

Jesus's Plan for His Church

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name is Alistair, as has been said, and it is my privilege this morning to open up that wonderful passage in Acts 4. So please do keep it open in front of you. But before we dive in, let's pray together.

Our great God, we thank you that we can gather to hear your word. And we pray, Lord, that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts would be pleasing to you.

And Jesus, would you be lifted up above every other name? And Holy Spirit, we ask that you would be at work in our hearts this morning. Amen.

Stephen Lungu was abandoned in Zimbabwe at the age of seven. And then he joined a street gang, which became increasingly violent as the years went on.

And one day him and his gang went into a Christian tent mission with petrol bombs in their backpacks, ready to kill as many Christians as they possibly could.

[1 : 05] Now, Stephen was a teenager at this point, and he sat at the back of this meeting. And as he waited with his petrol bombs at the ready, he heard what the preacher was saying.

He heard the gospel, the message that Jesus died and rose again and that Jesus lives and will return. The message of the resurrected Jesus changed his life.

And he went from being in a street gang to being one of the most prominent evangelists in Africa, often referred to as the Billy Graham of Africa. Now, what does Stephen Lungu have in common with a young mum and a baby and toddlers group who intentionally brings Jesus into her conversations with other mums?

What does Stephen Lungu have in common with the office worker who lives out their life before their non-Christian colleagues and tells them about what they've been learning at church?

All of these three people sound completely different. But each and every one of them is playing their part in continuing Jesus' plan for the growth of his church.

[2 : 23] As through the power of the Holy Spirit, they boldly share the good news of Jesus Christ with the lost. For the church to grow, there needs to be a plan.

And that's what we're going to see this morning in Acts chapter 1. But it is not Alistair's plan for the church. It's not even Brunfield's plan for the church. We are going to see Jesus' plan for the growth of his church.

This morning, we're starting our new series in the book of Acts. And let me just say how excited I am to be studying this amazing book that has a mixture of historical narrative, of glorious doctrine as the first sermons of the church are ever preached, and wonderful testimonies of the Lord's goodness to a people who at this stage were so small and insignificant that they weren't even recognized as a religion.

In this series, we're going to hear about the explosive spread of the gospel and how that happened and how that continues today.

This book is often referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, but it would be more accurate to call it the continued Acts of the ruling and reigning Christ.

[3 : 47] But before we dive into chapter 1, let's dig into the context a little bit. So the book of Acts is the second book written by Luke, and we see that in Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, and Acts 1, verse 1.

Both Luke's gospel and the book of Acts were written to a man called Theophilus. Now, we don't know much about him, apart from that he was pretty important and that he seemed to be a pretty wealthy man.

Luke writes this in chapter 1, verse 3. You don't need to turn there. I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning. I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

So Luke's gospel was written to give Theophilus certainty about who Jesus was and what he had been taught. And then what we see in Acts 1, 1 to 11, is Luke's purpose was to tell Theophilus what Jesus continued to do and teach from his ascension into heaven and beyond.

And Luke's gospel ends with God's promise that Jesus was crucified, that he rose from the dead, that forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, and that the disciples would be given power by the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to the world.

[5 : 22] And the book of Acts begins with those exact same promises. So that's how these two books fit together. The book of Acts is all about the continued acts of the ruling and reigning Christ.

But there's just one more thing we need to see as an introduction to this book. Look with me at Acts 1, verse 8. It says this, 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.

The book begins with a promise of the power of the Holy Spirit to enable the spread of the gospel. And now turn briefly with me to the very end of the book of Acts in chapter 28, verse 30.

The apostle Paul at this point has been under house arrest for two years. And verse 30 says this, Now why is this important?

Well, because this morning at the very beginning of the book of Acts, we see Jesus' plan for his church. We need to remember that it is not by growth strategies. It is not by keeping up with the times.

[6 : 58] It is not by putting on the newest gimmick to get people through the doors. Jesus' plan for his church is to have believers empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into the world and share the gospel.

That's where Acts begins. And that's how we have 28 wonderful chapters of stories of men and women who turn the world upside down by gossiping the gospel.

And that is the very reason we sit here this morning. Because the Holy Spirit continues to empower Christians today to go and share Jesus with the world.

So in Acts 1, 1 to 11, we see Jesus' plan for his church. And we see three things. The preparation, the plan itself, and the promise.

So the first thing we see is the preparation for the growth of the church in verses 1 to 6. The preparation. Jesus spent his whole earthly ministry teaching his disciples and larger crowds about the kingdom of God.

[8 : 07] The focus of Jesus' earthly ministry was to teach people about God. To point people to God the Father and call them into his kingdom.

And that's what Jesus continued to do after the resurrection. He taught his disciples. As verse 3 says, look with me. After his suffering, meaning on the cross, he presented himself to them and gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. For 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus continued to teach his disciples and give them convincing proofs that he was alive.

