

Jan 5, 2020

Acts 1:1-11

Outward Church

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Today is **January 5th, 2020**, the first Sunday of a **new decade**. The last Sunday of this decade will be **December 30th, 2019**. This last Sunday we **celebrated** as a church everything God did in **2019**. I hear it was really **encouraging**. So my question is:

What do you want to celebrate on Sunday, December 30th, 2019?

Imagine if you can celebrate anything—people **coming to faith, baptisms**, us reading our **Bibles** and **growing** together in our love for Jesus, the Lord sending out own to become **missionaries** and support other **churches**. **What** do you want to celebrate? On that Sunday I want to celebrate all the ways **Jesus** has worked **in and through us as a church** to be a **witness to his world**.

There are **3,647 days** between now and the last Sunday in 2019. That seems like a lot of time, but it will fly by like the **snap of my fingers**. And so we want to use our time wisely. We're going to take about the first year, of those ten years, to study a book that's all about the **witness of God's people in their world**. If we want to be **faithful witnesses**, we need to know **how to do it**, and we find that in the **book of Acts**.

Acts tells the story of the **first churches** and the **first missionaries** and their **outward witness**. Here in the opening chapter of Acts we find this **encouragement** for sharing Christ with others.

Jesus gives us everything we need to be his witnesses in our world.

This is my big idea. *Jesus gives us everything we need to be his witnesses in our world.* As we open up the first eleven verses of Acts we encounter **three things** Jesus gives us to **help us witness**.

1. Proof of his resurrection. (Acts 1:1-3)

Let's look at the first verse.

Acts 1:1 (NIV) In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

What book is the author talking about? He's talking about the gospel of Luke, which we finished a series in, *The Certain Gospel*, last May. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and Acts. Both are addressed in their introductions to "Theophilus." Luke is a physician, a historian, and **joins Paul** later in Acts (Acts 16-28; Col 4:14). Luke lives and breathed life in and among Paul and the other early believers. We can **trust** him and his **accuracy** and the **proofs** he presents. The proof he presents is **Jesus himself rising** from the **grave**.

Acts 1:1b-4a (NIV) ...I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command...

So what are the **proofs** of **Jesus' resurrection** that **Luke presents**?

1. Jesus **presented** himself to the disciples. As they retell it, he wasn't some **limping ashen person** who had **fainted** and barely **survived** a cross, but a **glorious king**. The one who was **scourged** with **whips**

was **better** than **brand new**. He **didn't** appear **once**, but over a period of **40 days**. Paul tells us Jesus appeared to over **500 people**, many of whom Luke could have talked to (1 Cor 15:1-6).

2. Jesus also gave proofs by **eating** with them—ghosts don't eat (v4; Luke 24:42-43), **talking** to them, letting them **touch** his **hands** and **side** (John 20:24-29).

These disciples were so convinced they saw Jesus alive after his death that most of them died **martyr's deaths** and all of them **suffered** to tell others about Jesus. Actually, the word for "**witness**" in **verse 8** is the Greek word "**martus**," where the word "**martyr**" came from. So I could rephrase my big idea...

Jesus gives us everything we need to be his martyrs in our world.

That's a **cheery** way to start out a new year! What could possibly cause me to **give my life**, even if I don't die, just **give the days of my life**, to **tell others** about Christ? The only thing that could **possibly** make it **worth while** is if **someone died** and **came back to life** and told us **how to have eternal life** and that is **exactly** what **Jesus** did.

Jesus died. He really died. This wasn't a **15 minute resuscitation story**, which is amazing. I just heard about a woman whose heart stopped for six hours, but because she was caught in a **freezing cold snowstorm**, doctors were able to **revive her**. Well Jesus was **dead** for **three days** in the **hot middle eastern sun** and he didn't have **modern medicine** to revive him. But God raised him from the dead. God brought him back to life. And Jesus said that anyone who **repents** of their sins and **believes** in him will receive **eternal life too**. He makes being a **witness**, even a **martyr**, **worth it**.

But maybe you **doubt**. Maybe you **don't believe** Jesus really rose from the grave. Maybe you need **more information**. You know I **like books**. Let me give you a **few recommendations** of resources that can **help you explore** the **evidence** of the **resurrection** and other **difficult aspects of Christianity**.

