

June 2, 2024

COMMISSIONED: ACTS 1:4-11,23-26

Jesus commissions His followers for kingdom work.

Focus Attention Option 1 (ETB LG, 17)

Ask: Have you attended an ordination ceremony?

Explain: Comment that ordinations are typically formal exercises conducted with solemnity to illustrate the importance of being set aside for sacred roles in the church. Share that we are commissioned by God to be His witnesses in the world.

Ask: How does Christ's commission apply to you? What examples have you experienced this week? (PSG, p. 10)

Transition: Today's session launches a study of the first half of the book of Acts. In these sessions, we'll trace the birth and growth of the early church, beginning with Jesus's commission to the church's earliest members.

SKIP TO INTRODUCE THE PASSAGE BELOW

Focus Attention Option 2

Activity: Pass out small note cards of small Post-it notes to each group member. Have some pens on hand for those who do not have a pen.

Ask: Ask the group to silently think of one unbeliever or unchurched person in their life.

Activity: Encourage the group to write the name of that person on the card or post-it note. Encourage them to hang on to the card and use it in the coming week to pray for that person.

Transition: "Did you know that there are thirteen million people in North America who don't know a single Christian? That's one in five non-Christians." (Matte, 27) Today we are going to see that Christ commissioned His early followers to be His witnesses to those who need to hear the good news. We will also see that God has commissioned us to reach the world as well.

Introduce the Passage: (If you use the ETB Leader Pack, you might want to distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** [*Handout: Background of Acts*] and **Pack Item 10** [*Handout: Luke: Historian and Theologian*]) Today we will begin a six-month study in the book of Acts. The book of Acts was written by Luke, the same author of the Gospel by that name. Luke was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Both books are written to Theophilus. This could be an individual or the name may be a stand-in for any "lover of God" reading the books. Either way, it is clear that Luke intended the

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte

books to be read by many people. In the first 4 verses of the Gospel, Luke tells us that he has sought out eyewitnesses and “carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence” (v. 3) of events. The Gospel recounts the work of Christ on earth and Acts recounts the work of Christ through His church. Dr. Kent Hughes writes, “In the Gospels the Son of Man offered his life; in Acts the Son of God offered his power.” (Preaching, 13) Today we are going to examine Christ’s commission to His church and the promise of power to fulfill that commission.

1. STAY FOCUSED (ACTS 1:4-8)

Begin by Reading verses 4-5 of Acts 1

Explain: Acts 1 picks up where the Gospel of Luke ends. Acts 1:4-11 seems to recount the same events as Luke 24:44-53

The events take place in the days after the resurrection. Luke tells us “³ After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3) During one of these appearances, while they were eating or lodging together, Jesus tells the Apostles to stay in Jerusalem. You might ask, what about the fishing trip to Galilee recorded in John? The answer to that can be found in the translation of Luke’s words “he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem.” “The Greek construction can be rendered quite literally, ‘Stop departing from Jerusalem,’ implying that at this point the disciples had been coming and going from the Holy City.” (NAC, 83) They were possibly staying the night in Bethany and taking further trips into Galilee. But here Jesus tells them “Stay put. Stay in the city.”

Guide and Ask: Instruct the group to examine verses 4 and 5 and discover why Jesus wanted them to stay in the city. (He wanted them to stay in the city and receive the Holy Spirit.)

Explain: Could the Father have sent the Spirit to the disciples elsewhere? Of course, He could have. God can do amazing things anywhere. But as we will see in the following passage, He wanted the Gospel to proceed out from Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit comes on the group in Chapter 2, the city will experience a great evangelistic effort and a spiritual awakening of thousands.

Apply: Before we examine Christ’s commission, we should stop here and consider His instructions concerning the need to wait. The disciples had a great message to deliver. They had come to understand the relationship between the OT and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But Jesus tells them to hold tight and wait. He wanted them to wait on the power of the Holy Spirit before taking that message to the world. Luke tells us in Luke 24:45 that Jesus had “opened their minds to understand the

Notes:

Teachers Note: It is possible that verses 4-5 reference the events in Luke 24: 44-49. It is also possible these are two different encounters, but Luke’s use of the words translated “While he was with them” in verse 3 indicates a meal or extended encounter because the words literally translate as while he was “he was eating, or he was lodging” with them.

