

Church 2.0

*“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.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

The Ascension

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Acts 1:1-11

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 1:1-11. Today we are beginning a new series called Church 2.0. It does feel as if we are living in a whole new era, doesn't it? Regardless of what you think about the severity of the COVID19 virus, no sane person could argue that the world has fundamentally changed as a result of what we have all been through over the last 2.5 years. We will be talking in terms of pre-Covid and post-Covid for the rest of our natural lives. And of course, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II on September 8th only ADDS to our SENSE of dislocation. Her death FEELS like the ending of an age. The 20th century is GONE! The culture we were raised in is GONE! And the evangelical church that nurtured and blessed the faith of so many of us in this room is GONE! This isn't the evangelical Big Tent movement of Billy Graham. The continent of that former movement has EXPLODED into a myriad of tiny islands drifting rapidly and chaotically in a thousand different directions.

It is, for better or worse – probably for better and worse – a whole new world.

And so we return to the Scriptures.

That's what Christians do, isn't it?

When the world changes – when Empires rise and fall – when the foundations shake and crumble – Christians return to THE ROCK OF AGES. True believers dig again the wells of our Father Abraham, because the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever – can you say amen to that?

Amen.

So – we are going back to SOURCE this morning. We are going back to GROUND ZERO. We are going back to our ROOTS so that we can remember who we are, why we are here and what we were told to do – and what resources we were given to help us in the tasks to which we were assigned.

We are reading the Book of Acts with a purpose. Like survivors in a dystopian world stumbling upon a cabin in the woods, we are looking for help, we are in need of resources – we are not here to admire the architecture or to inspect the décor – we are gathering SUPPLIES! So, this won't be a straight up walk through, as we have done before in the Gospel of Mark or in Paul's letters to the Corinthians – this will be more like a scavenger hunt. We will read passages and we will look to glean from them the help that we need to rebuild and resupply the church on the other side.

That's what we're here for, so with all that being said, hopefully you have your Bible open now to Acts 1:1-11 and you are ready to hear now the Word of the Lord. This is God's Word to us:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ 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.

⁴ 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;⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ 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.” (Acts 1:1–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Like I said, this is not going to be a normal walk through, so I will be extraordinarily brief in terms of general introduction. The Book of Acts was written by Luke who also wrote the Gospel of Luke and who was a travelling companion of the Apostle Paul. He was an educated man; he was a physician and also a historian. He says that he interviewed sources. Early church history actually suggests that he spent a fair bit of time with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and other pillars in the early church movement in order to compile their various recollections – he did this, of course, under the guidance of the Apostle Paul and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The story in Acts picks up more or less where the story of the Gospel of Luke leaves off. It is PART 2, you might say of The Jesus Story. Part 1 was about what Jesus did in the flesh. Part 2 is about what Jesus did through the church by means of his Holy Spirit and the story we are looking at together in Acts 1:1-11 serves as a sort of bridge or transition.

We’re not going to be terribly fancy today, we are just going to try and answer 3 simple questions:

#1 What happened?

#2 What does it mean?

#3 How then should we live?

Let's begin with the first of those; what happened?

What Happened?

Well, first of all, there was a question.

1. There was a question

We see that in verse 6:

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6 ESV)

John Calvin said famously here:

“There are as many errors in this question as words.”¹

Have you ever asked a question like that? I know I have. I’m not sure that there are as many errors in their question as words, but the question does have a number of wrong assumptions that make it essentially impossible for Jesus to answer directly – which as we will see in a moment, he does not. That being said, their question, while deeply flawed, is somewhat understandable. In the Old Testament there was a very important prophecy about a time in the future, when the fallen House of David would be restored. The commentators tend to be unanimous here in identifying this prophecy as being the immediate source of the disciples’ question. The prophecy is found in Amos 9 verse 11:

¹John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 75426.