We see this happening in Luke chapter 24 on the road to Emmaus. Jesus walks with two disciples and teaches them how all of scripture, all of the Old Testament, beginning with the law and prophets, is fulfilled in him.

Jesus appears in an upper room where the disciples are gathered. And before we think that this is just the imagination of a grief-stricken group of men, Jesus asks for food and eats with them.

[9 : 26] He was physically there, convincing proofs. And friends, if you're a Christian this morning, you need to know that your faith is not built on a fairy tale.

You need to know that your faith is built on the firm foundation of eyewitness testimonies that Jesus lived, that he taught, that he died, and that he rose again, proving that what he said was right.

What did Jesus teach his disciples in those 40 days? Well, it wasn't a seminar on living life without Jesus. It wasn't a master class on those bracelets that you used to wear, maybe as a teenager, I certainly did, that said, WWJD, what would Jesus do?

Jesus didn't give them a pep talk to get them through the tough times. The end of verse 3 says, Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not some political or military power.

It is not about the nation of Israel. Jesus makes that clear in verses 6 to 8 after the disciples ask about the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of God is the present reign and rule of God over the entire universe, in which people are being transformed and brought into the family of God.

[10 : 54] So the kingdom of God is not bound to a physical location. It is a spiritual reality. Its citizens are not from one nationality, culture, or color.

But we are made up from people from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation, who one day will gather around the throne of God and worship the Lamb, who is worthy of all praise.

And the kingdom of God is ever expanding. And that's what Jesus was preparing his disciples for. Abraham Kuyper, a prime minister and theologian from many, many years ago, put it like this.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

Jesus prepared his disciples by teaching them about the kingdom of God. And that is important because the next thing we see in this passage, and that is the plan for the growth of the church in verses 7 to 8.

[12 : 00] The plan. The disciples hear about the kingdom of God and their thoughts immediately go to the nation of Israel. In verse 7, they want to know when the time is going to come, or is now the time where Jesus is going to restore the kingdom of Israel.

But Jesus shows them just how wrong they were. He lets them into his plan first with the rebuke and then with the strategy. The rebuke comes in verse 7.

Jesus tells his disciples this, It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. Jesus tells his disciples that they're being caught up in the completely wrong thing.

They're focusing on times and places. They're thinking of a specific nationality and people group. But Jesus says that it's none of their business when God's plan will be fulfilled.

And friends, we would be wise to listen to this rebuke as well. The Christian world is full of conspiracy theories and end time predictions. There is always at least one person somewhere in the world saying they know the time of Jesus' return.

[13 : 13] And if you hear that, turn to this verse in your Bible and run the other way. Shut your ears to their lies. Friends, we are not to concern ourselves with the dates and times because one, we will never know when Jesus will return until it happens.

And two, we've got a job to do. So Jesus rebukes his disciples, but then he also gives them the strategy, the job that they are to do.

The disciples are to get busy continuing the work that Jesus started. That's why Luke mentions in verse one, the things that Jesus began to teach and do.

We are to continue the marvelous work of spreading the good news. And we see exactly how in verse eight.

Read with me. Now this is the central theme and outline for the entire book of Acts.

[14 : 26] And the job that every single Christian has been given and has been equipped to do. But this is not a business plan with steps one, two, three that the disciples do off their own back.

This strategy is not built on human initiative or willpower. This is a divine strategy for the growth of the church through the divine enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus doesn't tell his disciples to take a personality test to see if they're outgoing enough to share the gospel. He doesn't give them a reading list of the best apologetics books so they can answer all the questions people may have.

And he doesn't tell them to sit back in church and let other people do it. Let other people do evangelism. That's the box ticked. Jesus says they will receive power by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses in the world.

And that happens in Acts chapter two, the day of Pentecost. And from that moment on, the Holy Spirit dwells in every single believer. From that moment on, the ripples of the gospel spread.

[15 : 43] I wonder if you have memories like me growing up when you went to a big lake or a pond. I was always interested in skimming stones or trying to create the biggest splash in the water from my two brothers.

So we'd arrive at this lake that was perfectly still and clear as glass. But the minute that first stone touched the water, the ripples went on and on and on.

The effects of that stone could be seen way after the initial impact had happened. And in Acts, we see the ripple effects of the gospel going out from Acts chapter two.

The plan begins in verse four in Jerusalem. The disciples are told to wait until they receive the gift that God had promised, meaning the Holy Spirit. And then through the power of the Spirit, verse eight says they will share the gospel.

First in Jerusalem, that happens in Acts one to seven. Then in Judea and Samaria, which happens in Acts chapters eight to 12.

[16 : 50] And then to the ends of the earth, which begins in Acts 13 to 28. And that work continues today. The ripple effects of the gospel are felt long after the day of Pentecost.

