

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/11/18
Acts 1:1-11 “Remembering Why We Are Here”^{** 1}

Brad Brandt

Main Idea: It’s vital that we remember why we are here. Acts 1:1-11 makes that clear and teaches us to maintain three vital perspectives.

- I. We need to be looking back (1-5).
 - A. Remember what Jesus did (1-3).
 1. He chose apostles (1-2).
 2. He suffered and died (3a).
 3. He gave proof He was alive (3b).
 - B. Remember what Jesus said (4-5).
 1. He told them what to do (4).
 2. He told them what would happen (5).
- II. We need to be looking out (6-8).
 - A. Jesus’ followers were concerned about Israel (6).
 - B. Jesus is concerned about the world (7-8).
 1. He gave us a promise.
 2. He gave us a purpose.
 3. He gave us a plan.
 - Start in Jerusalem.
 - Go next to Judea and Samaria.
 - Keep going to the ends of the earth.
- III. We need to be looking ahead (9-11).
 - A. Fact #1: Jesus returned to heaven (9).
 - B. Fact #2: Jesus will return to earth (10-11).
 1. This is no time for standing around.
 2. This is a perfect time for reaching out.

Make It Personal: I am living in light of my purpose when...

1. I take seriously what Jesus did.
2. I take seriously what Jesus is doing.
3. I take seriously what Jesus will do.

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:36-52

Ever had the following experience? It happened to me once in high school.

It’s snowing outside. The wind is blowing hard and the snow is drifting into large piles. You’re sitting behind the wheel of your car, but you’re not going anywhere. Because you are *stuck*.

You were heading to an important appointment when you hit a slick spot in the road, lost control of your car, and felt the snow rut pull your front tire where you did not want to go. Into the ditch.

You hit the gas peddle and hear the engine rev. You see your speedometer needle race forward, but you feel nothing. You hit the gas again, but still nothing happens. You feel your wheels spin, and sense the rut getting deeper and deeper with each rotation.

It’s frustrating to be sitting in a vehicle with 250 horsepower and not move. You could actually use up a whole tank of gas, if you kept at it, and get nowhere. Absolutely nowhere!

A life can be like that. So can a church. You can have loads of potential under the hood, but the nagging reality hits you—if you’re honest with yourself—that you’re just sort of spinning your wheels and not getting anywhere.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

So what needs to happen? The book of Acts can help us.

Last week, we began what I trust will be an encouraging journey for us as a church through the book called *Acts*. It's a book that gives us the history of the first thirty years of the church. It contains the record of the days when the church was young, vivacious, and bold. It was a church on the move, and we can learn from it.

If there's one thing you won't find true of the believers in Acts, it's this. They weren't *spinning their wheels*. They were on the move, filled with joy and hope, and gripped with a sense of purpose.

And the same can happen to us. How? It starts by remembering why we are here. Acts 1:1-11 makes that clear and teaches us to maintain three vital perspectives.

We need to be **looking back**—that's verses 1-5.

We need to be **looking out**—that's verses 6-8.

We need to be **looking ahead**—that's in verses 9-11.

His final words must be our first concern. And they were in the early church. The church in Acts took Jesus' final words seriously.

If we're tired of the status quo (and even if we're not), we need to give careful attention to the three perspectives that gripped the early church. They are mandatory for every person who wants to live life as God intends.

Let's turn our attention now to Acts 1:1-11. In the very beginning of his book, Luke identifies the three perspectives with which the church (and every believer) must live.

I. We need to be looking back (1-5).

Our faith is not subjective. It's rooted in history. And the key to moving ahead is first of all to *look back*.

We need to remember two things that Luke highlights in the first five verses. First of all, we need to look back and...

A. Remember what Jesus did (1-3). "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 to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

According to verse 1, Luke originally wrote the book of Acts for a friend by the name of Theophilus. Acts was actually volume two, the first book was the Gospel of Luke. Luke penned both volumes to give his friend certainty about the two most important subjects in the world: Christ and the Church.

In his Gospel, Luke introduced his friend to *Christ* with a biography of His life. In book two, Acts, he introduced him to the *Church*, as we'll be seeing.

Indeed, we must appreciate both *Christ* and the *Church*. If you don't come to grips with Christ, you cannot experience eternal life. But if you don't come to grips with the importance of the *Church*, you will never experience joy as God intended.

