

Acts Chapter 1 v 1 - 11

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Welcome. Welcome, particularly if you're on holiday. We've got some folk who've crossed over the border from Lancashire. I hope they've brought their passports because they probably won't let them back in again once you've been to Yorkshire. And others as well we welcome in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're here because of him and who he is and all that he's done for us. And Paul, as he writes to the Christians in Colossus chapter 3, he says this, since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one who came into this world for us, who lived and died and rose again, but is ascended. He's at the right hand of the Father in heaven. And we've been raised with Christ. We share with him. We unite with him.

And so we too have newness of life. And we too are raised up even into the heavenly places. Now, first, Tim reminds us that we are people of the risen King. So let's stand and sing. A song will come up on the projector behind me. Come people of the risen King. Let's stand and sing.

Well, let's continue to worship and to rejoice in our God as we pray together. Let us all pray.

Father in heaven, as we come to you this morning on this beautiful day, many of us will indeed be rejoicing. Rejoicing in answered prayer. Rejoicing in health and strength. Rejoicing in the blessing of being able to have time off and be refreshed. Rejoicing in many different things. But Lord, there be some of us too who come this morning with heavy hearts. Those who find it hard to rejoice.

Those who are struggling. Those, Lord, who feel like they're wading through treacle and that life is tough. And to lift their hearts to rejoice is hard work. But, O Lord, we ask that indeed you would cause us to rejoice this morning, not in our circumstances, but in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for that encouragement from Paul when he says to set our minds upon Christ who is above. We've been raised, O Lord, to life, newness of life, eternal life, transformed life by your Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus conquered death and rose again, so we who once were dead in trespasses and sins, you've made alive with Christ. And Lord, that is unchanged. Whatever we feel, whatever our situation, we are alive in Christ and with him. We thank you that even this morning our Lord Jesus, who conquered death, is seated at your right hand in glory. He is seated upon his throne as Lord and King over heaven and earth.

[3 : 09] We thank you that we know your word tells us that he is at work in this world even today, bringing his enemies to that place where they become his footstool. As they become, Lord, those who submit to him in worship and praise. We thank you that, Lord Jesus, you are working out your purposes for your church, for us, for our good. We thank you that, Lord, your love for us and your grace towards us is unchanging and ever the same. And again, we pray whatever we feel in ourselves. May our hearts and our eyes and our minds be lifted heavenward and see that our sins are all forgiven, that we are pardoned, that we are accepted, that we are loved, that we are righteous and holy in your sight, that, Lord, you receive us. And as we come this morning with our worship and our praise, we thank you that we come as those who know that you love us with our heads, if not with our hearts completely. And know that, Lord, you accept us. And we pray again that you would come amongst us by your Holy Spirit, that you would meet with us, that you would speak with us, that you would lift up the downcast, that you would humble the proud, that you would heal, O Lord, that you would restore, that you would save, that you would convict, that you would challenge. Do your work in our hearts and lives according to your knowledge and your love of us. And, O Lord, may we be able to say again as we leave this fellowship together, as we leave, O Lord, later on, how good it's been to be amongst God's people and in his presence. O Lord, so come, we pray. Help us, we pray. Speak to us, we pray. Give us ears to hear and hearts to receive. We ask these things all in and through

Jesus Christ, our Saviour and King. Amen. We're going to read together from our time machine, from our Bibles. We're going to be taken back in time to Acts and chapter 1. Acts and chapter 1. We're going to read the first 11 verses together.

If you have a Red Bible, Church Bible, that's page 1092, page 1092 in the Red Church Bible, Acts and chapter 1. 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, the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them, gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 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. Then they gathered around him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority, 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. 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've seen him go into heaven.

If you'd like to turn back then to Acts and chapter 1, where we read just a little while ago of Luke's introduction to his account, his wonderful account of the first 30 or so years of the church, the New Testament church and the early church. We all make time to celebrate anniversaries. We make time to remember special events in our lives or in the lives of others in the past. Just over a month or so ago, Ange and myself celebrated our silver wedding, 25 years of being married. And for that reason, I'm away with Ange. We're going away by ourselves for the first time since our honeymoon to Barcelona tomorrow for a few days. So that's why we're not about. So I hope you don't mind if we celebrate in that way, but we rejoice for that. This year is the centenary, of course, of the ending of the First

[8 : 45] World War. November will be a particular month to mark that, but throughout the world and in the countries where that war had great impact in the loss of life and other things, there will be events, celebrations, occasions to mark that, the ending of that terrible conflict. Now we mark anniversaries, joyful anniversaries, sad anniversaries. We mark them because they have a big impact upon our lives.

