

Series: So All May Know	Reference: Acts 1:1-11	Title: Get Busy!	Date: 12.12.2021
Website Writeup:			
The testimony of Christ's life & the power of the Holy Spirit aren't limited to a select few; all who are in Christ are called into ministry of spreading the gospel - in our homes, in our communities & throughout the world. We don't have to be trained pastors or teachers in order to share the work God has done in our lives with others.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Let me begin by praying from an ancient prayer...

“Lord, our God, we bless & thank you for the gift of your Word. Grant your servants both the humility & the boldness necessary to preach it. Prepare our hearts & lives to be strengthened & changed by it. You have given to us the glorious gospel of our risen Savior & Master. Grant that as we joyfully receive the good news for ourselves, so we may gratefully share it with others, and ever give glory to You by whose grace alone we are what we are, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen!”

The past few weeks have been a study of the days following Jesus's resurrection. This week focuses on his return to heaven & the beginning of the church. As we look at the disciples, it's important to remember that none of the remaining Eleven had been formally trained to be priests or rabbis. They were fishermen, carpenters & former tax collectors. Some came from among the poor & the marginalized. Many were the people you would walk by without noticing on a day-to-day basis.

God used each of them to bring a drastic change to their communities, then to the world. This is important, because it reminds us throughout Scripture & history, God's most important work has rarely been accomplished by experts or highly qualified people. This is great news for those of us who feel unqualified to share in the ministry of the Gospel.

The testimony of Christ's life & the power of the Holy Spirit aren't limited to a select few; all who are in Christ are called to the ministry of spreading the Gospel - in our homes, communities & throughout the world. We don't have to be trained pastors or teachers in order to share the work God has done in us.

Turn with me to p743 in your pew Bibles where we'll read Lukes account from Acts 1:1-11, remembering from a few weeks back we outlined how scholars using textual evidence & archeology have found Luke to be absolutely trustworthy in his accounts.

It begins...*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do & to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he presented himself to them & gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days & spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On 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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus had been crucified, risen from the dead, appeared, met, talked & ate with many people. Now He’s ascending to heaven & will empower the Disciples with the Holy Spirit for the ministry before them. He’s empowered them with His Word & Witness, now He’s empowering them with His Spirit!

He’d given them the Great Commission in Mt 28:18-20 by this point in which He said, “All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

George Verver once said, “There are many worthy causes which distract people from the greatest one.” And this is the greatest one...their calling & ours to take the message of the Gospel to all people groups. A declining interest in mission is a sure sign a church has lost their first love. Sadly, Christians are often more concerned about other issues than about this. More apt to share the news of a new restaurant than sharing Jesus with a friend, although the latter concerns eternity in their friends heart.

The calling of the Disciples is solidified. They’re in the final moments with Jesus as it continues in v6...⁶*Then they gathered around him & asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea & Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

They’re still not fully getting it by asking this question remaining focused on the idea that the Messiah was to take over possibly with militaristic power, not realizing or owning their call to ministry now. As if to say, “We want you to do the work for us!” When He’s clearly given them purpose & calling in this kingdom work. They’re to continue on in the ministry which He’s outlined & modeled for them. Jesus responds as a leader does, “Quit asking questions about things which don’t concern you, get to the task I’ve put before you, and I will take care of all the other stuff!”

It continues in v10...¹⁰*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹“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 have seen him go into heaven.”*

As a kid I remember going to the 4H Fair when it came to town. So much activity swirling about, blinking lights, announcers inviting us to experience the strange & mysterious, the music, the tilt-a-whirl, ferris wheel, animal pens & judging. Everything

was so exciting, so much happening! I loved it! Amped up on cotton candy, and bumming around with friends. It was great, Mom & Dad would say, “Go ahead, we’ll meet back here at 9:00.” And we’d take off like a shot!

Then it was over...the tents pack up, no more funnel cake, all your friends go home, the trucks roll out, and the only reminder left is the trash in the field blowing in the wind.