You will look in vain to find in the book of Acts what is far too common today, people who profess Christ and yet have no meaningful relationship with Christ's church. It was unthinkable in the first century to be a Christian and *not* be vitally connected to His Body, the church, as it should be today.

Luke begins by looking back and rehearsing the highlights of volume one. The subject matter pertained to “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach.” Don’t miss the word “began.” In reality, Jesus is not done. His teaching and doing continues. Where? In His church. And what’s happening in the church now rests upon the foundation of what Jesus did before He left the earth.

What’s that? Luke invites us to remember what Jesus did, namely three activities, each of which he developed in his gospel.

1. *He chose apostles (1-2).* One of the first things Jesus did when He began His public ministry was to select twelve men. He invited them to follow Him for three years.

And so they did. They saw His miracles, heard His teaching, and witnessed His divine power. He called them “apostles” (Luke 6:13), and delegated His authority to them before He left the earth (Matt 28:20).

Here Luke says that Jesus gave them instructions “through the Holy Spirit,” indicating that the same Spirit who would be instrumental in the work of the church in Acts had already been instrumental in the work Christ performed in their lives.

In a very real sense, what happened in the church as recorded in Acts is merely an extension of the ministry Christ began while on earth. Christ delegated His authority to the apostles. He also gave instructions to the apostles that eventually were recorded in what we call the New Testament.

This is one of the reasons we must put the Scriptures at the center of all we do. We have no right to make the church what *we want it to be*. Christ already made it clear what He wants His church to be and do—in *His Word*.

2. *He suffered and died (3a).* Luke summarizes the redemptive work of Christ in verse 3, “After His suffering [the KJV uses the term “passion”].” In his gospel, Luke devoted nearly five chapters to the Passion Week of our Lord (19:28-23:56). Truly, our Lord suffered.

He was rejected and unjustly arrested. The soldiers beat Him, and the crowd mocked Him. Ultimately, they nailed Him to the Tree where He gave His life as a ransom payment.

We are people who must look back, beloved. We are here because of what Christ did for us. He suffered and died in our place.

Wounded for me, wounded for me, there on the Cross He was wounded for me.

Gone my transgressions and now I am free, all because Jesus was wounded for me.

Luke wants us to remember what He did. First, he reminds us that Jesus chose His apostles, and then suffered and died. But that’s not the end of the story, so a third reminder.

3. *He gave proof He was alive (3b).* What kind of proof? Verse 3, “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men [i.e. the apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”

Notice the term *many*. The risen Christ appeared to many individuals over a forty day period, once to a group of over five hundred people at the same time (1 Cor 15:6). He focused on the apostles and gave them *many proofs* of His resurrection, such as by eating with them (Luke 24:42-43).

Furthermore, He taught them. About what subject? Interestingly, Luke says He spoke about “the kingdom of God.” The *kingdom of God* is an important theme in Acts.

Philip preached “the good news of the kingdom of God” in Acts 8:12. Paul told new believers in Acts 14:22, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Later at Ephesus Paul spent three months arguing in the synagogue with unsaved Jews “about the kingdom of God (19:8).”

Luke ends the book highlighting this theme, too. In chapter 28, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul received visitors. According to verse 23, “From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the *kingdom of God* and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.”

In fact, in the very last verse of his book, Luke says of Paul’s activities in prison, “Boldly and without hindrance he preached the *kingdom of God* and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31).”

So answer this. When was the last time you mentioned the *kingdom of God* when you witnessed to an unbeliever? Very few gospel presentations do. That’s unfortunate.

The apostles talked about the kingdom. Why? They learned it from their Master. Luke says that during Jesus’ final forty days with His apostles He spoke about the *kingdom of God*.

Actually, you can sum up the story of the Bible by talking about the *kingdom of God*. In the beginning, God the King created the universe. Since He is King, He deserves obedience from His subjects.

Is that what He received? No. In Genesis 3, the King’s subjects committed an act of treason. Adam and Eve deliberately defied the King’s orders and ate the forbidden fruit. Their rebellion resulted in a terrible estrangement, not just for Adam and Eve, but for all their descendants. They were cast out of the garden, and cut off from the King.

But then in the story we discover something about this King. Yes, He is holy and just, but He is also merciful and gracious and loving. And so right there in the garden, we see Him begin the work to reclaim what is rightfully His.

