

Sermon – October 4, 2020 Wes Wilkinson

Verses Covered This Week

Acts 1:1 – 11 1 Peter 2:9 Revelation 5:9

Well good morning, church family. It's good to see you. I don't get to see y'all in this service very often. We're over there with our Aggies. And so it's a joy to get to fill in this morning. I'm thankful and grateful for Pastor Phillip asking me to. And just so you know, we're going to go this morning, Pastor Phillip asked several weeks ago that this morning we would walk through and we would look at the mission of God. And the reason why is our college students, and you can be in prayer for our college students. We are half a week into a four-week emphasis with our students on the mission of God. And asking the question with our students that it's not if God has called you, it's simply how, where, and when, and for what time. And so this morning, if you've got your Bibles, we're going to head in this direction. If you've got your Bibles, I hope you do, if you'll take them out. We're going to head to the book of Acts. The book of Acts chapter 1. Acts 1. If you find the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke John, Acts. Now we discovered in the first service that I have, by the grace of God, still got a voice after teaching the six-hour intensive Sunday night. The great news is, there's no life groups after this. So we might go another six hours. Kidding. Someone really reacted down here too. No, we're not going to go six hours. But now everyone's paying attention. So, Acts chapter 1, verse 1. Here we go.

¹The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all Jesus began to do and teach, ²so far as the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had through the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He has chosen. ³To these apostles He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

What Luke says is, Luke is writing Theophilus and he says, Theophilus, in the first account, that would be the gospel of Luke, I wrote to you an account. And Luke's gospel says, he's well researched it. I've written to you a well-researched account of all Jesus began to do and teach. Of all that happened in the life of Christ from the moment of His birth through His, through His ascension into heaven. The implication there though is, Theophilus, now I am writing to you

about all the Jesus is continuing to do. Jesus hasn't stopped. Just because He's ascended, He is still working. And in this, he begins to set this introduction. That what Jesus has done over a period of 40 days from the time of His resurrection to the time of His ascension, Jesus has been appearing at various moments to His followers. We see these moments in Scripture. We see in John 20 He appears to Mary Magdalene first. We see in Luke 24, two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Jesus walks through the whole Old Testament to them, longer than six hours. We see in John 20; Jesus makes two different appearances. One without Thomas; one with Thomas. We see in John 21; Jesus eating with the disciples. We know from 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to as many as 500 of His followers at one time. He appeared to His own family members in those 40 days. Jesus was appearing and what was He doing? The text says He's doing two things. He was presenting Himself alive by many convincing proofs. Literally, by many factual, undeniable, tangible, clear evidences that He was not just an appearance, He was not just a Spirit, but He is in bodily flesh, resurrected, never to die again. He wants them to be sure of it. They are eye witnesses to the resurrection. He wants to make sure they are confident in that. He is taking time to continue to teach them the things concerning the kingdom of God. Because He knows that He is about to ascend. And here's the content of what He's teaching them. Look at verse 4.

⁴Gathering them together,

Literally, coming together to the table to eat and fellowship.

He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for that which the Father had promised, "Which," Jesus said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So here's what Jesus says. They're eating a meal together and in that time, Jesus says, "Here's what I want you to do. Go back, stay in Jerusalem until the moment when what God has promised happens. And that moment is what I've already told you." John 16. John chapter 14. The Holy Spirit is going to come. I will go back to the Father and I will send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who is a he. He is God. He is the third person of the Trinity. Not and it. Not a force. But He, the Holy Spirit will come and you will be baptized. Now what do we mean by baptized? Well, we don't mean what we typically think of as baptism with water baptism. The word baptize is really a Greek word that's *baptizō*. And it means to fully immerse. To be covered completely. Which is why we baptize by immersion where the water covers you completely as a symbol. What he's saying is not that you will be baptized with the Spirit as if salvation comes from water baptism. He's not saying that there will come this second moment of salvation. What He's saying is there's coming a moment where the Holy Spirit will come down. And when the Holy Spirit comes down, you will be completely and totally covered and indwelt and filled by the Spirit and wait for that moment.