More Than a Carpenter: His story might change yours by Josh McDowell - I read this book recently. It's a quick read and in it Josh McDowell shares his own story of coming to faith. It's really good. You can take it home with you today as we have it at our Welcome Center.

The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus by Lee Strobel - We also have this one available at the Welcome Center. An atheist journalist records his interviews where he researches questions like, "Can we trust the Bible?" and "Can we trust the resurrection really happened?" His investigation of Christianity led him to faith in Christ.

The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity by Lee Strobel - Strobel followed up with this book, which answers questions like, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" and "How can Christianity claim to be the only way to God?"

The Case for the Real Jesus: A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ by Lee Strobel - Maybe you've heard of early Christian writings like the Gospel of Thomas and how they tell a different story about Jesus. Strobel investigates if we should trust them.

What's Wrong With Religion? 9 Things No One Told You About Faith by Skye Jethani - This is a fantastic book that is simple and short that logically presents the faith. Great for students.

Maybe you're not up for a book but could read an article or two or would like to try a podcast.

Stand to Reason (str.org) - I listened to this for hours in college. The main guy, Greg Koukl, does a great job of explaining and giving reasons for why we believe what we believe.

Apologetics Study Bible - If you want to incorporate reasons to believe into your daily devotions, as well as some well written articles, you could check out the Apologetics Study Bible.

If you want to try any of these resources, myself or any of the elders would love to discuss what you're learning with you. Or if you know someone who would benefit, take one and give it to a friend. Offer to read it with them and take the time to discuss it **with** them. *Jesus gives us everything we need (including proofs of his resurrection) to be his witnesses in our world.*

But we all know that you can give the very best reasons to believe in Christianity, but in order for that belief to come, God has to **do something** in **our hearts**. This is the **second thing** God has given us.

2. Power for our mission. (Acts 1:4-8)

Look at the absolute power Jesus promises to send to his disciples as they wait in Jerusalem.

Acts 1:4-5 (NIV) On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is **not** some **mystical force** we can move with our **minds** if we **pray hard enough**. The Holy Spirit is **God himself**, the **third person** of the **Trinity**. He is as much God as the **Father** and the **Son**. Jesus is promising to send his Holy Spirit to **fill up** his **disciples** and **empower** them for **ministry**. If you know Jesus Christ, this same **Holy Spirit** resides in you. And you can **ask** the Holy Spirit to not just **reside** in you, but to **fill you up** and **empower** you to reach out to that **one person** he has placed on your heart.

I listened to an interview on the **Holy Post podcast** (#377) with an author that wrote a book on **the life and faith of Mister Rogers**. Fred Rogers loved the Lord and actually went to seminary as he worked in television. He became an ordained Presbyterian Minister and integrated his faith and work into everything he did. But did you also know that Fred Rogers was an incredibly Spirit-lead man? There's **lots of stories** of Fred calling people when something was going on in their life to check in on them or showing up in a time of trouble, but I want to tell you the **best story** I heard on the **interview**.

One woman worked on **Mr. Roger's Neighborhood** for several years, and after her husband was **diagnosed** with **cancer**, one morning she woke up and her husband had died during the night. This was especially hard because she thought God was going to heal him. It's really early in the morning and she's in this "moment of crisis" and she hears a knock on the door. She goes out and it's Fred and he said "I was praying and I felt like you needed me."¹ He was there, cried with her, and called the funeral home for her. This experience helped transform her life. Fred believed the Holy Spirit was active in every human encounter and between him and the audience watching his show and he has had an incredibly impact on many many people.

Jesus can **fill us up** with the **same Holy Spirit** he filled Fred Rogers up with. *Jesus gives us power for our mission, his Holy Spirit and...*

Jesus gives us an outward mission.

Acts 1:6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The disciples were interested in building a kingdom, but a kingdom that looked more like a political kingdom set up on earth. Jesus tells them to **stop worrying** about **his kingdom** and start telling others that **the king has come!**

Acts 1:7-8 (NIV) He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus promises the **Holy Spirit** is going to come on them, which we’ll see in **Acts 2 at Pentecost**, and that he’s going to send them out on **mission** to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. As we read Acts we’ll see the **outward expansion** of their **witness** from **Jerusalem** in **Acts 1-7**, to **Judea and Samaria** in **Acts 8-12**, and the **ends of the earth** (to Rome) in **Acts 13-28**.