This is the story of the Bible, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22. It’s the record of God working to reclaim His kingdom. He chose a man named Abraham, and then worked through his offspring, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons, to create the nation of Israel.

And through that nation He sent His Son, King Jesus, to rescue and restore a people for His glory. The rescue mission was costly. The King entered the world and gave His own life. Yet through His death and resurrection, the King removed the curse of sin.

Now when a sinner repents and believes in Him, the King reconciles the sinner to God and places him in a new community, the community of the redeemed, the *Church*.

Beloved, we must come to grips with the message of the *kingdom of God*. There are two ways—and only two ways—to live. First, you can be your own king and seek to rule your own life. That’s how we all enter the world. If you persist in living this first way, you will experience the consequences of the King’s eternal judgment.

On the other hand, there’s another way to live. You can submit to the gracious rule of King Jesus, the One who loved you and died in your place. And if you do, you will be reconciled to God and begin to enjoy the privileges of His eternal kingdom!

This is the message the Lord entrusted to His Church. It’s vital then that we constantly *look back* and remember what the King did.

But there’s more. In addition to remembering what Jesus did, Luke invites us to...

B. Remember what Jesus said (4-5). “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.”

Jesus interacted with the apostles several times after His resurrection. But Luke mentions “one occasion.” He wants us to recall a particular conversation Jesus had with His apostles. It took place over a meal, and in it Jesus told them two things.

1. *He told them what to do (4).* Verse 4 says He gave them a “command.” The King, of course, has the right to give commands to His subjects. He *is* the King, and what He says is in their best interest, and for His glory.

So what was His command to the apostles? According to verse 4, He told them to do two things. First, “Don’t leave Jerusalem.” Remember, these men were from up north in Galilee, but they weren’t to leave Jerusalem.

What were they to do? Secondly, *wait*. They were to wait for a special gift.

What kind of gift? Jesus identified it as “the gift my Father promised,” as well as “the gift you heard me speak about.” They had heard about this gift, just seven weeks or so earlier when in the upper room Jesus told them about it.²

And now He says, don’t leave, but wait. That’s what Jesus told them to do.

But why? Jesus clarified that next...

2. *He told them what would happen (5).* “John baptized you with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

The verb is passive. You *will be baptized*. The apostles would not initiate this activity. God would. And He did in Acts 2, as we’ll see in a future study, the Lord willing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a historical event that Jesus predicted, and then fulfilled. As John the Baptist baptized his converts with water, so the Church was baptized with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Dear friend, this is perspective number one. We need to be *looking back*. If you feel like your life is stuck in a snow drift, *look back*. Remember what Jesus did, and said. Affirm your joyful submission to King Jesus and became an active part of the community His Spirit inaugurated at Pentecost.

This is where fruitful living begins. We must *look back*.

But we don’t stop there. There’s a difference between looking back and living in the past. So notice the second perspective our text gives.

II. We need to be looking out (6-8).

The Lord never intended for His church to be a clique. We’re not to hoard the good news that’s changed our lives. In fact, the church is in trouble when it fails to *look out*.

Jesus addressed that problem head-on in His final conversation with His followers. Here’s what happened...

A. Jesus’ followers were concerned about Israel (6). Verse 6, “So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’”

Remember the subject Jesus had been addressing with the apostles (3). *The kingdom*. And when they heard Jesus tell them that the Holy Spirit was coming in a few days, they couldn’t contain themselves. They knew the Old Testament. They knew the connection between the coming of the Spirit and the kingdom of God (Joel 2:28ff.).

² See John 14-16

This was Israel's great hope. The kingdom is coming. God had established a covenant with King David, and promised that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever.

It was only natural, then, for the disciples to ask this question. "Lord, is it time? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?"

We need to keep in mind their perception, too. Until they met Jesus, their idea of the Messiah was a soldier like Judas Maccabeus (Judas the Hammer). They believed God was going to send a King riding on a white horse with his sword flashing in the sun, and that he would get rid of the pagan Roman rulers and establish David's throne forever in Israel.

They'd been with Jesus for three years, all the while wondering when He would pull out the sword. "Are you going to do it *now*, Lord?" they asked. "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel *now*?"

They were concerned about *Israel*. Make Israel great again. We can relate. But then comes the contrast...

B. Jesus is concerned about the world (7-8). Verse 7, "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'"

Jesus didn't deny His intent to restore the kingdom to Israel. He didn't tell them it wouldn't happen, but challenged them on the matter of *timing*.