Those events are something which have really perhaps shaped us and affected us, affected our world, our country, our nation, our town, our family. Now during this coming week, there is a very special event in the Christian calendar. Very special event that, by and large, will be forgotten by the world and probably forgotten by most of us as well. Unlike Christmas, unlike Easter and even Pentecost, Whitson. This historic day has not been hijacked as a bank holiday or public event, which probably explains why even Christians often miss it. This Thursday is Ascension Day, the day we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ has physically returned to heaven. It's a landmark event in history with big repercussions Christians for the world, especially, of course, for those of us who belong to him and have put our faith and trust in him. That's why we read from Acts chapter 1. It's just one of the occasions where we're told about the events of Jesus's Ascension. But Jesus himself had told his disciples on more than one occasion that he would be returning to heaven. When in that wonderful event of the upper room as they shared and spoke together with Jesus, he told them on more than one occasion.

Chapter 16, verse 28, I came from the Father and entered the world. Now I'm leaving the world and going back to the Father. And that wonderful promise that he gave them in John 14, in my Father's house. I'm going there to prepare a place for you. Luke, in his gospel, as well as in his book of Acts, speaks about the event of Jesus returning to heaven. We have it here in chapter 1, verse 9.

After he said this, he was taken up before their eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. At the end of Luke's gospel, he writes again, he was taken up into heaven. When Peter begins to preach on the day of Pentecost, he not only talks about the crucifixion of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, he tells the people where Jesus is. He says he is exalted to the right hand of God. And throughout the New Testament, again and again, this reality is stressed. The position of Jesus, where he has gone, what has happened to him.

In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul writes, when he, that's God, raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Hebrews chapter 1, after he'd provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. And we could look again and again see that the Bible stresses to us and reminds us and wants us to know where Jesus is, wants us to know about his ascension, wants us to know that he has returned to heaven. Clearly it's important.

[12 : 32] It's important to our Christian faith. It's important to what we believe. It's important to how we live day by day in this world. And so we're going to consider the significance of Jesus' ascension tonight. Okay? So there's a taster for you. Tonight we're going to consider just some of the repercussions of Jesus' ascension, what it means to us. But what I want us to do this morning is to ask what I think is an important question and one I've never really asked myself before.

Why didn't Jesus ascend the day after his resurrection? Why didn't he return to heaven straight away? Why did he, to use slang, hang around for 40 days on earth? He must have wanted to be back with the Father in heaven. He must have been longing for that opportunity to return to the Father, to be back with the Father, to be home. Yet he forestalls it 40 days. Luke tells us here, he appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Why? What was the purpose? What was the reason for those 40 days? Well, I want us just to draw a few thoughts in answer to that, which I hope will also be a help to us too, from these opening verses of Acts chapter 1. The first reason we're told is found there in verse 3. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. The reason he was there for 40 days was he wanted to convince his disciples of the genuineness of his resurrection, that he was genuinely alive. And we have there many convincing proofs.

Now, they saw him, didn't they, that very first Easter Sunday, when he appeared to them in the upper room. And again, we're told of several occasions a week later, when Thomas was there in the upper room.

He appeared to them when they had been out fishing by the Lake of Galilee and cooked them fish, and had breakfast with them. He appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, in Luke's Gospel. We have record after record. Paul tells us, when he talks about it, that Jesus appeared at one time to 500 of the disciples.

You see, the trouble is this. We need convincing. If Jesus had just appeared once, or if they had just seen a sight of him, as it were, across the road, or if they'd just sort of bumped into him on one occasion, that wouldn't be enough to convince them, would it?

[15 : 25] Because we're like that. Sometimes we're not sure whether we've dreamt something. Have you done that? You've woken up and you've had a dream, and it's been so real, you're not sure whether it's real or a dream.