“In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11 ESV)

You can hear the echo of this passage in the disciples’ question. So it’s not the dumbest question ever. Jesus was the Son of David – Jesus had just risen from the dead – so who better than Jesus to bring the house of David back from the dead, politically speaking, and to restore the kingdom of Israel as in days of old? The problem of course is that they were thinking in terms that were **TOO NARROW, TOO POLITICAL, TOO ETHNOCENTRIC and TOO IMMEDIATE.**

Jesus was going to rebuild the House of David, he was going to rule as King, he was going to rebuild Israel – he was going to do all of that – but in ways, over times and across boundaries that they could not yet even begin to understand or imagine. So there were some good impulses behind their question, but it was too fundamentally flawed for Jesus to answer directly – so as we see now, he doesn’t answer their question directly – though he does answer it.

2. There was an answer

Look at verses 7-8:

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.⁸ 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.” (Acts 1:7–8 ESV)

There are two parts to that answer. First of all Jesus addresses their immediate concern – which as we said, had some good impulses behind it but which was also irredeemably flawed. Like a good parent, he doesn’t close the door entirely, but he also doesn’t say more than he is prepared to say. This is kind of like how I answer when my kids ask if we can go to Disneyland. I’m not saying no – I hope to be able to take you – I plan to take you – I will save up for that trip – but it may take me several years, I can’t predict things like inflation and the price of gas, so I am not saying it will be next winter or the winter after that. It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, my little ones – just know that your father has heard you and he loves you.

That's a good answer right there.

Now, of course, my answer is framed that way because of things I DON'T KNOW and don't control – Jesus' answer is framed that way because of things THEY DON'T KNOW and DON'T CONTROL, but either way, Jesus doesn't CLOSE THE DOOR on a Kingdom for Israel he just doesn't address those concerns at this time with any of the specifics they were hoping for. The Apostle Paul in Romans 9-11 will provide some of that content later on – but that is not the immediate focus here.

Here Jesus is re-directing their focus.

Stop thinking about the political future of Israel – and start thinking about the NEW AGE that is dawning right now in front of your faces! The Age of Israel is OVER. The age of the Gentiles – the age of the church – is about to begin. Focus on that.

Now – don't over hear that. Is there a future for Israel? Of course! First of all, every Jewish person is going to be invited to bring their stone to Jesus – the Cornerstone – so as to be included in the New House – so they can be grafted into the true vine easier than anyone – but from this point forward, JESUS IS ISRAEL. Jesus is the Cornerstone. And everyone, Jew or Gentile will only get to be a part of his kingdom by doing business with him. It is not enough to be related to Abraham; it is not enough to be circumcised, it is not enough to love the law – you have to do BUSINESS WITH JESUS to be included in the Kingdom of God – can you say amen to that?

Amen!

That's Christianity 101 – and Jesus is pressing that lesson home here on the disciples.

And that takes us to the second part of his answer. He says, "I'm not talking to you right now about any of the specifics related to Israel, what I am saying is that the Holy Spirit is going to

come and fall on the church so that you can take the message of this salvation to every tribe, tongue and nation on the planet. That's what I want you to be focused on from this point forward." He says:

"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." (Acts 1:8 ESV)

That's the answer that Jesus gives.

So we've got a question, we've got an answer and now we've got an event.

3. There was an event

Look again at verses 9-11:

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.¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ 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." (Acts 1:9–11 ESV)

We typically refer to this event as "the Ascension". It's a pretty big deal. We often talk about how we are saved by 5 things that Jesus did. We are saved by his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection AND his ascension – evangelicals tend to only focus on two of those things – his death and resurrection – but in truth, you would not be saved – you could not be saved - without all 5 of those being in place.

Think about it.

If Jesus hadn't been incarnated – if he hadn't taken on flesh; that's what the word "incarnation" means – you would not be saved. If he had just come as a Spirit or as a hologram – and said all

that stuff and then floated up onto the cross and then drifted down into the grave and then risen up and the ascended on up into heaven – if he did all of that as a SPIRIT ONLY – you would not be saved!