“Lake (*Beginnings* 5:7–16) suggests that the disciples had been spending the night at Bethany, as Jesus had done during his days in Jerusalem prior to the passion. That they may have been departing from Jerusalem also allows for the Galilean appearance traditions, which are not otherwise mentioned in the Lukan appearance narratives. See Reicke, *Glaube und Leben* 14–15, for the intriguing suggestion that Luke’s silence on the Galilean appearances may have been due to the ‘revolutionary’ associations of Galilean Judaism.” (NAC, 83 fn 21)

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Scriptures.” So, they had the knowledge of the gospel, but He wanted them to wait for the power of the Spirit.

Discuss: Why is it important that believers rely on the power of the Spirit when they do the work of God?

Explain: Knowledge is not enough. The Apostles had knowledge, but as we will see in Acts chapter 2, it was the power of the Spirit that emboldened and empowered the disciples. Moreover, throughout the book of Acts, we will see that the Spirit led God’s messengers to certain places and certain people. The Spirit is the Spirit of God, and He is the essential element in the gospel work. But what is the gospel work? Jesus instructs the disciples on the mission in the next few verses.

Read Acts 1:6-8

Explain: The Apostles have reverted again to their old ideas about the Kingdom of God. They are still focused on a terrestrial kingdom ruled by the risen Jesus that would overthrow the Romans and reestablish an independent Jewish state. Jesus does not dismiss the idea that at some point He would establish His Kingdom, but He does admonish them for worrying about the time of that establishment. It is almost like He is telling them, “Yall don’t worry about the establishment of the Kingdom. Concern yourself with the work that needs to be done before the Kingdom is established.”

He proceeds to them what the work is: under the power of the Holy Spirit, they are to be His witnesses. That’s it; tell people what you have seen and learned. They are to begin in Jerusalem then proceed to the regions nearby and cross cultural boundaries in the process. They are to do this “to the end of the earth.” That is the simple yet daunting work that every believer is to do until Christ’s Kingdom is established. Tell everyone everywhere everything they need to know to find salvation in Christ.

Transition: The mission that God calls us to is huge. Every person everywhere needs the gospel. The disciples were supposed to start telling people where they currently resided (Jerusalem) and then go out to the world. The same is true for us today. We start in our community and then go out to all the world. “Followers of Christ yearn for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth *and* into their own community. There can be no burden for distant unreached people without a burden for unreached neighbors.” (Preaching, 18) Going to the nations is difficult. It can be just as difficult to go across the street. That is why the disciples had to wait on the Spirit. When we come to faith in Christ, we receive that same Spirit. The Spirit enables us to go to the ends of the earth, and the Spirit empowers us to go across the street.

2. WITH URGENCY (ACTS 1:9-11)

Notes:

“But with its root meaning of *testimony*, ‘witness’ comes to have an almost legal sense of bearing one’s testimony to Christ. In this way it is applied to Stephen (22:20) and to Paul (22:15; 23:11; 26:16).” (NAC, 86)

Acts 1:8 is a “three fold table of contents [for the book of Acts]: Jerusalem, Acts 2:42-8:3; Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:4-12:24; ends of the earth, Acts 12:25-28:31.” (HNTC, 10)

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Read (or have someone read) Acts 1:9-11

Explain: I remember going to the movie theater as a kid. About halfway through the movie, there would be an intermission. I don't know if it was because the film on the projectors needed to be swapped out or if it was a scheme to get us to buy more popcorn. Regardless, the intermission was a pause in the action not the end of the movie. After Intermission, the action would resume. That is what we get in the passage: a brief pause in the action.

Discuss: Encourage the group to express how they would have reacted at seeing Jesus ascend into heaven.