Now all I could do was go tell my friends who weren’t there how great it was, and that they should experience it next year when it returns. I’d recount the stories of the 1000lb pig named ‘Calorie’, or the motorcycles riding in circles defying gravity in the giant barrel thing, the haunted house, and all the other fun details. I was excited to share. But over time memories fade, until it came back around the next year.

As an adult pastor, I now go to conferences or multiple day workshops. We worship, listen to great speakers, have insightful discussions & talk to experts. There’s no giant pig, but it’s still exciting...but that ends too. And we leave armed with new ideas & a bag of information we can’t fit into our carry-on. We get on a plane & come home to the familiar, and to others who’ve not had the experience, or heard the stories. Now...I have to use all I’ve learned & implement it here. I have to put the principles into practice & share with others the stories I experienced & the words I heard at the conference.

So, Jesus ascends, and these guys are standing around staring at the sky, the carnival’s ended, the conference is over, the star speaker’s gone home. Now they’re standing there armed with their experiences, new ideas & the call to implement it in their homes, community & to the ends of the earth (Mt 28:18-20). Now they’re standing there looking at an empty field when suddenly they hear, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? 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, “Shows over...what are you standing around for? There’s work to be done! Get back to Jerusalem & start telling people about this!”

It’s difficult to motivate & direct. Ministry’s always been like herding cats, but more so with the advent of the internet & a million voices in our heads. It’s difficult to get people to focus & realize the details of ministry are of paramount importance. More so than all other aspects of life.

They say a person decides within the first 5 minutes of their 1st visit whether they’re coming back to a church. If that’s true, who’s the most important person in the room? The greeter at the front door! What they say, how warm & welcoming they are! Do they give the direction needed for a new person or just say, “Hi, it’s upstairs.” Are they texting someone, or on the phone when a new person shows up? If a family has kids, do they direct them where to go & what to do introducing them to the right people? Or, how do they feel when they turn up 2 minutes before the start of a service & only a small percentage of the congregation is present & only to have the room fill up slowly during the first worship set? That first greeting & experience may be the difference in that person meeting Jesus!

It's hard to get people to recognize their presence makes a difference, that coming early, staying late, engaging in conversation with others before & after is an opportunity to minister to others. Or that they may receive something God might have for them. It's hard to get people to realize or believe they have something to give. That a word of encouragement from them, or to say, "Can I pray for you right now?," and do it on the spot may mean the difference to someone in profound ways. That they don't have to have pastor before their name to be a minister of the Gospel. That they're the fishermen, carpenters & tax collectors Jesus intends to use! Do we listen to the announcements, considering what great opportunities we have to participate in what God's doing in our Jerusalem, Judea & beyond.

Alpha for instance; we've handed out invites & announced the course, urged everyone to be prayerful & to use them to invite someone who needs to be here! In church conferences they direct pastors to 'Preach the Announcements' - weave your most important announcements into the sermon - what I'm doing right now.

There's a common statistic that in the church, 20 percent of the congregation does 80 percent of the work. This concept comes from the Pareto Principle, the observation (not law) that most things in life aren't distributed evenly. It may mean: 20% of the input creates 80% of the result. 20% of the workers produce 80% of the result. 20% of the customers create 80% of the revenue. 20% of the bugs cause 80% of the crashes. 20% of the features cause 80% of the usage. The examples go on.

The point is to realize, you can often focus your effort on the 20% that makes a difference, instead of the 80% that doesn't add value. In economic terms, there's diminishing marginal benefit. This is related to the law of diminishing returns: each additional hour of effort, each extra worker is adding less 'oomph' to the final result. By the end, you're spending lots of time on the minor details & need to maximize the opportunities available.¹

That shouldn't really apply to the Church since Jesus has called all Christians to kingdom work! Why is this sense of inaction so common among believers, when we're clearly called to be discipled & to disciple others all throughout Scripture?

For some it may be the **fear** or belief that they're not qualified, or maybe a fear of man. We say, "What will they say? Will I have the answers?" But the closer you get to Jesus the more excited & emboldened you'll be to share!

For others it may be the **doubt** of where or how to begin. Taking risks in faith draws us closer to Him & sharpens us for ministry! Just as the disciples were called back to work, so are we. So...in our context, this is what your pastor says to you.

