christ. We are right this morning to sing His praise: all hail the King.

I get the sense in my study that if we could sit down with Luke, his great desire would be for us to believe in the Savior-King and to live fully for Him-to lay aside all worthless passions and to live right here, right now, this week, with boldness and passion for Jesus!

Let's read the first eleven verses of Acts this morning. Watch for two themes-resurrection (v.1-3) and ascension (v.9-11).

Acts 1:1-11 (Read)

"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.'"

"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, 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.'"

Main Truth

This morning we are going to see that Jesus reigns, and because of His reign the church advances.

Everything the church will do as the gospel advances in the book of Acts proceeds from the reign of Jesus, who guides, empowers, and performs the mission through His obedient people.

In Acts 1, Luke anchors his history of the first 30 years of the Christian church on the foundation of the resurrected and ascended Jesus.

And here's why that matters: our answer to the question "Who is Jesus?" is the most important answer we will ever give.

Most people today are willing to say that Jesus was a great teacher, whose message of love and service is noble and worth living by. And while it's true-Jesus was a great teacher, and His way is love, and His followers are called to serve-that is not the core claim of the Bible.

Luke asserts something far more radical and far more controversial: Jesus is the resurrected Savior who alone can save, and He is the ascended King who alone has rightful authority over all.

He starts here in his history of the church because he wants us to understand that Jesus-the exceptional, victorious Founder and Head of the church-is the reason for the church's success.

Jesus-who resurrected from the dead and now reigns from heaven-is the sole reason the Christian church is unstoppable and fruitful. That is Luke's argument, and it should remain front and center in our minds as we labor in the church.

So he begins with the resurrection and ascension, making the case for Jesus' authority over His church and His people.

Peter says this clearly in Acts 2: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses... being therefore exalted at the right hand of God... let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Jesus is far more than a wise teacher. He is Christ (Savior) and Lord (King).

Point 1 - Jesus Rose from the Dead: The Resurrection Secured Our Salvation (Acts 1:1-3)

Verse 3-Luke writes that Jesus "presented Himself alive... with many proofs." The King James says "many infallible proofs."

The resurrection is what makes Jesus radically different from every other religious leader. The resurrection proved He is who He said He was-God in human flesh.

Proof, you say-what proof? Luke says the proof is in the witnesses. The apostles and the many disciples witnessed Him-saw Him alive and walking around in flesh and blood after His death and burial.

Paul says (1 Cor. 15:6) that Jesus appeared not only to the Twelve but to more than 500 believers at once. You might fabricate a story with a few witnesses, but not 500-especially 500 witnesses that were willing, many of them, to die for their faith.

If someone says, "Prove to me the resurrection," I can't produce the empty tomb, but I can point you to the record of Scripture and the testimony of the apostles. I can point you to the testimony of Luke and Peter and the other eyewitness accounts that are contained in the Bible, and that record is reliable.

Think about it: if you were reading court records from 100 years ago, the witnesses are dead, the physical evidence long gone, but the written testimony still stands-and it is reliable. You can trust it.

The Bible is like that-only stronger. The Bible is a written document with a history passed down through the centuries. There are many copies, fragments, large sections and whole Bibles-thousands of them-all saying the same thing. Some of those fragments date to within one generation of the apostles.

Luke gives a detailed record in Luke 24: the tomb was empty, the grave clothes contained no body, the angelic announced Jesus was alive, Jesus appeared to them, the disciples touched His hands and feet, Jesus ate with them. Luke's claim is that this was not a dream or vision but proof that Jesus was alive again after His death in flesh and blood.

But proofs are not enough, are they? Our hearing of the Bible must be mixed with faith. Our response to Jesus is a response of faith.

So Acts 1:1-3 makes clear that the resurrection is reliable and essential for salvation and for the advance of His church. We serve a living King.

And because He lives: believers-your past is forgiven, your death is defeated, and your hope is secure. You can stop living as if you're still chained to guilt or fear. The tomb is empty, so you can live free-free to serve the King.

Point 2 - The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven Secured His Throne (Acts 1:6-11)

Luke gives the account and the proof of the ascension in Acts 1:6-11.