"That's up to the Father," He told them. "It's not your business to know when I'm going to set up My kingdom. You're thinking about *Israel*. I've got something in mind for the *world*. And here it is..."

Verse 8, "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."

With those words Luke introduces the theme of his book. This is what Jesus is now doing in the world through His church. Jesus gives us three essentials.

1. *He gave us a promise.* "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you," Jesus told them. What did Jesus promise His followers? *Power*.

James Boice explains, "The Greek word *dynamis* entered the English language when the Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-96) made the discovery that became his fortune. He discovered a power stronger than anything the world had known up to that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for 'explosive power' was in Greek. His friend answered, '*Dynamis*.'

Nobel said, 'Well, I am going to call my discovery by that name.' So he called his explosive power 'dynamite.'"³

That is the word here. Jesus promised to give His followers *dynamis*, the life-changing, dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

But what's the power for? Recently the wife of a well-known televangelist said Christians don't need to take the flu shot. "Jesus himself gave us the flu shot," she said, and "redeemed us from the curse of flu."⁴

³ James M. Boice, *Acts*, p. 25.

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/02/06/televangelist-suggests-alternate-flu-shot-inoculate-yourself-with-the-word-of-god/?utm_term=.ebef733cf096

Friends, He didn't give us power so we could enjoy perfect health and abundant wealth, as the examples of the disciples in Acts will verify. This power isn't for self-fulfillment, but is related to the second essential.

2. *He gave us a purpose.* "You will be my witnesses," Jesus said. That's why we need power, to enable us to be something. *Witnesses.*

So we have no business trying to be a witness if we are not relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit. You will receive power, and *then*, you will be my witnesses.

A witness doesn't say, "I think so." He says, "I know so." He speaks the truth with conviction, even if it costs him. It's not surprising that the Greek word for *witness* and the word for *martyr* (*martus*) are one and the same. As Barclay observed, "A witness had to be ready to become a martyr."⁵

And what's supposed to be the subject of our witness? "You will be *my* witnesses," Jesus emphasized. "Witnesses unto me," as the AV puts it.

Let that sink in. If you are a Christian, this is your purpose. We who know Christ have a mission. We're not here to live for ourselves. We are here on *kingdom* business. The King told us to tell the world about Him.

Do you view evangelism that way? It's our privilege to tell people about the *King*. Just think of it. He didn't say, "Go, tell people to get their act cleaned up." No, He said, "Go, tell them about *Me*."

The truth is, no one is too far gone *or* too good for Jesus. That's our purpose, to tell people what the King did, and offers, and invite them to respond to Him.

Now answer this. Do you believe the gospel is good news? It seems to me one of the reasons many of us hide our light under the bushel is because we really don't believe the gospel ourselves. I mean *really* believe it, that it's good news!

Back in the 1700s crowds would flock to hear the well known preacher, George Whitefield, who often preached early in the morning before people went to work. On one such occasion, an assembly gathered in Edinburgh around 5 o'clock in the morning to hear his preaching. On the way to the church a man met David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic. Surprised at seeing him on his way to hear Whitefield, the man said, "I thought you did not believe in the gospel." Hume replied, "I do not, but *he* does."⁶

Do people know *you* believe in Christ? We are to tell them, tell them about *Him*.

Before leaving the world Jesus gave His followers a promise—"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." As well as a purpose—"And you will be my witnesses." Thirdly...

3. *He gave us a plan.* Where did He say to be witnesses? He was very specific in His instructions to the apostles. He told them...

•Start in Jerusalem. What was significant about Jerusalem? This is profound. Jerusalem is where they *were*. So start where you are.

Remember the story about the demon possessed man who lived in the tombs? People tried to chain him, but he broke the chains. Then Jesus came to him, set him free from demonic control, and gave him new life. Remember the man's response? He begged Jesus for the privilege to go with him. But Jesus declined. Do you remember what Jesus told him? "Return home and tell how much God has done for you (Luke 8:39)."

⁵ Barclay, *Acts*, p. 13.

⁶ As told by Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 17.

“Go home! Start at home!” Jesus said.

Some new Christians get in trouble right here. They think they need to rush right away to India or Africa to fulfill the Great Commission. But Jesus told the first disciples to start in Jerusalem. Tell the people where you live about Me.

He didn't say to *stop* there, however. Phase #2...

