

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:1-11

Key Verse: 1:8

“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.”

The Acts of the Apostles is the sequel to the gospel of Luke, written by St. Luke, the evangelist, physician and historian. The book describes how the gospel of Jesus Christ began to spread throughout the world in the first century. The work of Jesus continued through the Holy Spirit and the obedience of the apostles. In today’s passage, the Risen Christ gives us the world mission command. May God help us to accept his world mission command!

I. JESUS’ RESURRECTION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1-3)

Look at verses 1-3. *“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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.”*

Who was Theophilus? We don’t know for sure. Theophilus in Greek means “lover of God.” So we can say that Luke wrote both books for the benefit of those who love God, including us.

After his resurrection, the Risen Christ spent 40 days with his disciples. During that time, he gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. He also spoke to them about the kingdom of God. Some time ago, a computer-science professor at Carnegie Mellon University was asked to give his “last lecture.” It turned out to be his last lecture as he died of cancer soon after. Do you know what topic he chose for the lecture? It was entitled, “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams,” which became a best-selling book. Our Lord Jesus also knew he had a limited time on earth. Soon he would ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. What topic did he choose for his last lecture? They were: resurrection and the kingdom of God. These are very important and relevant topics to us today. Let us think about them.

First, Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. The Risen Christ appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and studied the Bible with them until their eyes were opened (Lk 24:13-35). He also appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time (1Co 15:6). He showed his nail marks to Thomas and told him: “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29). Jesus rose from the dead. Why was it important for

the disciple to believe that he was alive? Jesus' resurrection is the essence of Christian faith. If you don't believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus, you are not a real Christian. If God had no power to raise Jesus from the dead, how can we trust him to forgive our sins and give us eternal life in his kingdom? As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "... if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1Co 15:14,17). But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. The tomb was empty. He has risen! His resurrection proved that he died for our sins. His resurrection opened the door to the kingdom of God for all who believe in him.

The Risen Christ also appears to us today. He comes to us and lives with us when we accept the message of his resurrection by faith through our personal Bible study and prayer. We believe, not because we see his body but because we believe in his word of truth.

Second, Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. While on earth, Jesus planted the hope of the kingdom of God in the hearts of his followers. The first message he preached as he embarked on his ministry was, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15). In his Sermon on the Mount, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). He said that the kingdom of God is in our midst (Lk 17:21). We begin to experience the kingdom of God when we are in Christ. The kingdom of God is also our permanent home. We should know that this world is a temporary place for us. We are on our way to our permanent home where we will be with Jesus in eternity. The new heaven and new earth will be a perfect kingdom that is beyond our imaginations. We will walk on the streets of gold. There will be no more tears, no sickness, no pain, no dying...

The last thing Jesus taught his disciples before going up to heaven was the kingdom of God. They needed to be reminded of this hope. In reality, everything seemed to be up against them. The Roman empire. The Jewish leaders. How could they even survive, let alone keep their faith in God? Jesus told them that they would not only survive but thrive if they had the kingdom of God as their hope. This is true to us. We have been saved by the grace of God. But our reality is that we have many challenges within and without. What we really need is the hope of the kingdom of God. May God help us to live each day with this hope!

II. WAIT FOR THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (4-7)

Look at verses 4-5. *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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* Jerusalem was not their favorite place to hang around at that time. It was where Jesus was tortured, beaten and killed. It was where they all had abandoned him on the night he was arrested. It was where Peter denied him three times. They had painful memories. The people who killed Jesus were still there. But Jesus told them not to leave the city. Why not? Jesus did not want them

to run away from the place and people. This is what we are tempted to do at times. But Jesus wanted them to remain in the city. He told them to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. To be useful servants of God, they had to face the problems head-on with the help of the Holy Spirit. Things would be different when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? In verse 5, Jesus mentioned water baptism by John that was symbolic in nature, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit that actually changes a person's heart. This baptism puts to death the sinful nature and creates a new life in a person. The Holy Spirit dwells in a person who accepts Jesus as the personal Savior. This is the indwelling Spirit. But this time, Jesus was talking about something different, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit to equip the disciples to do the work of God. And indeed, it happened a few days later, at Pentecost.

Look at verse 6. *Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* This question revealed their problem. They were still dreaming of a free Israel, liberated from Rome. The kingdom of God was not yet on their minds. Jesus did not rebuke them. Instead, he turned their attention to the kingdom of God again. He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (7). People love to speculate about the timing of the coming kingdom of God. But Jesus says that the times and dates are set by God by his own authority. We should respect his authority. Jesus' Second Coming will happen exactly as God planned. So what should his disciples do in the meantime?

III. YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES (8-11)

Let's read verse 8 together. *"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."* "You will be my witnesses"—this is the world mission command of the Risen Christ. What can we learn from this command?

First, this command reveals God's broken heart and his vision for the sinful humanity. The world was, and still is, in utter darkness. People all over the world are dying. They are dying because of this terrible disease called sin. This sickness is much, much worse than the Ebola virus or suicide bombers. This disease kills our souls. It condemns us to eternal hell. But our loving God does not want any of us to die in sin. How do we know this? He gave us his one and only Son Jesus so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). Jesus came and paid the price of our sins with his own life. Jesus died on the cross, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." God does not want a single person to die in sin. His heart is broken when a person dies without hearing of the good news of Jesus Christ. Sadly, everyday, 50,000 people die without ever hearing about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This means that God's heart is broken 50,000 a day. We really have to wake up from our spiritual slumber and know this broken heart of our Lord.

Second, this command restores our purpose in life. After creating man and woman in his own image, God blessed them with a mission, saying, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...” (Ge 1:28). God told them to be fruitful, appointing them to be the stewards of the world. We were created in his own image with a mission that gives us a clear purpose in life. This means that we cannot be truly happy by living a selfish and self-centered life. Sadly, people live their lives, minding their own affairs, ignoring God’s mission in life. They live only for their material wellbeing. Sooner or later, however, we all realize that there is more to life than money, career, recognition, and other human achievements. We need a spiritual purpose in life as we prepare ourselves for eternal life in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8 restores our mission that gives a true meaning and purpose in life. As St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We were dead in our transgressions and sins. But Christ died for us on the cross to give us a second chance. We are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ to do good works. God prepared this good work for us to do, that is, to share the good news of Jesus Christ. If you have not personally accepted this world mission command yet, I pray that God may help you to do so today. Pray for world mission, and when you plan for future, include this command in your plan. “You will be my witnesses” – this is not a suggestion or an option. It is a command given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. At that time, the disciples were too weak to carry out the world mission command. In fact, they could not even take care of themselves. How could they be the witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection? Jesus said that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them. Then they would become powerful witnesses to his resurrection. Likewise, what we can do with our own ability is very limited. But when we receive the Holy Spirit, we can do great things for the Lord. We can even love a rebellious person with a broken shepherd’s heart. The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with courage and strength so that we can challenge young people to repent their sins and accept Jesus Christ. Peter was so weak that he denied the Lord three times, but after he received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he boldly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to a crowd of thousands in Jerusalem.

Fourth, in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Look at verse 8 again. “*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.*” God’s kingdom is spiritual; it is open to all peoples of all nations, no matter what their race, culture and language. When the gospel is preached and accepted, God’s kingdom comes into the hearts of people. So Jesus’ disciples must be witnesses to the Risen Christ to the ends of the earth. But our witnessing must begin in Jerusalem, that is, at home, among our family, friends and neighbors. This means that we must share the gospel faithfully with young people on our campus. Then to Judea and Samaria. Jews did not associate with Samaritans because of their age-old animosities. They had to overcome the cultural barriers to share the gospel. This means that we must also break down barriers to reach out to those with different background.

We must get out of our comfort zone. Then to the ends of the earth! God wants us to carry the gospel of Jesus to all peoples of the world, beginning with where we are. Some of us must become missionaries to other campuses, states, and countries. Practically this also means that we must pray for all peoples of the world, including those in Muslim nations and North Korea, even as we minister to young people here. Our prayers must be global, even as we serve the Lord locally.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, Jesus' disciples became faithful witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. They preached the gospel boldly to the people of Jerusalem. They took the gospel to Judea, Samaria and to Rome. Many of them became the martyrs of the first century by speaking out the truth about the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

Look at verses 9-11. *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "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."* After he gave the world mission command, Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. How did the disciples react to his ascension? They were looking up into the sky as if they had just missed their airplane. Then, two angels came and rebuked them, saying, "Men of Galilee, 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."

The ascension of Jesus was a turning point in the redemptive work of God. From that time on, Jesus would work from heaven through his disciples and the Holy Spirit. His disciples were to be independent workers led by the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:12; 15:26-27). Now Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God watching over us and encouraging us to carry out our mission until the day he will come again in glory. This is what Jesus meant when he said that whoever believes in him will do even greater things, because he was going to the Father" (Jn 14:12). Then, Jesus will come as the Judge of the living and the dead. This glorious promise helps us to be faithful witnesses to Jesus' resurrection while we eagerly wait for his Second Coming.

In today's passage, we learn that God wants all people of the world to be saved from their sin and death. His heart is broken when one person dies without hearing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants no one to be condemned to eternal hell. May God help each one of us to be a faithful witness of Jesus' cross and resurrection!