

THE CHURCH'S VISION

Acts 1:1-11

INTRO

[READ Acts 1:1-11]

I have personally felt the weight of this day for several months – the Sunday after the departure of our now retired Senior Pastor Brad Allison and his wife Wendy. I know that many of you feel a similar weight, a heaviness, sadness, a lostness.

On a day when the temptation is either to panic over our church's future or cling to its past, what would God have us do? What would Brad and Wendy have us do? They would have us remember our vision – remember why we're here.

Today we're beginning a sermon series in the book of Acts that I, Michael MacCaughelty, and others from our church will be preaching through until God brings our new pastor.

Why Acts? Two reasons:

- 1) Acts is fixated on the early church's vision and mission. They were to be Spirit-empowered witnesses of Christ to the ends of the earth.
- 2) The followers of Jesus in Acts found themselves, like us, in a time of massive transition – in our passage today, Jesus finishes his earthly ministry and prepares to send his Spirit to continue the work.

Turn your bulletin over and look at the top: the AVPC Vision.

In times of transition, it is crucial to remember our vision – what we desire our church to be. Though much is changing, this vision remains the same. We are “a community of the coming kingdom, bringing hope to a broken world.”

I. **The King**

Our vision speaks of the “coming kingdom” – the kingdom of God.

Every kingdom has a king – in fact, you can't have a kingdom without a king. Who is the King of this “coming Kingdom”?

For my ordination exams, one of the questions was, “Who is the King and Head of the Church?” Everyone loved this question. The answer? Jesus Christ.

I remember in one of my first meetings with Brad, he said how thankful he was that he wasn't the king and head of the church. Jesus is.

Last Sunday, Brad reminded us: "This church was never about me. It has always been about Jesus. He's the One we need to see with fresh eyes."

The eleven remaining disciples in Acts 1 find themselves in a time of enormous transition – the resurrected Christ was about to ascend to heaven so he could send his Spirit.

We see Jesus here as King of God's Kingdom.

First, we see that he is:

1) An Active King (v. 1)

[READ v. 1] Acts is Luke's second book – his first being the gospel of Luke. He dedicates both to Theophilus, which can mean either "lover of God" or "beloved of God."¹

The books of Luke and Acts are gifts, not only to Theophilus, but to all lovers of God and to those beloved of God.²

In his first book, the book we know as Luke, he "dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

How could that be? Luke ends where Acts begins, with Jesus ascending to heaven. How could his first book record what Jesus *began* to do and teach? Only if his second book, Acts, records what Jesus continued to do and teach.

The title of Acts is deceptive. Some call it "The Acts of the Apostles." But whose acts are these really? John Stott suggests a better title: "The Acts of Jesus by his Spirit through the Apostles."³

The book of Luke records what Jesus did on earth from earth.

The book of Acts records what Jesus continued to do on earth from heaven.⁴

¹ Acts, Commentary of the Ancients, p. 2.

² Ancients, p. 2.

³ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 34.

⁴ Ancients, p. 2.

When did the works of Jesus finish? They haven't. Jesus is still doing and still teaching today. He is still doing and teaching here at Altadena Valley in this time of transition – through *you*.

Jesus is an active king. Jesus is working.

Notice the order – “what Jesus began to *do* and *teach*.” Jesus did not just do. He did not just teach. He did both, and his doing verified his teaching.⁵

Jesus was more than talk. He embodied his teachings.

An early church father points to one example in Matthew 5 when Jesus said: “If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” He gave not only his cloak but his blood.⁶

Jesus is not only an active king; he is also

2) A King on Mission (v. 2)

He never lost sight of his purpose to seek and to save the lost. We see in verse two that before he ascended, he “gave commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.”

[My parents used to let me babysit my two younger siblings, and before they left the house, they would give me instructions – you could say commands – for how we were to behave until they returned.]

What commands did Jesus give before his ascension? “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” – this command still applies to us today. Like Jesus, we are to be on mission.

3) A Living King (v. 3)

(v. 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”

The phrase “presented himself” is significant.⁷ After his resurrection, Jesus did not show himself to his disciples for *his own* benefit. He did it

⁵ Ancients, p. 2.

⁶ Ancients, p. 2.

⁷ William Danker, Greek-English Lexicon, p. 272.

for *them*, appearing over a span of forty days to make sure there was not a doubt in their minds that he was alive.

Of all the “many proofs” that Jesus offered them, I love the scene Luke records when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, and they thought they saw a spirit. Luke 24:41 says, “While they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate before them.”

The last thing Jesus had done with them before his arrest was eat the Passover meal, and now he is eating with them again as if to say, “I’m just as alive and real now as I was then.”

What better proof of Jesus’ aliveness than eating – so mundane, so human⁸ - he is a living King.

And this King was forming a community of his coming kingdom.

II. **A Community of the Coming Kingdom**

In vv. 4-7, we see a picture of this early community, the Church. What is this community like?