In the ancient world, legends were told of heroes like Hercules, Julius Caesar, and Augustus "ascending" into heaven, but even Greco-Roman writers didn't treat those stories as fact. They were myths.

However, Luke, writing as an historian, records the ascension as a real, observable event.

Notice the repetition of the eyewitness: "they were gazing into heaven," "a cloud took Him out of their sight," "why do you stand looking into heaven," "you saw Him go." Luke piles up the evidence: they saw it happen. Jesus physically rose from the dead and physically ascended into heaven. Not legend-reliable testimony.

Where did He ascend to? Jesus ascended to heaven. Luke repeats that Jesus ascended to heaven-where He is seated at the right hand of God.

This is key. Hebrews picks up this throne room idea: "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He sat down because His work was done. He sat down because the victory was won. He sat down to reign from His throne.

The Lamb of God is now enthroned as the worthy King.

Jesus was a friend of Peter and Luke, but after His resurrection and ascension He had fully ascended in their hearts as King and Lord.

Has He ascended your heart as King?

If Jesus is your Savior, He must be your Lord. Stop treating Jesus as your consultant. He is your King. Every part of your life-time, money, family, career-belongs under His authority.

The church too belongs under His authority. We are an outpost-an embassy-of His kingdom, planted in a world still in rebellion. The risen and reigning Jesus is the rightful Lord of His church.

Point 3 - Because Jesus Reigns, His Church Advances

Now I want us to shift our thinking this morning. We've looked at the argument for why Jesus is King-He is risen and He is enthroned. But Luke doesn't stop with the argument. He moves to the application-what this truth means for us, His people, His church.

Because Jesus is King, therefore His church must advance. And in Acts 1, Luke shows us how that happens.

The church advances in two ways: dependent on His Spirit-not human strength or strategy, but Spirit-empowered mission; and obedient to His command-submitting our will to His Word and committing our lives to His mission.

Dependent on His Spirit

Let's look first at the church's dependence on His Spirit.

The church will not advance by human power, but only by the power of the one who has overcome spiritual and physical death and who now sits with all power on high.

Notice Jesus' instruction to the first Christians: they were to wait for the power of the Spirit. Luke calls this the promise of the Father.

We are going to study this more in the coming weeks, but this waiting for Christians for the power of the Spirit was a one-time occurrence in history. Pentecost was once-indwelling is now.

We do not have to wait for the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives the Spirit of God at the moment of their conversion.

But we will experience the fullness of His Spirit-His power enabling us-when we make Him Lord. The Holy Spirit does not drag us around making us do things we don't want to do. No-He empowers us. He makes His power known in our lives as we surrender to Him.

We take hold of the power of the Spirit to lead us into a life of spiritual growth and fruitfulness, a life of victory over sin, only as we make Jesus Lord of our life every day.

You and I will be pedaling and going nowhere if we are pedaling in our direction. But if we will be pedaling Jesus' direction-giving Him the handlebars, the steering wheel-our pedaling will be filled with His help and His fruitfulness.

Until Jesus is the functional Lord of your life, you and I will never know the power of His Spirit.

Obedient to His Command

Second, because the resurrected and enthroned King reigns, His people in His kingdom must obey His commands.

Yes, all the world is accountable to the Creator-God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit-and there is coming a day, the great day of His appearing, where every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus

is Lord.

But until that day, Jesus' kingdom is present in the kingdom outposts of the church, where He reigns as Lord of His people. And as Jesus' people, we must obey His commands. He sets the agenda. He gives the mission.

At His ascension, He names the mission: go and be witnesses of Me in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This mission statement is stated another way by Jesus in Matthew 28: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me... go therefore... and behold, I am with you always."

Jesus anchors the missional command in His authority.

We have our orders, church. Jesus is Lord.

His mission cannot fail, but it does require your obedience. Stop delaying. Start where you are-your neighbor, coworker, or friend-and live as a witness. Share the good news boldly. His Spirit accompanies His mission. You do not go alone. You should not be afraid.

Closing

Big question: will you personally live under His reign, join in His advance?

Here is the invitation: Sceptic: believe-the risen and reigning Jesus. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. And Christian: will you surrender afresh to His Lordship-your time, treasure, talents-so His kingdom can advance through you?