

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

07.05.2026 | To the End of the Earth | Acts 1:1-11 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Acts chapter one. If you want to use the Bible that's in the pew or the chair in front of you, I can tell you that Acts chapter one is on page 909 of that Bible. You can get kind of used to turning to the book of Acts because we're going to begin a study through this book. Acts isn't a short book, so we will be in the study for a while, but don't worry, we'll take some periodic breaks to consider other things. But I'm looking forward to us studying this book because the book of Acts tells the story of the early church. It's really a very amazing and inspiring story. It's a story of lives being transformed, thousands of people getting saved at a time, the gospel going to new places and to new people, radical conversions of people turning from themselves to what they thought was right to worship Jesus and follow him. It's really an amazing story, but it's not just the story of the early church. It's really better thought of as the story of the church.

You know, traditionally the book is known as the Acts of the Apostles, but probably a better name or maybe a more accurate name could be the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. You see, what the book of Acts is about is not really the actions of certain people, rather it's more about the work of God's spirit in the Apostles and in the broader people of God with the word of God to carry out the mission of God. The book of Acts is not really just history as to what has happened, but it's really more about a story of the church that is still being written. And I hope that as we study the book of Acts, we will see this, we will see that the same word that came to the people of God, that they shared with others, is the same word that we have today. And that word hasn't changed, but it is still changing lives.

Pray that we would see that the same spirit who descended upon the Apostles, we now invite to descend upon our hearts as we sing, that same spirit who empowered them to carry out this mission, to do amazing things that we read in the book of Acts, that spirit is still empowering God's people today. Jesus is still building his church, just as he was in the book of Acts. So as we come to the book of Acts, let us not see it as a story of the past, but a story that is still being written, one that we are now involved in. Let us study the book of Acts, seeking to understand where do we play our part in this story, being empowered by God's spirit, following Jesus as king, taking forth this mission to be witnesses to the end of the earth.

What's great about the beginning of Acts, I think in these first 11 verses that we'll look at today, is really an introduction to the book. And so it's a great way for us to get to know the book of Acts, to get to know where we're going in the series by studying these first 11 verses. So let me read them for us. Acts chapter 1, verses 1 through 11, it says, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, "You heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and to the end of the earth." When he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and the cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven, as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

I've mentioned this book before, but I'll mention it again because I think it's probably one of the more important books that I've discovered over the last few years. It's a book called Dominion by Tom Holland. Anytime I ever mention this book, I always want to make a point to say, "This isn't Tom Holland who plays Spider-Man. This is a very respected historian." What's kind of interesting is he's not a Christian historian. He's just a historian. What's kind of interesting is that he writes a whole book on how Christianity has revolutionized the whole world, how Christianity has had such an influence on the world, especially the Western world. He traces an argument that says, "Essentially all that we have in the Western world, including many of our ethics and our morals and our beliefs, are founded on Christianity." Even

things like secularism or liberalism, those kind of beliefs or philosophies that really seem opposed to Christianity, he says, actually founded upon Christian thought and teaching.

He says that Christianity has made a huge impact. It has revolutionized the whole world. As a historian, he traces this argument through history, beginning back really kind of just before the church was birthed, but really citing it back to the beginning of the church specifically citing Paul, who he calls a bum who has no reputation or position in the affairs of the world. He says this man who has no position in the affairs of the world to have really any influence wrote letters that were the most transformative, the most revolutionary letters ever written, that Paul's letters have been changing the world for thousands of years. Think about how amazing that is. I mean, think about how a Jewish Pharisee who had no position or authority in the broader world, who was persecuting Christians, has this conversion to Christianity and then writes letters to churches and to individuals that have been used for the last 2,000 years and have completely reshaped the world. Think about how amazing it is that a small group of Jewish men and women, who believe that their rabbi was the Messiah, who will see in just a few weeks in the book of Acts, are called common and uneducated people. Begin a movement that lasts for 2,000 years, remakes the whole world and is still growing today.

This is what we get to see in the book of Acts. It's the birth of this movement. It's the beginning of what Tom Holland is talking about in this whole book. You want to know how the world came to be like it is now. We see the beginning of it here in the book of Acts. All that's going to reshape the world is happening right here and it's still happening today. This movement that began in Acts, I mean, God began it long before then, but the movement of Christianity that begins here is still growing today. Not just because Tom Holland wrote this book as if the Dominion is over. He's trying to help us to see how it shaped the world that we are in, but it is still shaping the world today.