Explain: The reaction of the disciples is completely understandable. If someone rose into the clouds, most would be left staring into the sky dumbstruck. Jesus' ascension is a declaration that Jesus' earthly ministry had been accomplished. "He had conquered sin and death; and, in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, He had crushed the head of the serpent." (ETB LG, 20) While this picture of Jesus ascending looms large in the minds of believers, Luke deals with the event only briefly. It is a pause in the action of the acts of the Apostles. This is made clear by the appearance and words of the two angels. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven." (Acts 1:11) Their words are a call to urgency.

Guide and Discuss: Guide the group to page 15 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question near the bottom of the page. "How does the promised return of Jesus add to the urgency we should feel in sharing with others?"

Explain: The return of Christ implies a deadline by which to complete the mission of evangelizing the world. As Jesus said before, we do not know when that deadline will arrive, but we do know that we must be about the work because a day will come when that time arrives.

Apply: In a moment, we will see what the disciples did instead of staring into the sky. First, though, we should consider how we can live out the Great Commission while we await the return of Christ. There are three general ways that we can be about the work of evangelizing **here** (Jerusalem), **there** (Judea and Samaria), and **beyond** (the ends of the earth)

Notes:

"The story of Jesus led *to* Jerusalem; the story of the church led *from* Jerusalem." (NAC, 86)

"The ascension tradition is unique to Luke-Acts, in all the New Testament being found only here, in Acts 1:2, and in Luke 24:51, though it is implied in John 20:17. It is, however, closely related to the many New Testament texts that speak of Jesus' exaltation to the Father, such as 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:21f." (NAC, 86)

TEACHER'S NOTE

You might consider asking the group to discuss the question in groups of twos or threes. After a few minutes, ask them to report back. If you do this, it is more likely that you will get more nuanced answers to the question.

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Pray: First, we should be about the work of praying for the lost in our Jerusalem. We should pray for our neighbors and family **here** who do not know Christ. We should pray for our sister churches and church plants over **there** in our region and state. Lastly, we should pray for our missionaries serving **beyond** the borders of the United States and internationally.

I want to provide you with a graphic that will help you pray for your community. I developed it from a presentation given by Jeff Iorg. You might want to copy and distribute the attached graphic before explaining it.

(Prior to your group time ask 5 group members to be prepared to read these verses.)

Read: Matthew 9:35-38 (³⁵ Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.")

First, pray for more people to start witnessing.

Read: Colossians 4:3-4 (³ At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, ⁴ so that I may make it known as I should.)

Second, pray for more opportunities to share the gospel.

Read: Ephesians 6:19-20 (19 Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. 20 For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should.)

Third, pray for bold insight in sharing the gospel.

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:1 (In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.)

Fourth, pray that the gospel may spread rapidly.

Read: Romans 10:1 (Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation.)

Fifth, pray that people will be saved.

Give: In addition to praying about the spread of the gospel, we should give the mission. You can do this in two ways. First, you can give to the unified budget of the local church through tithes and offerings. The church exists as a Great Commission outpost **here** in the community. Through the church's budget, the members of the church are equipped with the resources to participate in the Great Commission. You can also give to special missions offerings throughout the year that reach people over **there and beyond**.

Notes:

You can find out more at www.namb.org and www.imb.org.

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Go: While praying and giving, we should also go on mission. Going on mission might include a short mission trip **beyond** the local community. It should include going on mission in your community through the organized work of the church and the organic leading of the Spirit right **here** in your everyday life.

Transition: Instead of standing around gazing into the sky, the disciples were admonished to get to work by the angels. However, Jesus had told them to wait on the Spirit before setting about the Great Commission. Let's see what they did in the meantime.

3. THROUGH PRAYER (ACTS 1:23-26)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 1:23-26

Explain: In the passage between the Ascension and the selection of Matthias, Luke tells how the disciples began to prepare for the forthcoming mission Jesus had assigned. They knew they could not yet go about the mission because Jesus told them to wait on the Holy Spirit, but that did not mean they had to be idle in the meantime. Acts 1:14 records their action during this time. Luke writes, "They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." The first step in preparing to be about God's mission is prayer. Power and guidance would come with the Holy Spirit, but His work in our life is always preceded by prayer.