⁶So when they came together again, verse 6, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

Now it's easy to read that question and make fun of the disciples and say, "Man, look at this. Jesus has risen. They've had 40 days with Him. They've seen all these things and they are still clueless." And that's possible. It's also possible that after hearing Jesus tell them to wait for the

Spirit, that they're thinking of Joel chapter 2 which is what Peter will preach in just one chapter in the book of Acts where it says, and in those days, in that time I will send my Spirit upon your sons and your daughters. And it describes the time when God comes back and restores the kingdom. So it's possible that they actually really know their Scripture. And so they're asking this question. Regardless of which way, Jesus makes it clear it's not the right question. Their focus is not in the right spot. He says it in verse 7.

⁷It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

It's not for you to know, disciples, what's going to happen and when it's going to happen. That is not your responsibility. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth. He says, it's not for you to know when's going to happen, what's going to happen, what the course of history's going to be. That's not your focus. Your focus is this. You are going to receive power. That word power is a word, dunamis. And it means the ability to do what you're supposed to do. It's the power that enables one to actually carry out and do the thing they set out to do. He says, you will receive this power, this ability, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And when that moment happens, look at what He says, "You shall be my witnesses." Not you might be. Not well some of you will be. You will be. This is the new mission He's giving all of the disciples. You will be. There's no other option. You will be My witnesses, My testifiers, the one who go out and tell who I am, what I've done, what I am offering. And you're not just going to be My witnesses, but you're going to be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in your own backyard in Judea/Samaria, which really goes together. Judea being the region of Jews that they agree with and identify with. Samaria being in the same area, but a different region of people who they don't like. And not just there will you be My witnesses, but you're going to go to the ends of the earth. He gives them their mission and He gives them the means through which they're going to achieve their mission. He gives them the scope of their mission.

⁹And then after He says these things, Jesus was lifted up while they were looking on.

Jesus begins to rise and as He rises it says, a cloud received Him out of their sight; a cloud. We think of the cloud as the glory and presence of God leading the people of Israel through the wilderness. We think of the cloud, the glory of God, coming down and resting over the tabernacle as Moses met with God. We think of the glory of God after Solomon's prayer of dedication coming down and filling the temple. And so glorious that it was, the Levites could not enter the temple. We think of the glory of God, the cloud that covered Jesus with three of those disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration as they beheld His true glory. Jesus is not just covered by a cloud; but in the glory of God. He is going, He is ascending back into heaven.

¹⁰And as they were gazing intently, their eyes fixed into the sky, while He was going, behold, two men in which clothing stood beside them. ¹¹They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, He will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