In some ways, Christianity is not probably growing as quickly in the Western world, but in what's often referred to as the global South, Christianity is still very much growing. In countries like China, Nepal, Iran, the church is growing more rapidly than it is in any other place. Christianity is still remaking the world and it's still having an impact here in our own country, here in San Francisco. I love seeing new people come to faith in our church, in churches like Western Hills and so many others. I love talking to other pastors and just hearing what God is doing in our city. We live in one of the least Christian cities in America, but yet God is still working here.

You see, what I want us to know and to believe as we study the book of Acts is that God is still doing all of this. That same spirit is still empowering us as His people. Jesus is still building His church. What has happened in the book of Acts is still happening today and God is still inviting us into this mission. Will we join Him? Will we continue to be faithful in doing what the church has done for thousands of years? It's all introduced to us right here in these first 11 verses. The kind of main idea that I have in mind for this first part of Acts, I think, could kind of serve as a summary statement for the whole book of Acts. And that is because Jesus is alive and reigning and will one day return, His people can confidently carry out His mission through the power of His Spirit. Because Jesus is alive, is reigning as King and will one day return, His church, we as His church, can confidently carry out His mission by the power, through the power of His Spirit. That's what we see in these first 11 verses. And what I want to do is I just want to kind of break down the 11 verses into three sections, if you will, that would just kind of give us some hooks to hang our thoughts on. Help us to think about what we're seeing in this book of Acts and in this first 11 verses.

The first kind of thing that I want us to consider is, the first section of these verses is the risen King. What we see is the book of Acts begins, is that Acts is actually picking up in the middle of a story. I don't know if you know this, but Acts is a sequel. It's a part two. Now, if you notice, but we'll read in just a minute verse one, when he talks about in the first book, Acts was written by Luke. You might know that Luke wrote the gospel according to Luke. That Luke, who was a physician, Luke was probably the only Gentile that wrote a book in the Bible. Luke wrote his gospel account to a man named Theophilus. Theophilus means "love by God" in the Greek. He writes in Luke 1 that he is writing to Theophilus an orderly account so that he can know who Jesus is and what he did and what he taught. And now he picks up that story in Acts chapter 1 verse 1. Go back and read it again. It says, "In the first book," that's the gospel according to Luke, "O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach." So he says, "You've already read part one, what Jesus was doing, what he was teaching when he was here." Verse 2, "Until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." That's kind of where the book of Luke ends. Jesus resurrected, teaching his disciples, and it briefly mentions the ascension. Luke says that's where we're picking up

here in the book of Acts. And I want you to notice verse 3 because I think it kind of summarizes this beginning part of the risen king. He says, "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."

I think this verse is really important for us beginning the book of Acts because it helps us understand where we're picking up from the book of Luke. It explains why I would call this first part the risen king. Because notice what Luke says about Jesus. He says Jesus was showing himself alive after his suffering by many proofs. So let's just say maybe you're very new to Christianity. Like somebody who might first be reading the book of Acts, maybe you don't know fully the story of Jesus yet. You might kind of wonder, "Well, why would someone need to show themselves alive?" Well, because the suffering that Luke mentions there was not just some hardship or some difficulty. It was death. Particularly death on a Roman cross. This Jesus, whom he is speaking about here at the beginning of Acts, died the most painful and shameful death that you could imagine.

And think about it. This man who had died the most painful and shameful death is not only proving in many ways. Letting people touch him, eating with them, talking with them, teaching them. Not only proving that he's alive, but he's also posturing himself as a king. You notice that as he's teaching them from the Holy Spirit, it says he's talking about the kingdom of God. If you were to go back and read part one, the book of Luke, you would know that that was the most, the topic that Jesus taught on the most. It was all about the kingdom because that was his role. He is the king bringing God's kingdom here to earth. This man who had died the most painful and shameful death is not only back alive, but is presenting himself as king.

And here's why I'm just taking a few minutes to make sure we understand this. Because this is the core of the message of Christianity. This is the core of the message that will be shared throughout the rest of the book of Acts. This is what makes Christianity so unique. This is what makes Christianity so revolutionary. Do you want to know why Christianity has reshaped the world? It's because it has a unique message that we have a king who suffered and died, rose from the dead, and now reigns as king. Listen to how Tom Holland puts it. So again, this is a man who's not a Christian, but just is understanding Christianity and the influence that it's had. This is what he says. He says to be a Christian is to believe that God became man and suffered a death as terrible as any mortal has ever suffered. This is why the cross, that ancient implement of torture, remains what it has always been, the fitting symbol of the Christian revolution. It is the audacity of it, the audacity of finding in a twisted and defeated corpse the glory of the creator of the universe. That serves to explain more surely than anything else the sheer strangeness of Christianity and of the civilization to which it gave birth.