¹ "Understanding the Pareto Principle [The 80/20 Rule]," *Better Explained* [blog] accessed December 1, 2020, <https://betterexplained.com/articles/understanding-the-pareto-principle-the-8020-rule/>

- Get close to Jesus in Word & Prayer on a regular basis privately. Let Him eradicate the fear you're not qualified or of how others will respond. Have a daily quiet time. Pray throughout the day. Read outside the Bible trustworthy books which lead you deeper in faith, we have many in the back for taking.
- Get close to Jesus in Word & Prayer on a regular basis with your church family. Utilize the opportunities available to you within it to eradicate the doubt of where or how to begin. Come early, leave late for church, listen well & prayerfully pay attention. Get involved in some capacity to serve others. Get into & attend regularly a Community Group. Invite & plan on attending the Alpha Course with your friends which we're doing to bring people in & have the chance to put our faith in action!

You don't have to have all the answers, we do this together in Alpha. And Luke 12:12 says that when we're called to give an answer, "... *the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.*" We may not have it all figured out, but we're called to obedience in this area to start the conversations trusting & praying God will give us the words as we do this together!

The book of Acts is the perfect place to start looking at how & where to begin in ministry if you're feeling unsure. First, the disciples were told to return to Jerusalem; from there, they were to spread outward, as Jesus commissioned them to do in their first mission back in Matthew 10:16-23 where He said, "I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves." Then He outlined what to expect. Jerusalem was the home base for the early church. The city became their home mission field. The Eastern Main Line is ours.

In the same way, God doesn't necessarily require we tear ourselves away from everything we know first & then share the gospel in foreign fields (although some have specific calling to do so). Instead, we have the opportunity to begin sharing in the Gospel in our own homes, communities & workplaces - places where we already have an established network of believers who can stand alongside, counsel & aide when we're struggling.

An article published in *Christianity Today* shares how pastors, farmers & activists have been working together to minister to the physical & spiritual needs of migrant workers both before & during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Diane Martinez helped start an immigration law clinic for the local population through her church. This has provided opportunities to share the Gospel as well. Bekah McNeel writes: "Though they never require anyone to pray or sit through a Gospel presentation to receive help, Immigrant Hope offers spiritual support to its clients as well. 'Rarely do we have anybody turn us down for prayer,' Martinez said. Sometimes, clients are curious to hear more. 'We get to tell them about a [heavenly] citizenship where applications are never denied.'"²

² Bekah McNeel "Meet the People Who Minister in America's Food Chain," *Christianity Today*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/december/food-migrant-farmworker-ministry-agriculture-pandemic.html>

Pastors & farmers aren't the only ones who can share the Gospel. In an update from a Voice of the Martyrs partner in Nigeria, we read about young Christian students from a war-torn region, predominately hostile to Christianity, working together to learn how to read because they'd been unable to attend secondary education in their villages. Although they barely speak the same language & haven't been trained & equipped to be great teachers or orators, their stories of what God has brought them through have been living testimonies to other students, and - thanks to technology - their stories have spread to strangers they'll never meet.³

When we look throughout history, the church's core strength has always been found in close-knit local communities of believers who come together to share & encourage one another in their faith. Pastors & evangelists will always have a vital role in bringing the good news of the Gospel to a community, but when we read through Acts & the Epistles, we're reminded that it's the everyday workers, homemakers & caregivers standing in the gaps actively serving side-by-side with their neighbors - simple believers who make the greatest impact which ripples out from one generation to the next.

The angels reminded the disciples there was work to be done after Jesus returned to heaven. Work which won't be completed until Christ's second coming. Therefore, until that day, it's up to us to continue in the work of the Gospel - so that all may know. So, don't stand there looking up into the sky waiting for Jesus to come back, He's called you to put your hand to the plow & not look back to the work of His kingdom now!

³ "Nigeria: In the Morning," *Voice of the Martyrs* [blog], November 30, 2020, <https://vom.com.au/nigeria-in-the-morning/>