So there they are watching. You can picture the moment. There they are. We'll see later. They're on the Mount of Olives. They're looking up. They're seeing Jesus, the glory of God taking Him up. He's out of their sight and then all of a sudden two men clothed in white, "Hey! Disciples what are you doing? Why are you still transfixed looking up in awe?" The same Jesus, He's not going to change. He's the same yesterday and forever. Hebrews 13:8. The same Jesus who's resurrected, the same Jesus, He's going to come back and He'll come back in the same way, in glory, from the sky. So why are you still here looking? That's the implication. And what are you doing? What are you waiting? Why are you still here? Go. And what do you see the disciples do? The disciples maybe for the first time, if you're following the whole narrative from Luke's gospel, what do you do? Verse 12. They return to Jerusalem. They walked back from the Mount of Olives which was about two-thirds of a mile. A journey. When they went into the city, they went up to the upper room and it names off the eleven disciples who remain. And with these disciples, verse 14 tells us the women who were also part of Jesus' ministry, Mary, the mother of Jesus and Jesus' brothers. And it says that they were with one mind, with one intent, with one purpose. They were devoting, they were persevering against all odds to devote themselves to prayer. And we're going to watch as they go back, as they obey the words of Christ, as they're there, they're seeking the Lord, they're walking in prayer, they're with one mind, with one intent, focused on the mission of God. The Holy Spirit comes, the Holy Spirit indwells, and what do they do? They don't go, "Wow! This is really great! The Holy Spirit's here." They go. In Acts chapter 2, they walk to the temple. Peter preaches. 3,000 come to faith in Christ. And thus the church is born and you watch the story of the book of Acts as the gospel of Christ. As the disciples witnessing. Not just these disciples, but all followers of Christ as they moved from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. And here's what's fascinating. The book of Acts ends with Paul getting to Rome. Rome is not the ends of the earth. Nor is there a proper conclusion to Acts. Why? Because Acts is the story of all that Jesus is continuing to do through His bride, the church. Which means, church family, in a certain way, the story of Acts has not ended. You and I are part of the story of what Jesus is continuing to do through His bride, the church. The same Jesus who we see working in Acts is the same Jesus who's working through us, who desires to work through us. Who desires to work through us. Who has called us to His global mission of witness. Church family, our call, our call as individuals, our call as a church is to be His witness. And that word should bring a breath of relief for some of us. Because here's what that means. A witness is one who testifies. It's one who has seen, who has heard, who has experienced. And they testify of the truth of what they've seen and heard and experienced to others. We testify of our experience of who Jesus is. That He's God. That He came. That He lived. That He died on you and I's behalf taking our punishment. That He rose. That He ascended. That at some point in our life, He reached down and convicted our heart of sin and called us by name. And we've responded. And you know what? When we responded in faith He saved us in His grace and reconciled us and brought us into relationship with God. The relationship that we were made for. We testify to this. But I think a lot of us, we get nervous when it comes to the idea of witnessing, of evangelism, because there is this mindset we too often walk with. Which is if I will just find the perfect way to share the gospel, if I will just answer every question, if I just do it right, then that person will believe. But if they don't believe, it's because I didn't do it right. And then it becomes defeating because there's all this pressure. Listen. This passage doesn't say, and you will be the savior. It says, you will be my witnesses. You and I don't save people, church family. You and I, no one's going to believe because of the greatness of our proclamation. We see that in Jonah. Jonah gave the worst evangelistic appeal in history. "Hey, Nineveh, God's going to crush you." And the

whole city repented. He didn't even offer them an opportunity. God has not called you and I to save people. God has called you and I to proclaim the message of His salvation because it is a work of God that saves people. A work of God He desires to do through us as we give faithful witness. We need not forget that 1 Corinthians 1 tells us that the message we proclaim is a stumbling block to some and absolute foolishness to others. The question is, will we witness? We are not spiritual salesmen. We are divine testifiers. Church family, we cannot witness for whom we do not know and what we've never experienced. If my faith is resting in the fact that I was born into a Christian family or if my faith is resting in the fact of things in my own works. If I've never truly come to faith in Christ, I have nothing to witness because I do not know Him. So maybe today that's the response. As you hear and as we walk through and as you hear the greatness of our God, maybe today is the day for you to know Him. But, church family, brothers and sisters, we will be a weak witness for one with whom we are unfamiliar and for what we don't really value. You see, Jesus has not saved us to head knowledge. He has saved us to a true living personal relationship with Him in which the Holy Spirit, God Himself, lives within us. It is personal. It means we relate. We speak. He speaks. We follow. He leads. He moves. But for many of us, too many other priorities drown out the pursuit of Christ. And so the reason our witness is weak is because we really don't know Him well or because we think, "Hey. Great. I'm saved. Cool. I've got the t-shirt. This is great." And we're not in awe of the fact that once I was alienated, hostile, separated from God. And Jesus died and took on what I could never do and He out of all the people in the world said my name and called me to Himself. Our call is to be witnesses.