The fact that we place our hope in someone who died the most painful and shameful death is so unique. The fact that we worship a king who is not like the kings of this world. We worship a king who reigns in a humble way. We worship a king who became weak so that we might be strong. We worship a king who gave his lives so that we might be saved. We worship a king who conquered not by killing his enemies but by dying himself. This is why Christianity has been so unique from the very beginning. It's why at least in its best forms Christianity has always had a heart for the weak and the powerless. Because we serve a king who became weak and powerless. This is why Christianity from the beginning and at its best forms has always been about not pursuing positions of power but positions of service. Because we have a king who came and told us he came not to be served but to serve to give his life as a ransom for many.

Christianity should pull us away from the pursuit of power and down the path of humility. This whole message is so unique and it is what changes people's lives. He, the king, changes people's lives and the good news about him being a humble king. A king who gave himself, a king who died for your sins. Has this message changed your life? Have you trusted in this king? But know that while he died and that cross still serves as an important symbol and reminder of this unique message that we carry, this unique belief that we have, he is a risen king. He didn't stay dead. Jesus is humble but he is not weak. Jesus is lowly but he reigns over all. Which means if we truly worship him as king, we should be a humble people who have a heart for the weak and the powerless. But we should not see ourselves as weak and powerless. We are not a defeated people who serve a dead king. We are a people who serve a risen king and who have been empowered by his spirit to carry out his mission. And that's where we're going next. So we begin the story of Acts with the risen king.

Next we move to the empowered witnesses. The second part of this first 11 verses and really the whole understanding of the book of Acts and the message of Christianity. You first need to know the king whom we worship and how unique his message is. But secondly you need to know the empowered witnesses. So notice Jesus is for 40 days after he rises from the dead teaching his apostles. Luke says in verses 4 and 5, "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which he said, you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." These apostles largely were not people from Jerusalem. We'll hear the angels later call them men of Galilee. They were from a whole different region. But Jesus told them you are to wait in Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit who I had promised before is going to be poured upon you. You're going to be baptized in the spirit. Now when Jesus mentions this, in the thought at the time, they probably thought that this was like the messianic day of the Lord. Because many times I think in that culture and that belief when the spirit was going to be poured out, it was like kind of the messianic, the whole saving kind of day of the Lord is there. And so the people probably thought, well that meant the kingdom is going to be completed and it's going to be restored. So in verse 6 they say, they ask him, "Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" If the spirit's being poured out, it probably means the kingdom's being restored. They're thinking that the kingdom is the kingdom of Israel. It's going to go back to the glory days of David and Solomon. It's going to have a great reign. But then notice what Jesus says. He says, "It's not for you to know the times of the seasons that the Father is fixed by his own authority. Don't worry about when you're going to see things happen, when the day of the Lord will come." But he also corrects their thinking of the kingdom. It's not about restoring the kingdom to a certain nation or a certain people. It's actually about showing that the kingdom is for all people. As we sang earlier, the Son of Jesus shines everywhere. Or the reign of Jesus goes to where all the sun shines. And that's what he tells him here in verse 8. Here's what you should be focused on. Here's what you should know. But you'll 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 end of the earth.

Acts 1.8 could probably be seen as a summary verse for the whole book of Acts. So allow me just to spend a few minutes helping us think about what Jesus says in this verse. Three things I want you to notice in this verse. The first one is the power that he promises. He says, "But you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." So it's not something that the apostles are going to do to get this power. Not some way that they're going to work to get more strong. No, he says the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you. And that's how you receive power. And we'll see this in a couple of weeks at Acts chapter 2. Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out. The people are empowered to share the gospel, even in different languages. To exalt Jesus. People get saved. But know that this promise that the Holy Spirit will come upon you, it's directly fulfilled in Acts chapter 2 for the apostles. But that you is not just applying to the apostles, it's a promise for the people of God. What we see throughout the book of Acts is that even beyond the apostles, the Spirit is poured out and people are empowered.