•Go next to Judea and Samaria. Judea—that's the district where Jerusalem was located, about 50 miles long and 30 miles wide, for comparison purposes about two and a half times the size of Scioto county.

And Samaria—that was the next district to the north of Judea, roughly the same size in terms of area. But very different in so many other ways. In Samaria the people were different. The worship was different. It's an understatement to say, you had to leave your comfort zone to go to Samaria.

Right here is where we often get in trouble. We don't want to leave the familiar. “I can serve God right here, close to my family and friends.”

Yet Jesus told the First Church to *start* in Jerusalem, not finish there.⁷ In fact, the First Church started to get into a rut of sorts. And then God used some intense persecution to get them out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

The Master's plan couldn't be clearer. Empowered by the Spirit, you are to be My witnesses, He said. Start in Jerusalem. Go next to Judea and Samaria. Then...

•Keep going to the ends of the earth. Think of how that sounded to men who likely had never been more than 75 miles from home. These were ordinary fishermen from Galilee. Family men. Blue collar types. Yet Jesus looked them in the eye and said, “Here's the plan. *You* are going to the ends of the earth.”

“But can't I just stay here? Let somebody else go.”

Is that what they said? No. They went with great joy.

Acts tells the story. Acts 1-7 shows the witness of the church “in Jerusalem,” chapters 8-11 “in Judea and Samaria,” and chapters 12-28 how they took the message of Christ to the “ends of the earth.”

And why did they go? Because the *King* told them to go.

Friends, when we become a Christian, a fundamental change occurs. The most important thing is no longer pleasing self, but pleasing our wonderful King.

Is that true in your life? Do your neighbors know about the wonderful King who saved you? How about your classmates, and the guy that works next to you? Have you talked to them about the King? Jesus did not tell us to be prosecutors and judges, but *witnesses*. His witnesses.

So the disciples were concerned about Israel, but our Savior is concerned about *the world*. If we are feeling stale in life, maybe it's because we need a perspective adjustment. First of all, *look back*. Let's get to know Christ better and become an active participant in His church. Then *look out*. Let's see the world as He sees it, and tell the world what we know about Him.

There's a third essential perspective...

III. We need to be looking ahead (9-11).

Our text concludes by telling us two things, two certainties.

⁷ William LaSor, *Church Alive*, p. 36.

A. Jesus returned to heaven (9). “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

And just that suddenly, He was gone. He told them what to do, and then left. Where is He today? He is in heaven. That’s a certainty, for many witnesses saw Him go.

This, too, is a certainty...

B. Jesus will return to earth (10-11). “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 have seen him go into heaven.’”

I’m intrigued by the impact Jesus’ departure had on His followers. There they stood, paralyzed as it were, looking up into the sky. Until the angels’ message jolted them into reality.

“Why are you standing here, looking up?” they asked. First of all, He’s coming back. This same Jesus is coming back. And second of all, you’ve got a job to do. Before He returns, tell the world about Him.

Friends, these are the facts. Jesus returned to heaven. And Jesus will return to earth. Which means two things for us...

1. *This is no time for standing around.* Rather...

2. *This is a perfect time for reaching out.* There’s work to be done. The Savior gave us a job to do. He did the work to save. He gave us the work of making His salvation known to the nations.

I don’t think most of us realize how seriously the first generation of the church took Jesus’ final words. Within thirty years they spread the message of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to the capital city of Rome and beyond!

How did they do it? They were ordinary people like us. But unlike many of us, they truly lived with these three perspectives. They *looked back*, they *looked out*, and they *looked ahead*.

Make It Personal: I am living in light of my purpose when...I do three things

1. *I take seriously what Jesus did.* Jesus died and rose again to save sinners. Have you received Him as your Lord and Savior?

2. *I take seriously what Jesus is doing.* Jesus is gone, yes, but He’s doing something on earth right now.

As Boice rightly points out, “‘Acts’ is a short name for ‘The Acts of the Apostles.’ It might more properly be called ‘The Acts of Jesus Christ’ or, to be even more accurate, ‘The Acts of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Jesus Christ through God’s People.’”⁸

Are you a part of what Jesus is doing in the world today? Are you plugged into His church, and growing, and serving?

3. *I take seriously what Jesus will do.* He will come again. And we will see Him. And oh, what joy will be ours as we see others there that He used us to bring to Him!

Communion

⁸ James M. Boice, p. 15.