1) A Community Defined by the Presence of the King

(v. 4) “While staying with them” – could also be translated, “Take salt together,” meaning to eat together.⁹

This is bigger than it seems. God in flesh eating with sinners. This is what was lost in the garden, when Adam and Eve’s intimate fellowship with God was broken by their sin. In Revelation, we see a heavenly garden where God and his people will be once again in face-to-face fellowship, eating together at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

All of salvation history is the journey between these two gardens, and the lengths to which God would go to enjoy that intimate fellowship again.

⁸ Ancients, p. 3.

⁹ Zerwick, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek NT*, p. 349.

We see pictures of God dwelling with his people in the pillar of cloud and fire, in the tabernacle set in the midst of the people, in the temple in Jerusalem, all fulfilled in Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

The King said, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (MT 28:20). The community of the coming kingdom is a community defined by the presence of the King.

2) A Community Awaiting God’s Promises

(v. 4) “he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father,” – this was the promise of the Holy Spirit that we will see fulfilled in Acts 2.

God’s people have always been awaiting God’s promises. Most have been fulfilled, but we still await the promise of Jesus’ return.

As we’ll sing later, “We will stand as children of the promise, we will fix our eyes on him, our souls reward...”¹⁰

3) A Community Transformed by the Spirit

One of God’s promises to his people was to give the Holy Spirit.

Jesus reminded them in v. 5: “for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (it would be ten days after Jesus’ ascension).

Remember what Jesus told his disciples before his death: “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

What “help” would the Spirit give?

We see it in the word “baptized.” This word was used in 200 BC in a recipe for making pickles. A cucumber would be “baptized” in a vinegar solution and never be the same again – it would be transformed into a pickle.¹¹

¹⁰ Getty music, *By Faith*

¹¹ Recipe by Nicander, Blue Letter Bible App

To be baptized with the Holy Spirit is different than to be baptized with water. Water touches the outside of the body, but the Holy Spirit transforms the inside.¹²

4) A Community of the Coming Kingdom

In vv. 6-7, we see that the disciples still don't understand this kingdom.

They asked Jesus, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'

John Calvin said there are as many errors in this question as words.¹³

- 1) Confused about the nature of the kingdom – the word “restore” shows they still thought Jesus had come to restore Israel to what it once was – to bring a kingdom with borders, a kingdom you could see on a map.
- 2) Confused about the members of the kingdom – “restore the kingdom *to Israel*” – they expected a national kingdom, the kingdom of Israel made up of ethnic Israelites
- 3) Obsessed with the timing of the kingdom – “will you *at this time*” – expected an immediate kingdom¹⁴

Jesus' response in v. 7 shows that the most important question was not *when?* but *what?* – it would be a totally different kind of kingdom than they thought.

And this kingdom would bring hope to a broken world.

III. Bringing Hope to a Broken World

Jesus continued to recalibrate his disciples: the kingdom of God is not the kind of earthly power you're thinking; “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 ends of the earth.”

Here Jesus identifies the primary task of the community of the coming kingdom – to be his **witnesses**.

¹² Ancients, p. 6.

¹³ Stott, p. 41.

¹⁴ Stott, p. 41.

“Witness” is the primary theme of Acts – that word is used 13x to describe the task of the apostles.

Later in chapter 1 when the 11 disciples saw the need to replace Judas Iscariot, Peter said: “one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us...must become with us a **witness** to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22).

It was crucial that the one chosen to replace Judas was an eyewitness – one who knew Jesus’ ministry firsthand and had seen him after his resurrection.

Why? Because these 12 apostles were the foundation of the church. They were the first witnesses. All believers since then are witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection because of their witness.

The word translated “witness” here literally means “one who attests to the fact or truth of something.”¹⁵ It’s as simple as saying, “This happened. This is true.” Like the man Jesus healed from blindness who told the Pharisees, “One thing I...know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

It’s remarkable that the salvation of the world depends on something so simple. Bringing hope to a broken world through...witness.

This is not the territorial kingdom the disciples expected. The kingdom spread not by soldiers but by witnesses.¹⁶ Instead of military or political power, Jesus said “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” – supernatural power that propelled the apostles out from hiding into bold witness.

This kingdom is for more than Israel – “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” – the rest of Acts shows this outward movement of the gospel to people of every tribe, tongue and nation.

After Jesus said this, he “was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while [the disciples] were gazing into heaven..., behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘why do you stand looking

¹⁵ Danker, p. 223.

¹⁶ Stott, p. 42.

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).

Jesus knows that bringing hope to a broken world is an impossible task apart from him. The disciples gazed into heaven, likely half in awe and half wondering, where in the world do we go from here?

The angels snap them out of their stupor.

Jesus will come back, and until he does, we have work to do. In the meantime, don't gaze upwards in nostalgia but outwards in compassion to a lost world.¹⁷

Brothers and sisters, we have two paths to choose from. One is to be fixated on the past and anxious about the future. What will we do without Brad and Wendy? What kind of pastor will we have? When will he arrive?

The other path is to be humbly dependent on the Holy Spirit in the present, to be about what this church has always been about – to be “a community of the coming kingdom, bringing hope to a broken world.” By the power of the Holy Spirit and the promise of the ascended Christ, the true King and Head of the Church, we will.

Benediction: Hear Acts 1:8 as a promise.

¹⁷ Stott, p. 50.