

Acts 1:1-11 “The Gospel Panorama: Believe It, Preach It”^{***}

Series: “The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News”

Main Idea: In Acts 1:1-11, we see three vital perspectives for a gospel preaching church. Because of the gospel, we look back (1-5), we look out (6-8), and we look ahead (9-11).

Key: We now have two responsibilities with the gospel panorama (1 Cor. 15:11).

1. We are to believe it.
 2. We are to preach it.
- I. Because of the gospel, we look 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. Because of the gospel, we look 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. Because of the gospel, we look ahead (9-11).
 - A. Jesus returned to heaven (9).
 - B. Jesus will return to earth (10-11).

Take Inventory: What do I most need to do with the gospel today?

Parent and baby dedication (at beginning of service)

It’s been a great joy to open the Scriptures together for our series, “*The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News.*” I had intended to finish last week, but something was missing. We’ve spent five weeks *seeing and savoring* what Jesus did. But to what end? What are we supposed to do with what we have seen and savored?

We’ve seen the components of the gospel panorama, using 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 as our home text. We’ve considered, *according to the Scriptures*. Then, *Christ died for our sins*. Then, *Christ was buried and raised on the third day*, on Easter Sunday. Last week, we zeroed in on, *Christ appeared*.

This is the gospel panorama. It’s what Christ did, and it’s all breathtaking and wonderful. But it begs a vital question. What are we supposed to do with what we’ve seen and savored?

Paul actually gives us the answer in our gospel panorama text. Let’s read it again, this time, paying particular attention to the action verbs.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

We are a privileged people. We know the good news. We’ve just spent the past month marveling at what Christ did, which are revealed by the third person pronouns and verbs. He died. He was buried. He was raised on the third day. He appeared. He appeared. He appeared. He appeared.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached on 2/11/18 as part of our Acts series.

^{***} 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.

That's what *He* did. But what are *we* to do? What are we supposed to do with the beautiful gospel panorama we've beheld? Paul actually tells us, doesn't he? Notice the action verbs that tell us what Paul did, and what the Corinthians did with the gospel.

In verse 1 – remind, preached, received, stand in

In verse 2 – saved by, hold fast to, believe in vain (something we're NOT to do)

In verse 3 – delivered to you, received

In verse 10 – I worked harder than any (doing what?)

In verse 11 – We preach, you believed

There's our answer. What are we supposed to do with the breathtaking gospel panorama once we've seen it? Verse 11 sums it up. *Believe* it, then *preach* it, so others will then *believe* it, then *preach* it, and on and on.

That's it. It starts with, *believe* it. What does that mean? There's such confusion about this word *believe*. Does it mean, pray a prayer? Raise a hand? Walk to the front of a church building? Stand up? Sign a Bible? Put your signature on a decision card? Nothing necessarily wrong with any of those actions, but they're not in this text, nor any other that I know.

What does this text say we're supposed to do with the gospel? Paul helps us with this question. Look at the wide range of verbal activity he uses. To believe the gospel means you *receive* it, like you would a gift. You *stand* in it, for it becomes your identity. You *hold fast* to it, for this is no fleeting emotional matter, but a life choice. And because it's so valuable to you, you *work hard* for it, not to gain it, but because He has gained you. Indeed, Christ not only paid the penalty for your sin, but for *you*. He has purchased you, and now henceforth, you live for Him.

This is what we're to do with the gospel panorama. *Believe it*. Do you believe it? In your heart of hearts, do you believe the gospel? Have you received this gift? Have you taken your stand upon it, and now find your identity in it?

If, by God's grace, your answer is, "Yes, I believe it!", then here's what follows. Belief which begins in private is to be made public.

Paul emphasizes this in Romans 10:9–10, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Notice the connection between heart and mouth. Believe the gospel in your heart. Confess it with your mouth.