You may spend the whole of the day questioning yourself. Did that really happen? Did I do that? No. They needed to be convinced. They needed to be certain that the Jesus that they had seen and spoke with was really the Jesus who had first died and risen again.

That's why Thomas was given that incredible privilege of looking at the holes in the hands of Jesus and in his side. They might have been easily persuaded that in fact they didn't really see Jesus.

They hadn't really met with him. That he wasn't really alive. No, they had to be absolutely, unshakably certain that Jesus was alive. The whole of their lives depended upon it.

The whole of their future depended upon the resurrection of Jesus and him actually have conquering death. That's the message that they took to the world on that day of Pentecost.

[16 : 34] As Peter preaches, he is absolutely certain God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses. It's not third hand. It's not something that we've read in the paper.

It's something we know. And then chapter 3 and verse 15 again as he preaches after the healing of the lame man. You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead.

We are witnesses of this. The message that they were to take to the world which would turn the world upside down, which would shake the world to its very foundation, which would transform the world as you know it, had to be something they were absolutely certain of.

And so Jesus spends those 40 days appearing, speaking, eating, talking, walking, letting them touch and feel his body as well to convince them and assure them that what they were going to proclaim and live and die for was not just a myth, not a fairy tale, not a story, not a dream, but a reality.

Dear friends, the life-transforming gospel that you and I are to take to this world is something you and I must be convinced of.

[17 : 54] We must be certain that Jesus is alive. We must be certain that he is the living Savior. You see, Bible faith is not blind faith, as some people would like us to think.

Bible faith is reasonable, thought out, considered, and built upon fact, reality, events that are indisputably true.

So you and I need that conviction as well to be certain of that ourselves because we live in a world where people have so many beliefs, so many philosophies, so many ideas, so many hopes that they build their lives upon which are far from concrete, far from real.

More often than not, most people who reject the Lord Jesus and his resurrection trust their future to the ideas they've picked up along the way in life.

We're living in what's called a post-modern society where anybody can believe whatever they like and believe it's true whether it is or not. And when you speak to people, as I'm sure you have done, and talk about the Christian faith or talk about their hopes for their loved ones or talk about the future, you'll find again and again that they've picked up little bits and ideas here and there, maybe a sort of a mishmash with a bit of God thrown in it, but really it's just, it's nothing to trust in.

[19 : 28] It's nothing factual. Oh, well, I read in the sun last week, but it was on Wikipedia. Well, Donald Trump told us.

And people are quick to hold on to, quick to grab hold of, quick to build their hopes and dreams upon things which they know probably aren't all that trustworthy, but rather than trust in the solid reality of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, they would rather trust in something which appeals to them.

Isn't that the case with all of us to a certain degree? We would rather that somebody told us what we want to hear than what we need to hear. We'd rather go to the doctor and him say to us, everything's fine, your blood pressure's normal, there's nothing to worry about, go home, than for him to tell us the truth that we'd better lose some weight and we'd better cut out on the cholesterol and all those things.

Even if that isn't the truth, that we're fine. It's within our sinful human nature. But dear friends, we can't be like that.

It's not just a matter of life and death, it's a matter of heaven and hell. It's a matter of eternity that we tell people the truth, that Jesus is risen from the dead and therefore he is the only saviour, the only way.

[20 : 53] he's the one that you must believe in. You see, Jesus told that wonderful parable, isn't he? That very simple parable of the two men who were builders.

And they both built very good houses. They both were careful, no doubt, in laying out the bricks and the mortar and the roof and the trusses and the tiles and whatever they did.

But, one house collapsed with an awful bang, Jesus says, when a storm came, when a difficulty came, when testing came.

And the reason it did was because it was not built on rock, but on sand. We're living amongst a world where people prefer sand to rock. And because of that, we are seeing collapse after collapse after collapse.

I was just watching even this morning on Breakfast Television that Coronation Street are going to actually have a story which sounds like it might be useful talking about suicide amongst men under the age of 45.

[22 : 03] Men under the age of 45 are more likely to die from suicide than any other reason in the UK. Why is that? Why is that? It's because men's lives are built upon sand.

