

The Ongoing Work of Jesus

Acts 1:1-11

Halifax: 31 July 2011

Introduction

Today we begin a new sermon series from the Book of Acts.

- I have chosen this book because it shows us something I believe we need to see at this time as a congregation:
 - Like no other book in the Bible, it shows us the ongoing work of Jesus in establishing His Church now that He has gone into heaven.
 - My brothers and sisters, I want to encourage each one of you in this series with the fact that our exalted Saviour is still working in the world today,
 - and that each one of you who believe is involved in that great work!
 - You need to see that so that you will be encouraged and heartened to what He has called you do.
 - He is alive and He is working in and through us, His people, to establish His glorious kingdom in the world!
 - He empowers you to do this work!
 - What a tremendous privilege is before you my brothers and sisters!
 - You need this encouragement so that you will go forward fervently and patiently and eagerly and confidently and prayerfully and humbly!
 - I want, by the grace of God, to stir you up to action.
 - We have become too lethargic and we need to move forward!
 - As we are admonished in the Epistle to the Hebrews,
 - **Heb 12:12-14: Strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.**
 - The work of Jesus goes on and we are a part of it!
 - This is clearly shown to us in the opening verses of Acts which I read to you today...
 - Acts 1:1-11.
 - Take a look at these with me and be encouraged to engage in the ongoing work of Jesus.

TRANS> See first of all that...

I. The work that Jesus did on earth was only the *beginning* of His work.

- A. You can tell that this is so by the way that Luke describes it:
- **Acts 1:1-2: The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up,**
 1. The former account is the gospel of Luke.
 - written to Theophilus (probably a Gentile convert of high rank)
 - It covered the time from Jesus' annunciation until His ascension.
 - And this is called
 - **"all that Jesus began both to do and teach."**
 2. The implication is that *now* Luke is going to write about what He continued to do and teach *after* He ascended into heaven.
 - That is what Acts is about!
 - This is volume 2 of Jesus' work through His apostles.
- B. Let no one suppose that Jesus ended His work when He went to heaven!
- that could not be...
 1. The work He did on earth was too great to come to an end!
 - There were His mighty **acts**
 - healing, raising the dead, calming the storm.
 - and His redemptive acts... the cross
 - He finished redemption
 - There was His **teaching**
 - announced the kingdom
 - preached about how to live in the kingdom
 - proclaimed the gospel (explained His redemptive work)
 2. By its very nature, this work was only the beginning.
 - He completed redemption...
 - He completed God's revelation...
 - But now this work was to be applied to all the elect.
 - If anything, we may say that He ascended to God's right hand to begin this great work.
 3. And this work is still going on today!
 - He is applying the work He did while He was on earth to the nations.
 - He is still *doing and teaching*
 - doing:
 - **2 Thess 3:3: But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.**
 - teaching:

- **Eph 4:20-21: But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus.**
- He is the one who is teaching...

- It is ours to:
 - receive the work—(to believe and rest in it, to live it out).
 - to proclaim it—(through preaching, in our homes, all around)

TRANS> He does this work from His throne in heaven through His agents on earth.

C. Jesus' ascension into heaven is described in v. 9.

- **v. 9: Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

1. What a sight this must have been!

- He finished talking—then He went up into the glory cloud!!
 - This is the cloud that led Israel in the wilderness.
 - It is the cloud that filled the tabernacle and the temple.
 - It showed that God was present with His people.

2. This shows that Jesus, as mediator, is in the presence of the Father!

- He is there as *mediator*—in our flesh—human flesh!
- He is there to represent us all who are His people!
- He is there to intercede for us!
- He is there as the one who was crucified for us and whose sacrifice was accepted for our sake.
- He is there as having defeated Satan.
- He is there to do His work of gathering the elect from the four corners of the earth into His kingdom!

TRANS> And He has left us here to do His work until He returns.

3. And because He is there, with the Father,

- We know that His work cannot fail!
- It is in this confidence that we go forth to do His work...