But where are we to be witnesses? Well He tells the disciples, "You will be My witnesses." It's not an option. To be a witness is not an option, brothers and sisters. And where? In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth. Jerusalem. Our Jerusalem is Brazos County. It's Bryan/College Station in which we house one of the largest universities in the country. Texas A&M enrollment this fall is 71,109 students. There's another 10,000 plus at Blinn. Now by my best estimates, there's somewhere, and this is being generous, there's probably somewhere between five to ten thousand students who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Now understand what that means. Lest we think that A&M, we jokingly call it the nation's largest public Christian university. Understand this. Only one in seven to one in fourteen students who attend that university know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. But let's just, our own city, 229,211 people live in Brazos County as of last year. More have moved here this year. Now let's just assume that there's 20 churches that run at least 1,000 in worship and all 1,000 of those are true followers of Christ, saved by grace through faith. If that's true, that means there's only around 20,000 believers in Brazos County. There are over 100,000 men and women and boys and girls in this city who are dying, separated from their Creator and Savior. And God called you and I to be witnesses for Him to them. Judea. Samaria. For us that would be Texas and the rest of America. Texas, those people that we are most like, those people that we love dearly, that region that our Jerusalem falls in. Samaria, part of the larger region that we fall in filled with those that maybe we do not enjoy, understand that Texas is a massive mission field. Texas is by no means all saved. There's 29 million individuals living here. In the next 20 years it will nearly double in the state of Texas. Houston and Irving are constantly vying, and you may not know this, for the number one city in America for being the most ethnically diverse. Not New York City, not LA, but Houston and Irving. But our call is not just Judea and Samaria; it's to the ends of the earth. There are 17,442 people groups in the world. Made up of 17.75 billion people. Of those, 7,407 people groups. Literally, the word, when we say biblically,

nations, we mean people groups. Not geo-political countries. Not a catchy word. But we mean people groups. Those people groups. There are 7,400 that have never the gospel. They are made up of 3.23 billion people who if nobody goes, they will live their entire life and never know Jesus loves them. And church family, it's not the mission for a few people who are chosen. Do you see in the text? It says, you shall be and you shall go. Not some of you here, some of you here. You shall go. You're called to all of it. The question's not if I'm called. The question's not, well I'm called to Jerusalem and you're called. The question is, we all have a part from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. God has called us to be His witnesses. His mission must be our mission. And church family, He has placed us in an intentional place. Did you know there are over 5,000 international students at A&M? And in the top five countries that send their students to A&M, four of those top five are countries that you and I would be arrested on the spot and possibly killed if we preached the gospel publicly. But they have sent their best and their brightest here to the university and yet most of these students will go through their whole education and will never step foot in the house of an American, much less a Christian. God has sent the nations to us. It's our mission, from Genesis to Revelation, this is God's heart to seek and save His image bearers; to bring them back to Him. We see this, 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 9. Makes this statement about us as believers. It says this.

⁹But you, church family, Central family, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who's called you out of darkness and into marvelous light;

God's purpose for us, church family, His purpose as being His people is to proclaim the excellencies of Him. Who are we proclaiming to? We're proclaiming to Him. We're proclaiming to the angels. We're proclaiming to the world in witness of the God who's died to save Him. And we see when it all comes to a conclusion in the book of Revelation, chapter 5, verse 9. It says:

⁹Worthy are You, Jesus, to take the book and break its seals; for You were slain, and You purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe, every tongue, every people, and every nation.

And two chapters later, John says,

after these things I looked and behold I saw a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, every tribe and peoples, and all tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, palm branches in their hands; ¹⁰and they cried out with a loud voice saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