Jesus Himself made this connection between heart and mouth in His great commission. He said that private faith, if it's real, will become public faith. How? In two ways. First, through baptism. And then, through a willingness to learn and obey the rest of His teaching. Listen to His words in Matthew 28:19–20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

So here's the proper response to the gospel panorama. *Believe* it. And show you believe it by giving public testimony to your belief in the waters of baptism.

But it doesn't stop there. Again, true belief will not stay private. It cannot stay private. If we believe the gospel panorama, then we will find great joy in making it known to others.

You say, "But I don't know what to say. I'm not very good with words."

The Lord knows that. He doesn't expect you to do this by yourself. It's one of the many reasons He designed the church.

Friends, preaching is a congregational assignment, and we are each to participate in it, with the various gifts, abilities and spheres of influence He has given us. We *believe* it (that's personal). But then, we *preach* it, which is personal too, but also corporate, for it's an activity we are to do together, by God's design.

This leads to another question. To whom do we preach it? Two audiences. First, to *ourselves*. *Christians* need to hear the gospel, again and again. It's true. This is why Paul is rehearsing the gospel panorama in 1 Corinthians 15. He is reminding Christians of the gospel. Why? Because there were problems in the First Church of Corinth. The church members were struggling with prideful cliques, and ministry competition, and the lack of love, and showmanship in worship services. How do you help church members who are dishonoring Christ this way?

Here's how. Get them thinking again about the gospel, about the Christ who died for their sins. There's no truth more powerful than this to motivate us to stop living sinfully. Christ died for our sins. This gospel reality kills pride, and cultivates a love for righteousness and other people.

So we preach it to ourselves. In our prayer closets, and in our church meetings. Do you know why we sing so much at church, and specifically why we sing so much about the cross? Certainly, there are many reasons, but here's a vital one. We need constant reminders that we are no longer what we were, and it's all because of what He endured for us.

Friends, it's hard to look down on your brother when you're singing together about the One who was nailed to a bloody cross for you both. The gospel doesn't just save us. It enables us to live like saved people.

Brothers and sisters, our corporate singing times are essential, so let's treasure them, by showing up early, with prepared hearts, ready to sing. Singing is one of the most helpful ways we preach the gospel to ourselves.

But we don't stop there, for it's not just to ourselves. To whom are we to preach it? There's another audience, and it's this audience that Jesus Himself addresses in today's text. You'll find it in Acts 1:1-11.

I've preached this text before, most recently in our Acts series. But we need to see it again, for it's here that Jesus Himself shows us very clearly what we're to do with the gospel panorama. The gospel panorama generates three looks, three vital perspectives. Because of the gospel, we look *back* (1-5), we look *out* (6-8), and we look *ahead* (9-11).

I. Because of the gospel, we look back (1-5).

We remember two realities that Luke highlights in the first five verses.

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 (NIV)."

According to verse 1, Luke originally wrote the book of Acts for a friend by the name of Theophilus. Acts was actually volume two. His gospel was volume one. Luke penned both to give his friend certainty about the two most important subjects in the world. The first is Christ. The second is His Church.

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

We 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 His 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.

Luke invites us to remember what Jesus did, namely three activities.

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, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs.” Notice those three words, *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, He 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.

Of course, as Luke reminds us, that’s not the end of the story.

3. *He gave proof He was alive (3b)*. Notice verse 3, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”

Notice the term *many*. The risen Christ appeared to many individuals over a forty day period. That was last week’s message. At least ten appearances, to over 500 people (1 Cor 15:6). Luke focused on His appearances to the apostles, to whom He gave *many proofs* of His resurrection, such as by eating with them (Luke 24:42-43).

And Luke tells us what Christ did during these appearances. He taught them. About what subject? 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 kingdom theme as well. In chapter 28, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul received visitors. And 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).”

When was the last time you mentioned the *kingdom of God* when you witnessed to an unbeliever? Unfortunately, very few gospel presentations do. But 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*.

Friends, the story of the Bible *is* the story of the kingdom of God. It goes like this.

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 as the story continues, 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 going to 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, for the King entered the world incognito, gave His own life on a cross, and thereby removed the curse of sin.