There's nothing to sustain them when trials come. There's nothing to help them, nothing to keep them, nothing to hold them up. Dear friends, we've got a gospel which is not simply the truth.

And it is. But it's the message that our world needs to hear that there is one who's conquered death and gives life purpose. So Jesus spent those 40 days convincing them, telling them, reminding them, showing them, assuring them that he was alive so that they could take this incredible and glorious truth out.

Secondly, he spent those 40 days confirming to them the promise of the Holy Spirit's coming. Notice that here in chapter 1. On one occasion, while I was eating with them, he gave them this command, Do not leave Jerusalem.

Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me about. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then again, verse 8, you will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

[23 : 23] Jesus had said this over and over again, hadn't he? Not only about the baptism of John being in water and his being with the Spirit, but particularly again in that upper room. He spoke about the coming of God, the Holy Spirit.

He called him the helper, the advocate, the comforter. As he says here in chapter 1 of Acts, verse 4, you heard me speak about him.

John 16 and verse 7, Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I'm going away. Unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you.

The disciples really struggled with losing Jesus. They really struggled with him telling them that he was going to depart. Telling them that he was going to leave them.

They were sad, deeply saddened. You would understand why he'd been with them those three years. They'd, in one sense, lived, slept, and ate, and breathed with Jesus for those years.

[24 : 33] And Jesus knew that their hearts were terribly sad and grieving. As he says there in verse 6 of John 16, Rather, you're filled with grief because I've said these things, but it's for your good I'm going away.

During those 40 days, as time got closer for him to return to heaven, he spoke to them repeatedly about the promised Holy Spirit. Luke chapter 24, near the end again, I'm going to send you what my Father has promised.

Stay in the city until you've been clothed with power from on high. Now, they didn't fully understand what difference the Holy Spirit was going to make. They didn't fully comprehend how wonderful it would be to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

But Jesus kept reminding them, He's coming. I'm not going to leave you alone. He's going to be with you. He's going to teach you. He's going to instruct you. You won't be orphans.

He kept on reminding them of the promise so that they, in one sense, could be comforted in their sorrow with the loss of Jesus, with the separation of Jesus from them, physically.

[25 : 43] Jesus reminds them of the promise that they might take hearts. Now, dear friends, there are times when we, ourselves as believers, feel the absence of our Lord Jesus.

There are times in our lives when particularly we feel far from Him or we feel that He's, He hasn't, but we feel it. He's abandoned us or left us or forsaken us or the trials that we're going through are signs that He no longer loves us or whatever it may be.

But we too have the promise of the Holy Spirit as well. Not the promise that He's going to come and baptize us in the future, but the promise that He is with us now and always.

We have the promise that He is the one who lives in us now. Jesus said that of them and of us it is truly the same as well. In John chapter 14 He spoke about the Holy Spirit and His work.

The Spirit of truth, the world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.

[26 : 52] He goes on to tell them and explain to them again, My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. The reality is that whether we feel it or not, we have received of God the Holy Spirit.

Every believer, every Christian, whether we are in difficulty or in joy, whether we are rejoicing or mourning, we have the promised Holy Spirit who is with us. That wonderful name in the Greek, the name is paraclete, but it's translated for us in English as helper, as comforter.

It's an unbreakable promise of His nearness so that we can be confident and know that He has not left us, He has not forsaken us. On that day, you'll realize I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

The unbreakable union that we have with Christ by the Holy Spirit's ministry and work. That's why it's impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

That's why we cannot follow Christ without the Holy Spirit. It's why we cannot take the message of Christ without the Holy Spirit. It's why we need and depend upon and rely upon the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 12] He's the one who's come. He's the other counselor. He's the one who ministers to us as Jesus ministered to the disciples. And you have Him, dear friends.

And you and I have Him and when those times are hard and difficult, we can look and say, Lord, thank you for the promise, the promise of your Holy Spirit. Thank you that you will sustain, you will help, you will strengthen.

One more reason why Jesus was there for 40 days, one more thing that He needed to do and impress upon His disciples was not only to convince them that He was alive and risen from the dead, nor to comfort them and confirm to them that the Holy Spirit was coming and would be with them and sustain them even though He would be returning to heaven.