This is God's heartbeat, church family. This is His mission. It must be ours. And when we look at God's mission and we say, "No, that's only for those few people who are going to be a vocational missionary." That is the same as joining a team whose goal is to win the game, but you're going, "Nah, I don't really care if we win. I just want to make sure I got the swag on the sideline." That is not what it means to be a believer. We are called. Our life is not our own. It's not about our life. Our life was bought with a price. The precious and unblemished blood of Christ. You and I are not called to one or the other. We're called to Jerusalem to the ends of the

earth. And can I just encourage students; what does that look like as you prepare for college and as you pray through what you might major in and how God could use that, or where you go to college. Could I encourage those of you who work, is this the mission that we walk into our workplaces with? Is this the mission that we walk when we go out to our, to the practices of our children? Is this the mission that we go out and talk with other parents with? Parents, can I just say a special word? God has entrusted to you children into your quiver for you to sharpen for the purpose of shooting out for His glory. Which means God is less concerned that you do everything you can to raise up a faithful Aggie because Aggies aren't the mission of God; disciples of Christ are. And I love A&M, but we need to be clear. We'll spend time and money to put our kids in all these different things. But then when they say, "I want to go on a mission trip." Oh, maybe not. The mission is ours. The mission is weighty. The mission is great. But church family, lest we get overwhelmed, go back to the text. Look at what he says. You will be my witnesses but when, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Church family, we don't go about God's mission in our own power and our own effort with our own ideas. We go about God's mission empowered, filled, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God Himself. And the Holy Spirit gives us the power, the dunamis, the ability to actually do it. You see, the task is weighty. How do we reach 3.23 billion people? How do we reach 200,000? How do we reach? We reach by the power of the Spirit. We reach by the power of the Spirit who promises in Luke 12:11 and 12 to give us the exact words we will speak when opportunities to witness come. We speak by the boldness of the Spirit who in Acts 4:31 fills the believers. And it's the Spirit who enables us to speak boldly. We speak at the direction of the Spirit as we see in Acts 16. Paul says, as he seeks to go about the mission of God, "God I want to go here." And the Holy Spirit directs him somewhere else. We walk as people of the Spirit. There should be a confidence, church family, a confidence as we go out. That we are able to carry out the mission. This is what Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. He says, "How many of you were, were great?" I'll just give my Wes summary. How many of you were awesome and qualified? None of you. But God is who makes you competent. Even I came among you not in wise words of eloquence so that your faith would not rest in the ability of man, but in the power of the Spirit. Church family, the Holy Spirit enables us to speak. Perhaps our witness is weak because we only look at our ability to witness based on how competent or qualified or able we feel rather than going, "God, You live within me and I will be confident in who You are in me and how You're sending me out." Can you imagine the disciples there? There's eleven of them, 120 other followers of Christ. According to chapter 1 and Jesus has said, "Your mission, My mission is now your mission. Go and win the world to Christ." Can you imagine them staring and going, "How are we going to do this?" Which way do we go? Every direction needs. Yet you don't see them frightened or overwhelmed. Why? Because they trust the Spirit of God. And so they go. Church family, understand this passage doesn't just show us our mission and how we're going to go, where we're going to go, how we're going to do it. This passage shows us that it's easy to be distracted. See the disciples? OK. Great. The Holy Spirit's going to come. So now does it mean that you're going to restore everything? You see the disciples. Alright, Jesus has lifted. They're still standing there. You see them, you see them in certain places waiting. You see them either asking the wrong question and maybe even a bad question. Church family, what are the questions that we are asking that's driving our lives? Are we asking, when will I fall in love? When will that person come? Or are we asking how are we going to afford vacation this year? When will A&M finally win the championship? Or I just miss life being the good old days. Or when will this virus end and life return to normal? And perhaps we are so focused on asking those questions and those questions driving us that we are missing the open doors the Spirit is