But He didn’t stay in the grave. On the third day, He rose again. And ever since, when a sinner repents and believes in Him, this King reconciles the believing sinner back to God. Yet that’s not all. He places that redeemed sinner into His body, into connection with other redeemed sinners, where they will serve Him together until He returns.

Beloved, we must come to grips with the message of the *kingdom of God*, for 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, and if we persist in living this first way, we will experience the just consequences of our treason.

But praise God, there’s another way to live. We can submit to the gracious rule of King Jesus, the One who loved us and died in our place. And if we do, we 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 not just what He *did*.

B. Remember what Jesus said (4-5). “And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Again, Jesus interacted with His apostles several times after His resurrection. But Luke focuses on one, the last appearance. He wants us to recall a particular conversation Jesus had with His apostles, in which He communicated two things.

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

So, what was His command? According to verse 4, He gave the apostles two instructions. 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*. For what? For a special gift that He identifies as “the promise of the Father,” which, He said, “you heard from me.” They had heard about this gift, just seven weeks or so earlier when in the upper room He told them about it.²

Now He says, it’s almost time. Don’t leave, but wait. Then...

2. *He told them what would happen (5).* “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The verb is passive. *You will be baptized*. The apostles would not initiate this activity. God would. And He did in Acts 2, as predicted.

This is the first look. Because of the gospel, we look back. That’s how we were saved, right? By looking back. But we keep looking back. It’s how we’re to live. We remember what Jesus did, and said. And we affirm our joyful submission to King Jesus by living as an active part of the community His Spirit inaugurated at Pentecost.

But we don’t stop there. There’s a difference between looking back and living in the past. The gospel will not let us live in the past. It generates a second look.

II. Because of the gospel, we look out (6-8).

The Lord never intended for His church to be an exclusive club. He did not save us so we could hoard the good news that’s changed our lives.

This is our tendency, by the way, to be self-focused. And Jesus confronted it head-on in His final conversation with His followers.

Notice verse 6, “So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” Interesting. What’s on the disciples’ minds?

A. Jesus’ followers were concerned about Israel (6). Israel? Yes, that’s them. And you can’t blame them, not after what Jesus just said.

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

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 get rid of the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel?”

These are good Jews. What are they concerned about? *Israel*. Us. Our country. Make Israel great again. Nothing wrong with this, for God chose Israel and has a plan for Israel. But not just Israel, as Jesus makes clear.

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. He did challenge them on the matter of *timing*.

² See John 14-16

“That’s up to the Father,” He said. “It’s not your business to know when I’m going to set up My kingdom. Furthermore, your view of My kingdom is way too short-sighted. You are thinking about *Israel*. I have something in mind for the *world*.”

And here it is, verse 8. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

This is the theme verse of the book of Acts. This is what Jesus is now doing in the world through His church. In this sentence, Jesus causes us to move from *look back* to *look out*, and He does so by giving 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 He 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? A few years ago 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

Friends, Jesus 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. It’s 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*.

Notice the order. Power. Then witnesses. 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 is not a person who says, “I think so.” He says, “I know so.” He simply speaks what he knows to be true, regardless of the outcome. 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.

To put it simply, if we have seen the gospel panorama, we’re to tell others. This is the mission Christ has given us. The King told us to tell the world about Him, about what He did, and offers, and invite them to become as we are, believers in Him.

My friends, do we really believe the gospel is good news? This is why it’s vital that we first, *look back*, and keep looking back. It’s by looking back regularly that we’re motivated to *look out*.

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

⁵ Barclay, *Acts*, p. 13.

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 He left 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's very specific.

•Start in Jerusalem. Why Jerusalem? For many reasons. This is the special place the prophets foretold, the place where Jesus accomplished His redemptive work. But there's a very reason for starting in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where they *were*. Start where you are, says Jesus.

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)."

"Go home! Start at home!" Jesus said.

Some new Christians think they need to rush right away to India or Africa to fulfill the Great Commission. A noble aspiration, but Jesus tells the first disciples to start right where you are, in Jerusalem.