This is first a **geographic plan** of **expansion** for the early church, but I think there’s something in this for us. Just because something is **recorded** in Acts **doesn’t mean** it’s a **set pattern**, but the Bible does **communicate theology through history**, and we find a **pattern for our outward mission**. **How so?**

A. Jerusalem - Westford

Jerusalem is the **capital** of **Israel**. It’s the **political, economic, and cultural hub** of the nation. It’s where God has **placed his disciples** for the moment. God has placed **us as a church** in Westford. God has called us to minister in Westford—**not to the exclusion** of the town we each may live in (Chelmsford, Littleton, etc.) but the **mission begins here**. Jesus **quickly expands** the mission.

B. Judea - Frontlines

The disciples are not from **Judea**. They’re actually from **Galilee**, which is like the **northern cousin** of Judea. When I hear Judea I think of a **specific geographic region** in Israel but also the **hometowns** of the **disciples**, the **places they knew best**. So although it’s **not exact** we can apply this to our **frontlines**. Your frontline is the place where you **live or work** and spend lots of time around people who don’t yet know Jesus, like your coworkers, classmates, or family members. **Where’s your Judea? Where’s your frontline?**

C. Samaria - Those different than us

As we think about Samaria, we realize the people of Judea really didn’t like Samaria in Jesus’ time. They looked at them like they would other **pagans**, or **even worse** as Samaria had once **abandoned** the one true God of Israel. At one point in Jesus’ ministry **James and John** tried to call down **fire from heaven** on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:52-54) but **Jesus rebuked** them (Luke 9:52-54). In Acts 1:8 God calls his disciples, including James and John, to **go to Samaria with the gospel message**.

Who do you feel **most different** around? Whose **your Samaria**? Maybe it’s a group of people that hold a different political opinion or ideology about life than you, or it’s someone who doesn’t have your best at heart, but it **doesn’t** have to be a **negative**. It just might be someone you’re **unfamiliar** with or **don’t live close to** so you **don’t really know them**. Jesus calls us to people like these, maybe not to every single one, but to **our Samaria**, wherever that may be.

D. Ends of the earth - International missions

The book of Acts ends with Paul making it to Rome, but the mission doesn’t stop there. **We too** are called to go and serve in places that **need Christ** and **haven’t heard of him yet**. God might be **sending you** to go, have you thought of that? He can also use our **prayers**, our **finances**, and **short-term** teams to further his **mission abroad**. I looked over the missions programs we are **currently supporting** as a church, and I think I

see some similarities between them and Acts 1:8. Though not exact, this is what I came up with:

Biblical	Contextual	Ministry or Missionary
Jerusalem	Westford	Church body & Outreach team
Judea	Frontlines	Each one of us / Vere Institute - Chris Lake
Samaria	Those different than us	Vision New England Prison Ministry - Denis Frediani Bethany Christian Services - Safe Families Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC)
Ends of the earth	International missions	Mission of Hope Haiti - Emmanuel Orphanage France - Thierry Mirone *We've taken short-term trips to both.

It's good to see how we're beginning to reach out to some of these areas, but we need to keep going, keep striving, empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In **seminary** one of my **professors** said that pastors often **overestimate** what they can do in **3-4 years** and **underestimate** what they can accomplish in **10-15 years**. That **really applies** to us **more as a church**. Let's not **underestimate** what God can do through us in the **next 10 years**. *Jesus gives us everything we need to be his witnesses in our world—proof of his resurrection, power for our mission, and...*

3. Motivation to go. (Acts 1:9-11)

This text ends with Jesus ascending into heaven and all the disciples standing there waiting for Jesus to return. So two angels appear and send them to Jerusalem because Jesus is coming back!

Acts 1:9-11 (NIV) After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Jesus is coming back, and the disciples **hadn't even started** on the mission. I don't want to get to **Sunday December 30th, 2029, 3,647** days from now, and still be **standing here looking into the sky**. I want to get going! I want to have **something worth celebrating**. I want to tell others about the resurrection of Jesus and **see** what the **Holy Spirit does**. *Jesus gives us everything we need to be his witnesses in our world.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

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¹ Info from Episode 377 of the Holy Post Podcast (Phil Vischer Podcast). Published November 14, 2019. Accessed January 4, 2020.