giving us right now in a world that is shut down. Because the world shut down, but God's mission hasn't. And if we ask the wrong questions, we will miss. If we ask bad questions, "Well if I engage in this mission, will it be easy?" No, it won't be easy. We will face opposition physically and spiritually. But the Spirit of God has overcome. He's the One who lives within us and enables us. Will it cost me? Absolutely, it will cost us. It will cost us time. It will cost us money. It may cost a child going and living far away. It will cost. But just like the martyr, Jim Elliott, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Church family, will we go for that which God has called us to? Here's really the question. Will we, you see the disciples in verse 12 all of the sudden find that they've heard the mission, they've heard how they're going to be able to do it, they've heard where they're to go, they recognize the distractions, and finally they do what they haven't done before. They obey. They go back to Jerusalem. With one heart they're praying for God's purposes. They wait. The Spirit comes. Then when the Spirit comes, they go out. Church family, we don't have to wait for the Spirit. The moment you and I were saved at salvation, the Spirit of God entered in. We were baptized in the Spirit at that moment. We don't have to wait. The time is now. Now we don't wait. We go. Our waiting is to come together. Our waiting is to come together and pray with one purpose. Prayer drives the witness of God. Prayer drives the mission of God. How in your life groups can you be praying? How in your families can you be praying for God's heart for the nations? Central, could you imagine a day where new believers are coming to faith in Christ in the Brazos Valley through the witness of Central on a daily basis? When God would add to our number daily. When we look about this room, we would see a room that looks far more like Revelation 7, made up of every tongue and tribe that lives in Brazos Valley than even now. Could you imagine it? Church family, it will not happen if we don't speak. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How can they believe in Him who they have not heard? And how can they hear unless it is preached? And how can they preach unless they are sent? Blessed are the feet of those who bring the good news. Church family, could you imagine this moment when both here and abroad as we send out people, as we live here as though sent out, God moves. Just throw some ideas your way, church family. In a few weeks we'll celebrate the Fall Festival. How could you be praying beforehand, saying, "God, open doors for me to meet people tonight. God, open doors, and when I come to the Fall Festival have eyes that look around. Not for just my friends to talk to. That's not back. But that look around for people that I do not know. That might be the night that might forge a relationship. That might be the moment for the gospel witness." Or at a Central Sports practice or students or those who work. How can you pray and look for open doors at the school, on bus, in locker rooms, at the office, in the coffee break when you're meeting people. How can we be praying and looking? You may not know this, but Sunday afternoon, 3 o'clock, you'll see a bunch of students from Southern Asia playing Cricket on our soccer fields. There's multiple opportunities. Or how could you meet one of them and invite them into your home and they can see Scripture on your walls and say, "What is this? Tell us about this." How can we reach them? How can you engage in going to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth? Could you give a summer, a semester, a gap or two years, a lifetime? Maybe the next time your job changes, you take a job at a strategic place in America and you partner with a church plant. Maybe there are so many ways, church family. Acts hasn't ended. We are part of what Jesus is continuing to do. He is at work through us as a body. And remember, we are the closest thing anyone will see, brothers and sisters, to Jesus in person until judgment day. We're the body of Christ and when the world, when the Brazos Valley, when Texas, when America, when the world sees Central, they see a body that leaves the 99 to go after the 1. Or will they see a body that's wrapped up in today?

There was a place right by DBU where I went to college. DBU's nestled in the most random foothills you've ever seen in Dallas. You didn't know they existed and there's, right down the street there's a place called prayer mountain. And it's a little retreat with a small church and it's up on this hill. It's a pretty good way up. And there's a platform that you can go sit and you can look out and see the whole Metroplex sprawled out in front of you. And as you drive down that hill and as you come out to the street to turn out, there's a sign as you leave. And that sign says, "Warning. You are now entering the mission field." Church family, in a few moments, we're going to pray. There's going to be a time of response. We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We're going to celebrate the very message that we are to carry in the mission of God. And then we're going to leave. All of us will leave and go out these doors this day. The question is not if we leave. The question is when we leave, will it be as those who are sent and going as the witnesses of God empowered by the Spirit from here to the ends of the earth?

Pray with me.

Father, You have called us to a weighty and great mission. It is a mission that is only fitting and deserving or You. It is a mission that only by your power can we, can we even remotely do anything. I just pray that our hearts will not predetermine what we will and won't do in the mission. But we will just put our hands in front of you and say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, I will mow my lawn with the intent of the mission of God. And yes, Lord, I will go to Timbuktu for the same. And whatever it may be in between." So Holy Spirit as we move to a time of response, I know You move. Find us faithful to respond to You. It's in Your name I pray. Amen.