But the last thing surely here is that Jesus remained that He might commission them to preach the gospel. He might commission them to be His witnesses.

Verse 8 of Acts 1, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth.

[29 : 20] Ultimately, that was going to be why the Holy Spirit would come or one of the reasons the Holy Spirit would come upon the disciples and upon us to empower them to tell others that Jesus had conquered death, to tell them and witness to the reality of the salvation He brought and won by His death.

They were given this command from the mouth of Jesus to spread the good news that He was alive and to preach, Luke tells us, the forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations.

Now, when we think of that commission, we think particularly of the words of Jesus in Matthew, don't we? The great commission it's often called. Matthew 28, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you and surely I am with you to the end of the age.

Jesus' commission is to them and to us. They were to begin in Jerusalem, we read there, then spread out to Judea, then to Samaria, then to the ends of the earth.

[30 : 35] The gospel was to continue to be taken and proclaimed and declared. Let me say this again, dear friends, to you and to me that Jesus' words to His disciples are words to every disciple, to you, to me, to every one of us who has put our faith and trust in Christ and His commission is that we are to go and be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.

that's why He gave us His Holy Spirit. He gave us His Holy Spirit that we might be assured and convinced of who He is, assured and convinced of who we are, but assured and convinced of the message that we are to preach and to proclaim it in the power that He should and does give us.

I'm sure when Jesus gave that commission to His disciples, they all thought, us? us? us? us? us? us? that we're going to take this message that we're going to speak to these people, these people in Jerusalem who just murdered you?

we're going to take it to the Samaritans, those people who hate Jews? we're going to take it to the ends of the earth, this Roman Empire which has set up its emperor as a living God against everything that we believe and know to be true, us?

yes, you. and you and I may feel very, very inadequate and we are. That's the reality, we are.

[32 : 07] We are inadequate just as they were inadequate. Who were they? Fishermen, tax collectors, rogues, uneducated. Who are we? No better, no worse.

That commission is to you and I. And where Jesus says to them, begin in Jerusalem, he says to us in one sense, begin where you are as well.

Begin in your home, begin in your family, begin in your school, begin in your supermarket, begin in your streets. Begin to take the good news, begin to witness, begin to speak.

And if you don't think that this is really important, and necessary, then let me remind you that these are the very last words of Jesus spoken on earth.

I thought I'd try and find an illustration from some of the last words spoken by famous people. They're all rubbish. They have nothing good to say. Nothing important, nothing vital, perhaps a bit whimsical, but nothing that is going to affect other people's lives.

[33 : 27] But Jesus, in the last words spoken, speaks to his disciples and he speaks to you and me and he says, you are my witnesses.

Go and speak and share and preach and proclaim. It's his parting wish. It's his greatest desire that those who love him will live for him.

That those who've received his salvation will speak for him. It's a hard challenge, but we cannot afford to ignore it.

And though we feel ourselves utterly helpless, the reality is he has given us everything we need to be faithful and obedient disciples of Jesus.

Jesus. It was for our sake that Jesus remained those 40 days. Just as everything in his life was for our sake.

[34 : 41] It was for our sake he came from heaven. For our sake he suffered and died. For our sake he rose again. For our sake he ascended.

But for our sake that he waited those 40 days that we might know, be certain, be encouraged and be sent.

Let's pray together. There's so much oh Lord that we do not understand.

So many mysteries that we cannot comprehend. So many questions that fill our minds. Thank you oh Lord they will come that day when we shall know just as we are known.

We thank you that you call us to walk by faith and not by sight in this world, in this life. You call us to trust you. To trust that what you have to say to us is not only truth but it is life and living truth.

[35 : 56] We praise you and thank you again that what we do not know we do not need to know but what we need to know you've made known to us as you made known to your disciples of old.

And oh Lord we ask that you would equip and help us to act upon what we know. What you've spoken to us even today. Help us we pray.

Lord Jesus to be real true disciples of yours. Convinced and rejoicing in your resurrection and ever living power.

Comforted and assured of your Holy Spirit's power within and oh Lord commissioned and challenged to go and to take your truth to a fake world.

Help us Lord give us that determination and that zeal we pray that once filled your heart for us.

[37 : 13] May we live for you. Amen. Now may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.