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

•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. 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 resist leaving the familiar. "I can serve God right here, close to my family and friends," we tell ourselves.

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

Our Master's plan couldn't be clearer. He says, empowered by the Spirit, you are to be My witnesses. 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, men. *You* are going to the ends of the earth."

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

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

And indeed, they did. 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.”

Why did they go? Because the *King* told them to go. *Look back* leads to *look out*. The disciples were concerned about Israel, but our Savior is concerned about *the world*.

Do we share His concern? Are we helping our neighbors see and savor the gospel panorama? What about our classmates, and the people next to us at work? And what about the people in other countries? Are we giving our money to send missionaries, and are we willing to give our children and grandchildren to become those missionaries?

Friends, if we are feeling stale in life, maybe it’s because we need a perspective adjustment this morning. Let’s start, first of all, by *looking back* at the gospel panorama, and ask the Lord to stir our affections anew for Christ and the work He did for us. Then, enabled by the power He provides through His Spirit, let’s *look out*, and tell the world about Him. But there’s one more.

III. Because of the gospel, we look ahead (9-11).

Our text concludes by telling us two certainties.

A. Jesus returned to heaven (9). “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

And with that, after forty days of appearances, after giving simple instructions, He was gone. Where is He today? You say, “He is in heaven.” And of course, He is. But we often think of heaven as being a place that way out there. But Luke describes it differently. He says a cloud took Him away. He’s out of sight now, not far away, just on the other side of that cloud, as it were.

I can’t prove this, but it’s almost as if heaven isn’t a place far away, but another realm, an eternal realm. It’s right next to us, on the other side of that cloud. And Jesus went there. And many witnesses saw Him go.

A second certainty...

B. Jesus will return to earth (10-11). “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, ‘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.’”

I’m intrigued by the effect 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. The implication? This is not like His other post-resurrection appearances the past forty days. You won’t see Him for awhile. The next you see Him will be when He returns the same way He left.

On this mountain, in fact. What mountain? Verse 12 tells us. Olivet, says the ESV. The mount of Olives. The final scene in the gospel panorama, as foretold by Zechariah the prophet.

Zechariah 14:4–5 “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west... Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”

Friends, these are gospel realities. Jesus, who died for sinners and conquered the grave, has returned to heaven. And He will return to earth, to the place He left, and every eye will see Him.

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

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

Take Inventory: What do I most need to do with the gospel today?

For some, what's needed is to *believe it*, and show you believe it by *receiving* Him. He died and rose again to save sinners. Will you now receive Him as your saving Lord?

Perhaps you do believe in Him, and if so, praise be to the One whose gospel saved you! But something is missing. You have believed in Christ for salvation, but now need to believe what He said about His church, and the vital role His church is to play in the fulfillment of His mission. Yes, He is gone, but He's still at work on earth right now through His body, the church.

As James 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 vitally connected to His church, and growing in it, serving in it, and contributing to its mission of making Him known locally and worldwide?

Closing Song: #297 *"I Love to Tell the Story"* (all three verses)

April Benediction: 2 Peter 1:2

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we finished our series, *"The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News,"* by considering two necessary responses to it mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:11. First, believe it. Then, preach it. What does it mean to "believe" the gospel?
2. Preaching the gospel is a corporate assignment for the church. What does that mean? Why is it important to remember? What happens when a church forgets it?
3. We looked carefully at Acts 1:1-11, where we saw three vital perspectives for a gospel preaching church. What are they? Take time as a group to read the passage again, and then review these three perspectives.
4. What did Jesus tell His followers that they would do with the gospel, according to verse 8, and what would make this possible? How is the Lord fulfilling this promise at WBC? What happens when a church forgets Acts 1:8? How can we help each other (individually and as a church) preach the gospel this week?
5. Spend time as a group thanking the Lord for the gospel, for what He did two thousand years ago, is doing now, and will do when He returns. Then spend time praying for those who need the gospel, here and around the world.

⁸ James M. Boice, p. 15.