Gregory of Nazianzus said famously:

“What has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved.”²

So, you are saved by his incarnation and you are saved by his life – if Jesus hadn’t obeyed God perfectly then his death would have been merely the death HE owed to God and it wouldn’t do you a blessed thing.

And of course you are saved by his death. If Jesus hadn’t died on the cross then you would have no way to remove the stain and guilt of your sin and you would be forever barred from the presence of God and forever exiled from your eternal home.

And of course you are saved by his resurrection. If Jesus isn’t raised from the dead then we above all people are most to be pitied! If Jesus is still in a tomb somewhere in Palestine then we’re TOAST! We’re fools! There is no future! There is no eternity! We should all run out of here and get drunk as fast as we can!! That’s literally what the Bible says! If Jesus isn’t risen from the dead, then we should eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die and after that all is DARKNESS AND SHADOW!

But thanks be to God, Jesus DID rise from the dead! There is life beyond the grave! And therefore we have HOPE! Praise God! We are saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

AND we are saved by the ascension of Jesus Christ. But like I said, THAT is the piece that many of us are less clear on. We’ve probably heard that before and I doubt that anyone here would

² Gregory of Nazianzus, Epistle 101

disagree with that, but in truth, we are not entirely sure why that is. We're not entirely sure what the ascension means – so let's talk about that.

What Does It Mean?

Fundamentally, it means the following 2 things. First of all:

1. It means that Jesus has been crowned the King of Kings and Lord of Lords

R.C. Sproul says helpfully here:

“The ascension is not merely a “going up” to heaven. It is a going up for a specific event, his coronation and investiture as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”³

When Queen Elizabeth II died on September 8th 2022, King Charles III immediately inherited her titles and authority. I'm quoting here from the CBC website which says:

“Charles automatically became King of Canada upon the death of Queen Elizabeth. But the accession proclamation is issued by the Governor General on the advice of the federal Privy Council Office, according to the book Canada's Deep Crown, co-authored by David E. Smith, Christopher McCreery and Jonathan Shanks.

Trudeau and Simon signed the documents at Rideau Hall on Saturday surrounded by members of cabinet. The proclamation was then read aloud by Canada's Chief Herald Samy Khalid and followed by a 21-gun salute.”⁴

Alright – so Queen Elizabeth II died on September 8th. King Charles was proclaimed King on September 10th but his coronation as King may not be for several months yet. When Elizabeth II was proclaimed Queen in February of 1952 she did not have her coronation until June of 1953 – there was a 16 month delay. Similarly we've been told to expect the coronation of King Charles III sometime in 2023.

³ R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According To Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 26.

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/accession-proclamation-king-charles-1.6578457>

What's my point?

My point is that Jesus was proclaimed as King the moment he rose from the dead. The Apostle Paul says that in Romans 1:4. He says that Jesus:

“was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4 ESV)

That is why Jesus could say to the disciples just before giving them the Great Commission:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18 ESV)

He was already reigning as Son of God and Son of David – he was thus King of Kings and Lord of Lords - but he didn't GIVE them the GIFT of the Holy Spirit right there in Matthew 28:18 – and he doesn't give them the gift of the Holy Spirit here in Acts 1:8 – instead he says:

“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.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

There were 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension – 40 days between Jesus' being proclaimed as King and being CROWNED as King. That's what the ASCENSION IS. It is ascending to the throne room of heaven SO AS TO BE CROWNED!

In the Book of Hebrews the Apostle says:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, **crowned with glory and honor** (Hebrews 2:9 ESV)

We saw him come down, we saw him go up – and now we see him CROWNED! And as he sits on that throne, wearing that crown, he does what Kings DO – he begins to give out GIFTS to his people. Paul says that in Ephesians 4, quoting from the Book of Psalms; he says:

Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (Ephesians 4:8 ESV)

What gifts are we talking about here?