One area in which they needed to prepare was leadership replacement. With the loss of Judas as one of the twelve, they felt that they needed to replenish their leadership body to the number that Jesus had selected. They probably understood this number to be theologically and eschatologically important. In Luke 22:28-30, Jesus declared that the twelve would sit as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. While other Apostles are mentioned in the New Testament ("Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James (Gal. 1:19) were also called apostles." [EBT LG, 22]), Polhill contends that "because the church is built on the foundation of these Twelve as representatives of the true Israel, the people of God of the messianic times, their number had to be completed before the coming of the Spirit and the 'birth of the church.'" (NAC, 93)

Before they selected the new member, Peter outlined the requirements for the position. The person had to be someone who had been witness to the teachings and miracles of Jesus from the time of His baptism. Specifically, they must have witnessed His resurrection (vv. 21-22). These two requirements demonstrate that the office of Apostle is not something that can be passed down or bestowed upon a person. There are no Apostles today because no one can satisfy the requirements outlined by Peter. The Apostles played a unique role in the early church as eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry and resurrection and first-hand recipients of His message.

Notes:

"In vv. 21-22 Peter laid down the qualifications for Judas's replacement. He had to be one who had witnessed the entire ministry of Jesus from the time of his baptism by John to the ascension. Above all he had to have witnessed the resurrection appearances. Here we have the basic understanding of the apostles' role in Acts. They were primarily "witnesses" to Jesus, eyewitnesses who could share his teaching and confirm his resurrection and ascension. As such, the role of apostle was limited to the Twelve. It was a unique, irreplaceable office (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14)" (NAC, 93)

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Two men were put forth by the 120 gathered believers: “Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.” (v. 23) While the group “nominated” these men they *did not select* the replacement. Instead, they relied on the Lord to show them who He wanted to be numbered among the twelve. They did this through the casting of lots. While we might be taken aback by the apparent reliance on chance to make such an important decision, we first have to take note of the prayer proceeding the casting lots. They asked the Lord to reveal His will. Second, we need to remember that casting of lots was an accepted Old Testament means of discerning God’s will. Moreover, these men were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. In this sense, you might say they are still somewhere between the Old Testament ways of doing things and the New Testament ways.

Guide and Discuss: Guide the group to page 17 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question in the middle of the page: “What role should corporate prayer play when a group of believers are making a decision?”

Summarize and Transition: When making important decisions in the local church, prayer is essential to the process. The 120 disciples prayed twice during the process. Verse 14 reveals they were in a continual state of prayer and verse 24 records their specific prayer regarding this matter. Both types of prayers are important. The first shows a group of believers constantly dependent on the Lord. The second shows a group of people who took specific needs to the Lord.

CONCLUDE

Summarize and Challenge: In today’s lesson, Luke presents Jesus’ mission for His church—reach the lost. He reveals the power by which the mission will be accomplished—the Spirit. The record of the ascension and the admonishment of the angels demonstrates the urgency by which we should be about the mission that will come to fruition at the return of Christ. Lastly, the selection of Matthias demonstrates the need for prayer in preparing for the mission.

Challenge: Challenge the group to be on mission for the Lord this week. Encourage them to pray for their lost friends and ask the Spirit to guide them to opportunities to share the gospel with those friends.

Notes:

“Before Pentecost, before the presence of the Spirit to lead it, the church sought the direction of God and used the Old Testament procedure of securing divine decision.” (NAC, 95)

5 New Testament Evangelistic Prayers



Pray for more people to start witnessing.

Matthew 9:35-38



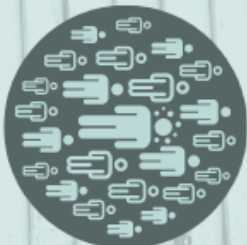
Pray for more opportunities to share the gospel.

Colossians 4:3-4



Pray for bold insight in sharing the gospel.

Eph 6:19-20



Pray that the gospel may spread rapidly.

2 Thess 3:1



Pray that people will be saved.

Romans 10:1