II. There are two things that we are dependent on in order to carry out that great work...

A. First of all, we are dependent on the unique work of the apostles

1. This is the work that immediately followed the ascension—

- It was the apostolic age of the church.
- In our study of Acts, we must distinguish between the work that is unique to them and the work that continues now that that age has passed.

2. There are several ways that they and their work was unique...
 - a. they were chosen to be apostles
 - **v. 2: after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,**
 - an apostle is an official messenger
 - they were given commandments
 - they were given the Holy Spirit for their particular office.
 - b. they were those who personally saw the resurrected Jesus
 - **v. 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days**
 - His resurrection was made certain to them...
 - infallible proofs...
 - It showed that God had accepted His sacrifice for His people.
 - They are the eyes of these things for the church in all ages to follow.
 - c. they were personally taught by Jesus
 - **v. 3 (continued): being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**
 - taught all along the way...
 - taught during the amazing forty days (all made clear)
 - bursting to go out!
 - d. They were uniquely called to be His witnesses.
 - **v. 8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."**
 - No one else is a witness in the same way (saw Jesus, taught by Him, sent to testify of Him to the nations)
 - They laid the foundation for the gospel among all kinds of people—Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles...
 - They were confirmed by signs and wonders.
 - We must not try to imitate these today lest we make fools of them or of ourselves.
3. You need to see that this work is foundational to any work that we do.
 - a. They are part of the foundation upon which the church is built
 - From them, we have the precious, infallible word of God.
 - Through their word, we know Jesus (what He did, what He taught)
 - We are to appeal to this word as our only rule of faith and practice.

- b. Great error comes when their word is rejected or added to
 - by popes (claim to have new revelation)
 - by those claiming to have special revelation in subsequent ages (“God spoke to me”)
 - by those who take away from His word to suit the sentiments of the day (Rob Bell)
- c. We cannot go forward in Christ’s work unless we build on their word.

TRANS> But that is not all we must have!

B. We cannot continue the work of Christ apart from the Holy Spirit.

- The poured out fullness of the Holy Spirit was indispensable for the church as soon as Jesus began working from heaven.
- He promised not to leave His disciples as orphans, but to send the Holy Spirit to be with them.

1. Jesus shows how indispensable the Holy Spirit is by commanding them to wait until He is poured out before they do anything.

- **v. 4-5: And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

a. They were not to proceed with the work until the Spirit came.

- There would be no use to do so.
 - Though they had the gospel message now, it would do no good without the Holy Spirit...
 - We can preach and preach and preach...
 - They needed the Spirit to be able to remember what Jesus had taught them and what He had done...
 - Jesus said that He would bring to their remembrance all that He had said and done...
 - But the Spirit was also necessary for anyone to receive their word, even if they preached powerfully and persuasively.

- Jesus had told them before that the Spirit was the one who would cause people to believe the truth...

- **John 16:7-11: Nevertheless I tell you the truth. 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 depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**

- convicts the otherwise dead and unbelieving world of the truth about...
 - us—our sin—our need of forgiveness
 - Jesus—His righteousness—accepted by the Father
 - Satan—His judgement by Jesus—shown in the resurrection and the new worldwide kingdom (Satan cast out).

- b. How glad we should be for the Holy Spirit!
 - Before He comes, we cannot receive the gospel...
 - We are dead like a barren desert.
 - We are blind.
 - We are deaf.
 - We have hearts of stone.

- c. We must never attempt to do God’s work without Him.
 - We cannot believe without Him
 - We cannot be sanctified without Him
 - We cannot lead others to faith without Him.
 - So we ought to pray for His working in our lives and in our church!

- 2. Notice that Jesus refers to the Spirit as *the promise* of the Father.
 - a. John the Baptist had baptised people in connection with this promise.
 - He baptised with water... (symbolises cleansing)
 - But the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit... (performs cleansing)

 - b. How does the Spirit cleanse us?
 - He unites us to Jesus—works faith in us (convicting us)
 - He unites us to Jesus—organically (we are joined to His life as the one who died and rose again)

 - c. The baptism of the Spirit is the promise of the New Covenant.
 - The Father had promised Him...
 - **Ezek 36:24-27: “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.”**
 - **Joel 2:28-32: “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.**

And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.”