And one thing that you should know is that when the Spirit comes upon you and you receive power, it might look different at different times. The Spirit empowers people in different ways. Listen to what Paul writes to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. He says, he's talking about how all the believers are gifted in different ways. And he says all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills. In other words, he's saying the power is towards all of God's people, but it will look different in God's people. It's important to know this as you study the book of Acts, because there are things that happen in the book of Acts that don't always happen. Luke isn't writing Acts to tell us what should always happen. He is telling us what happened. In other words, when the Spirit comes on the apostles, they speak in tongues. Other times we'll see in Acts that when the Spirit comes, people are able to do certain things or speak in tongues. It does not mean that that's what the power of the Spirit always looks like in our lives. The Spirit shows his power through us in different ways, but it's always for the same reason. The Spirit always empowers for a purpose. That's the second part I want you to see in chapter 1 verse 8. He says, you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. So there's this promise of power. He says, and you will be my witnesses. So this power that the apostles and the people of God receive is for a purpose, and it is to be witnesses of Jesus.

Think about what a witness is. A witness tells of what they have seen and what they have heard. Tells of what they've experienced. Jesus says, you have received power for this purpose, to go and tell other people what you've experienced with me. For the first apostles, it was that they had seen Jesus. They had seen him rise from the dead. They're telling people that they know this Jesus, that he's real, that he died, that he came back to life, that he is the Savior. But for

those, even the Book of Acts, who don't meet Jesus physically, there's still a witnessing to be done, to tell of what they believe in Jesus, to tell of how Jesus has changed their life, how Jesus has saved them from their sins. And this is still the purpose that you have today. Hear me. You have power if you're a believer in Jesus. The Spirit of God has been given to you. Power has been given to you for a purpose. The purpose is that you would be able to witness about Jesus, about who he is and what he has done, that you would be able to give glory, share testimony, to how God has changed your life, how he has saved you from your sins. Now, again, like the power, it might look different in different ways, but it's always towards the same end. Glory to God, sharing of who Jesus is. This is the purpose that you are living for.

The mission statement of our church is to lead people to love and live for Jesus. One thing I said at the beginning of this year is, I don't want that just to be the mission of our church as a whole, but I also want it to be the mission of each member of our church. Not just that first SF wants to lead people to love and live for Jesus, but that each one of you would lead others to love and live for Jesus. Why? Because this is the purpose for which you have been saved. This is the purpose for which you've received the power of the Spirit, that you might testify to God in your lives, simply by your actions, by displaying the fruit of the Spirit, by speaking of what Jesus has done, telling the truth of God, sharing his love with others. This is the purpose for which you've been created, the purpose for which we've received this power. Are we keeping this focus? Are we getting distracted?

Listen, I'm preaching to myself as much as you whenever I ask that question. So many times I get distracted on other things. I forget the purpose to which God has called me. I don't want our church to lose sight of this purpose. I want us, as we study the book of Acts, to continually be reminded, what has God called us to do, this mission that he's called us to be on? We've received the Spirit. We have power for a purpose, to be witnesses. And lastly, the last thing we see in this verse I want you to notice, is where we're supposed to do it or who we're supposed to do it to. So you can think of it maybe as a place or a people. There's this power that's promised, there's this purpose that's given, and it goes to a place, or you could view it as to a people. What he says is, "You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, the city where they're supposed to wait, Judea and Samaria, the surrounding regions, and then to the end of the earth." This kind of geographical expansion that Jesus gives us in verse 8 could kind of serve as an outline for the whole book of Acts. In a way, you could say that chapters 1 through 7 are really seeing the witnesses, bear witness, in Jerusalem. Chapters 1 through 7, in Jerusalem. Chapters 8 through 12 is in Judea and Samaria. Then chapters 13 through 28 is to the end of the earth.

What Jesus promises here, we see it in the book of Acts, and in some way, we've seen this prophecy kind of fulfilled. What I mean when I say that is, what began in Jerusalem has kind of reached the end of the earth, and that it's reached San Francisco. I mean, you don't get much farther away from Jerusalem than San Francisco. We are kind of a testament to the fact that this gospel has gone to the end of the earth. What Tom Holland is writing in his book is how the gospel has gone throughout the whole world and is reshaping the world. There is this sense in which you and I are a testament to Jesus' prophecy and his promise here being fulfilled, that it's going to all peoples. But at the same time, there's a significant way in which this prophecy is not yet fully fulfilled. Significant way in which this promise is still being fulfilled. Because there are still people in the world who have no access to this gospel message. There are still people in San Francisco who have never clearly heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have a calling here in our city, in our Jerusalem. We have a calling to go to the end of the earth to be witnesses. This is why we partner with global partners. This is why we partner with local ministries. We do work here. This is why we encourage you to be sharing with the people at your workplace, in your neighborhoods, with your family members. Because this is the mission that we have, that we are still carrying out. This is why I would say the book of Acts is not just about history. It's about the story of the church that God is still writing. We're finding our place now in the story. Where do I exist given the power of the Spirit for the purpose of being a witness? Where is God calling me to take the gospel? To which end of the earth is God calling me to bear witness to Jesus and what He has done?