Well, first and foremost, we’re talking about the gift of the Holy Spirit!

As King of Kings and Lord of Lords – seated on his throne – crowned with glory and honour – Jesus begins to pour down GIFTS and GRACE upon his people. He begins to TRANSFER the blessings of heaven into the realm of men through his BODY on EARTH – through the church! That’s what Pentecost is – we’ll get to that passage in a couple of weeks – but there wouldn’t have BEEN a PENTECOST if there had not been AN ASCENSION. It was as KING that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon his people – thanks be to God!

The event of the ascension means that Jesus is SEATED and REIGNING over all – and giving gifts – the ascension also means that the decisive work of our redemption has been accomplished.

2. It means that the decisive work of redemption has been accomplished

When Jesus died on the cross what did he say? He said:

“It is finished” (John 19:30 ESV)

When he rose from the dead he was DECLARED to be the Son of God with POWER – when he ascended on high he was seated, crowned and acclaimed – and he gave gifts to men.

Why?

Because IT’S OVER, brothers and sisters!

The devil has been defeated, the Kingdom has been reclaimed and men and women are being restored. Everything is in place. Jesus is on the throne and the Holy Spirit has started to FALL and to FILL and TO RESTORE – it's GO TIME!

There is nothing left for our REDEEMER TO DO – there are no further tasks for him to complete in advance of the full consummation of the Kingdom – that's why the Apostles are always referring to THE LAST DAYS. Paul tells Timothy – in AD 64 – that he is living and pastoring in the LAST DAYS. Why in the world would he do that? Why do all the Apostles do that? Calvin again is helpful here, he says, talking about John's use of that same kind of language:

“The Apostle, according to the common mode adopted in the Scripture, declares to the faithful, that nothing more now remained but that Christ should appear for the redemption of the world. ... We must understand the design of the Apostle, that he calls that the last time, during which all things shall be so completed, that nothing will remain except the last revelation of Christ.”⁵

The Apostles call these days – our days – all days after the first coming of Jesus Christ and the second coming of Jesus Christ – the last days because there is nothing more that needs to be done to accomplish our redemption and restoration.

Our probation has been completed. CHECK!

Our debt has been paid. CHECK!

Our hearts have been transformed. CHECK!

The Holy Spirit has been poured out. CHECK!

Check, check, check, check! All of that has been accomplished through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and therefore nothing more needs to be done – apart

⁵John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 98432.

from the return of Jesus to take up his earthly throne and to rule over all things HERE to the glory of the Father FOREVER.

That's it!

And so because everything EXCEPT THAT has been ACCOMPLISHED – these are THE LAST DAYS, theologically speaking.

He WENT UP – and the angel says to the disciples – he will come back – right here, to this Mount of Olives at the end of all things – you're not going to miss it – so go on now and get busy at the tasks to which you have been assigned. Which, leads us to our final question: how should we be living in the time between?

How Then Shall We Live?

This is an unusual season. Jesus is already on the throne. Everything that needs to be done – has been done – the only left is to spread the news, and that's a big part of the answer to our question, isn't it?

It was in the story that we just read in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. Jesus told the disciples:

“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.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

That's the job for every man, woman, boy and girl living in the TIME BETWEEN. You are a witness! You are a reporter. You have a story to tell. You have been entrusted with Good News. Now TELL IT!

Don't just stand here looking up in the sky waiting for Jesus to come back – SPREAD THE NEWS!

That's what the angel 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.” (Acts 1:11 ESV)

You're not going to miss it! It won't get started without you, so you don't need to be down in the basement surfing the internet for clues as to the specific time of his return. You were given a job to do and:

“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”
(Matthew 24:46 ESV)

Go and make disciples, brothers and sisters, from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth and lo, he will be with us always, even to the end of the age – thanks be to God; let's pray together.