- In the NT He is often referred to as the promise...
 - For example, in Gal 3:14, Paul speaks of Him in this way:
 - **Gal 3:14: that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.**
 - *objective genitive*: “the promise which is the Spirit”
- He is what makes the New Covenant new!
 - It is the age of the Spirit.
 - He comes because Jesus has finished His work.
 - He imparts the saving work of Jesus to sinners from every nation.
 - Worship is no longer through types and shadows—it is through Jesus revealed in preaching through the Holy Spirit.
 - There is a greater working of God in His people.
 - There is a greater working of God among the nations.

TRANS> The work of Christ will not move forward apart from the Word (of the apostles) and the baptism of the Spirit (the promise of the New Covenant).

- You cannot do anything for God without these.
- But now that we have a risen, ascended mediator reigning in heaven...
 - who has given us His Word and Spirit...

III. It is for us to get on with the work that He has given us to do in this age!

A. Jesus shows clearly that this is His concern for us now that He has ascended in the way He answers the question of His apostles.

1. The question they asked is given in verse 6:
 - **v. 6: Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”**
- a. In a way, it was not such a bad question.
 - Jesus had told them the Holy Spirit would come “not many days from now.”
 - They knew that the Spirit would be powerful.

- Jesus had, like prophets, spoken of the Spirit as a mighty river that would turn Israel and the whole world to the LORD!
- Peter later explains that this restoration is something taught by all the prophets...
 - **Acts 3:21 “the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets.”**
 - He goes on to quote the prophets and to declare that the blessing of restoration they spoke of had already begun...
 - In Acts 3:26, he says to his fellow Israelites:
 - **To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.”** (Acts 3:26)
 - So it is not unreasonable with all this prophecy about restoration that the disciples wondered...
 - “Will the coming of the Spirit not many days from now be the restoration of the kingdom to Israel?”
 - In a very real way, Pentecost was the beginning of that restoration of Jerusalem that would impact the entire world.
- b. But in another way, the apostles’ question was not a good question.
 - Jesus had told them that Jerusalem would be destroyed in that generation as a judgement for their unbelief.
 - He had told them that it would a worse destruction than had yet been seen.
 - He had told them that they (the Apostles) would be put out of the synagogues and would be persecuted.
 - Hardly a restoration!
 - The disciples were confused—how could the Spirit come and Israel not be restored?
- c. In Acts 3, this is understood by Peter...
 - Israel is indeed restored—but not all at once.
 - Peter explains that Jesus must remain in heaven until the times of the restoration of all things.
 - The restoration will not happen all at once, but over many years.
 - As Jesus had said so many times in Matthew 24—
 - You will see wars and those who claim to be Christ and earthquakes, but the end is not yet.

- I never cease to be amazed at how many people in our day turn what Jesus says here around backwards.
 - He clearly says that all these things are NOT signs of the end—that the end is not yet,
 - but for some reason, they are said to be signs of the end!
 - Jesus was making the point that the end is a long way off.
 - The restoration had actually begun with John the Baptist...
 - as Jesus said in Mt 17:11-13...
 - **Mt 17:11-13: Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.**
 - It had begun with John, and now it was to go on with the work of the apostles and with those that followed after them!
2. In our text, you can see that Jesus answers their question in a way that lets them know (again) that the restoration will not be complete for a long time...
- and even more importantly,
 - that they need not concern themselves about it.
 - Instead they are to concern themselves with doing the work of the kingdom—the work of restoration through the preaching of the gospel!
 - Look at what He says in verse 7 & 8:
 - **v. 7-8: And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**
 - In speaking of “times and seasons,”
 - Jesus indicates that it will be a long while yet!
 - The plural shows this—times and seasons...
 - As I mentioned, He had already told them that the destruction of Jerusalem would come first, and not to think that end had come.
 - The thrust of His parables had been about the Lord delaying His coming and people losing interest.
 - Peter speaks about this in his second epistle when he says that the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering.
 - For some reason, the disciples missed this emphasis even as the church has throughout the centuries.