It's important that as we do this, we do it with a sense of confidence. We do it with a sense of urgency. We do it with a sense of hope. Because Jesus is coming back. The last part that I just want you to notice and we'll wrap up pretty quickly here is the returning Lord. First he verses are about the risen King, Jesus presenting Himself as a King who suffered and died to save us, but who has risen from the dead, who now has all authority in heaven and on earth. And He uses His authority to give to His apostles, His disciples, to go out, carry out this mission by the power of the Spirit. Announcing

that He is the King, bearing witness to the King in all places. And then He ascends. You ever been awestruck before? Like just kind of left speechless? Maybe it's at a beautiful firework display. You want looking at the fireworks at night? I tell you, I went to the Golden Gate Bridge yesterday. I was not awestruck. The fog kind of prevented us from just being captivated. But could you imagine like looking at somebody and they just ascended into the sky and they're gone? That's what happens in verse 9. And when He had said these things as they were looking on, He was lifted up and the cloud took Him out of their sight. Here's kind of just an interesting thing to consider. Why did Jesus have to go up?

I don't know if you know this, but heaven is not actually up. Like where God dwells, you can't go far enough in space to find God there. Heaven's just in a different realm, if you will. So why did Jesus go up? He could have walked off into the distance. He could have just disappeared. Why did He go up? Because He was showing that as low as He had come and taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, humbling Himself to the point of death on the cross and being buried in the tomb, He was now being exalted to the right hand of the Father. He is reigning as King. He is Lord over all. He went up as a picture and it was to give His people a confidence. That this one who just told you to go out and to bear witness to Him, He is the one who is over all. So no matter what King is over you in Rome, no matter what leader or authority is over you in America or any other place the church has existed, there is one true King who is reigning. We can carry out His mission with confidence because He has been exalted. He has the name above every other name.

The disciples are awestruck by this. "Wouldn't you be?" Verse 10. "While they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes." These are angels. Verse 11. "They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" Because something crazy just happened? I mean, like sometimes you get these rebukes in the Bible that are kind of interesting. Like why do you stand there looking? Well, we just saw Jesus. Like, that's amazing. But look at what they say. "This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." In other words, this rebuke is needed because the whole point of us being here as the followers of Jesus is not to just be looking into heaven, but to be carrying out His mission.

So have this sense of urgency because Jesus is coming back. Jesus might come back today. He might come back tomorrow. It may not be in your lifetime. We don't know, but there should be this urgency, an urgency for you to ask yourself, do you worship Jesus as King? Have you trusted in Him? An urgency for us to say, am I living out the purpose God has empowered me for? Am I really bearing witness to King Jesus wherever He has placed me? Am I really doing what I can to lead people to love and live for Him? It should be this urgency because Jesus is coming back. But also there should be hope. We have confidence because our King has risen. He's exalted. We have urgency because we don't know when He's going to return. We also have hope because we know He's going to return. We have hope to know that this mission is going to be complete. We have hope to know that His glory will reach the end of the earth. The Bible speaks about how one day His glory will fill the whole earth as waters cover the sea. That this hope for the glory of God, the praise of Jesus to be to the end of the earth, it's not just on us. Like we've got to really carry out this mission and win it for ourselves.

No, we're empowered to carry out the mission, but the hope that it will be completed is in our King Jesus. He's returning as Lord. And today He will come back and to the end of the earth He will make all things new. To the end of the earth He will totally revolutionize the world. So what we're doing is we go out and bear witness to this King, live as people of His kingdom. We are anticipating what He is going to do. We're beginning to live as if we belong to a different kingdom and a different world. We're seeing the world reshaped as we do that, but we know that on our own we're not going to change the world. We're not going to make all things new. Our goal is not to consummate the kingdom of Jesus in our going and sharing. That's His job.

And that's why we have hope. As we go out and carry out this mission by the power of His Spirit, we know that one day He is going to return. He is going to make all things new to the end of the earth. So let's give our lives to this. As we study the book of Acts and even beyond, let us give our lives to this purpose that God has given us. Taking the gospel, being witnesses to Jesus to the end of the earth, knowing that He will return as Lord.