- God has withheld the revelation of dates to us, so we need to stop speculating about it!
- Harold Camping comes to mind!

3. But do not miss the main point here!

- Jesus tells them that instead of speculating about times and seasons,
 - they must get on with the work that He has given them to do!
 - the work of being His witnesses—
 - first in Jerusalem,
 - then in Judea and Samaria,
 - and then to the end of the earth!
 - They had plenty of work to do before His return!
- That is true for us also!
 - The church is hindered by date setting and idle speculation!
 - The LORD has not told us!
 - He told His disciples when the destruction of Jerusalem would be, but He did not tell them when the end would be.
 - He simply told them to go to work in building His church!
 - My brothers and sisters, you need to do the same!
 - You are not all called to preach!
 - But you are called to serve Christ in His kingdom and to make Him known through word and deed in all sorts of ways!
 - You are to encourage your neighbours to seek Him and be ready to tell them of the hope that you have.
 - You are to support missions and to support the church and urge people to come and hear the gospel preached.
 - You are to teach your children and urge them to continue in the grace of God.
 - You are to live a godly life that shows the work of Christ in you.
 - You are to love your brothers so that everyone will know that you are Christ's disciples.
 - You are to confess Him as your Lord and Saviour.
 - Don't speculate—do the work of the kingdom that He has called you to do.

B. You see that the same sort of message is brought to apostles again in v. 10-11.

1. After Jesus ascended into the glory cloud, they are doing what is, I suppose, quite a natural thing to do...
 - They are standing their gazing up into heaven!

- That's probably what you would do if the person you were talking to suddenly went up into the shekinah glory.
 - You would have that kind of glazed over look!
2. But you see that two angels come to testify about this happening...
- It takes two to bear witness...
 - And you see that they give the disciples a gentle rebuke:
 - **v. 10-11: And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**
 - This is as if to say,
 - "Hey pals, He's gone—just like He told you.
 - Don't stand there like a bunch of dummy's gazing into the sky!
 - He has given you a great work to do!
 - You have to spread the gospel to the end of the earth.
 - You won't see Him again until the work is complete, so quit gazing and get on with it."
3. That is the great thing about Acts...
- It's about Acts—
 - The Acts of the Apostles...
 - It's not called "The Speculations of the Apostles," but "The Acts of the Apostles."
 - It is "The Acts of Jesus through the Apostles now that He has ascended"...
 - More fully, "The Acts of Jesus through the Apostles by the Holy Spirit."
 - It is a book that tells you to get going and do something!
 - to quit gazing and start moving forward for Jesus.
 - He is reigning, not so you can stand and gaze at Him,
 - but so that you can go forward and do His work by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - Of course I don't mean that we are not to study the word that He has given to us through the Apostles and Prophets...
 - That is essential...
 - But we are not to speculate about it.
 - We are to carry it to the nations.

- The eastern part of the church did way too much speculating in the first three centuries and became the seed bed of many heresies.
- The western part of the church went to work for Jesus and actually corrected many of the heresies that arose in the east.
- They knew the word because they were busy taking it to the nations.

TRANS> So the angels tell us to stop gazing and to get on with the work...

- And there is also a great encouragement given to us by them...

C. The angels give us confidence that Jesus will complete His work that He is doing through us in this age.

1. The angels declare that He will return again in the glory cloud.

- The work of gathering will not last forever.
 - The day will come when the work is complete and then He will come in the same way He departed...
 - In the glory cloud.

2. Because He is reigning as our Mediator, fully in our flesh, fully accepted for our sakes,

- we can be certain that His work will not fail!
- That ought to motivate you to join yourself to Him in the work that He is doing now—
 - the work of building His church—
 - and to continue in that work with zeal until He returns in glory!

Conclusion

- So what about you?
 - Are you busy about the work of His kingdom?
 - Are you doing the work that He has given you to do?