And friends, this work continues as you go into work and live out your faith by the power of the Holy Spirit before your non-Christian colleagues.

The work continues as you witness to your friends and family members by making godly life decisions, by saying no to sin and living for Christ through the power of the Spirit.

This work continues as you take the gospel to those whom you love and you warn them. Of the reality of death and judgment.

But you comfort them with the news that there is a way to be saved. And that is only through the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross, who died for sins, for the sins of all those who call on his name.

[17 : 54] This work continues today because the Holy Spirit dwells within believers and he empowers us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This is why world missions is so important. Millions of people die every day without a saving faith in Jesus Christ. This is why church ministry is so important because we are to be witnesses in the community God has placed us in.

This is why personal evangelism is the task that every single Christian has been called to with no exceptions. Because we live in a world that needs to know about Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon, a pastor from years ago, sums up the urgency of the gospel growth by saying this. If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our dead bodies.

And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions.

[19 : 07] Let them go unpaired for. Jesus has a plan for his church.

And that is that every single person would go and share the gospel. Starting with this small group of men, which grows and grows and grows.

And it will not stop growing until the day he returns. And then the third and final thing we see in this passage is the promise.

In verses 9 to 11. The promise. So after Jesus has finished speaking with his disciples, he was taken up before their very eyes into God's presence.

Commonly referred to as the ascension. Now the life of Jesus proves that he was God in the flesh. Sent into this world to commence the kingdom of God and live that perfect life of obedience to God's law that we never could.

[20 : 15] The death of Jesus proves that he was the perfect sacrifice foretold in the Old Testament. Making it possible for people to be forgiven. The resurrection was the proof that all Jesus said and did was true.

And then the ascension is the glorification of the Son of God. It is the moment where Jesus goes into God the Father's presence and he sits at his right hand.

The ascension is the coronation of the King who rules and reigns. The King who has all authority over all of creation.

And the King who one day will return to complete his kingdom on earth in the new creation. The disciples look up in awe and they see that Jesus ascending to his heavenly throne and two men in white, presumably angels, in verse 11, give them a promise that will change the course of their lives forever.

Verse 11 says this. 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.

[21 : 38] This means that on that glorious day when Jesus returns, he will return physically. Descending from heaven and he will be visible for all to see. This means that the mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth has a time limit.

There will come a day when Jesus returns and every eye will see him. And there will be no more time to repent. There will be no more time to share the gospel with our loved ones.

We do not know when that day will come. We're called to get busy sharing the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the rest in the Lord's hands.

The promise is that Jesus will return. And so the challenge to every single Christian in the world is this. Will you obey the commandment of the Lord and take the gospel to the ends of the earth?

Start with your family. Start with your friends, your neighbors, your work colleagues. And pray that the Holy Spirit would give you opportunities, power and the words you need to faithfully proclaim the gospel to a lost world that is dying without Jesus.

[22 : 56] The return of Jesus is a great thing. It's a great thing that Christians should look forward to in eager anticipation. But it is a really scary thing for those who do not confess Jesus as Lord.

So if you're listening in this morning and you are not a Christian, Jesus is King. He is the King who took on flesh to die the horrible death that we all deserve so that we can be made right with God and be freed from his wrath, which one day will rightly fall on all those who do not put their trust in Jesus.

Now is the time to repent and believe in him. Not tomorrow, not next week, not next month. We do not know when he will return. So don't put it off.

But investigate these convincing proofs that the Bible is true. That Jesus did really rise from the dead and that he is now seated glorified in the Father's presence.

That Jesus is in heaven. Because the day is coming where there will be no more time. The return of Jesus is either a great thing or a scary thing.

[24 : 11] Which one is it for you? So what do we have in common with a mother who is a witness in her toddler group? And some of the great evangelists throughout the world like Stephen Lungu.

Well, we like them have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. We have the privilege of being part of Jesus' plan for his church.

The growth of the church, the growth of the kingdom of God will not happen by following human strategies. It will not happen by keeping up with the times or putting on the newest gimmick to get people through the doors.

Jesus' plan for his church is to empower every single believer through the Holy Spirit to take the gospel into the world.

That is the task that we have been called to. Let's do that this week. Let's share the gospel with those we love. Let's pray together.

[25 : 18] Father, it is an immense privilege to be part of your plan.

To see your kingdom grow. All because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Jesus, we thank you that you willingly died in our place.

That you rose triumphant from the grave, defeating sin, defeating death. And that you ascended into glory. And we thank you that you will return.

And Holy Spirit, we thank you that you dwell in every single believer. That you open our hearts to see the truth of the Bible.

And that you empower us to share the gospel. And so Holy Spirit, we ask that this week you would give us opportunities and boldness to share the gospel.

[26 : 20] And Father, if there are people listening to this who do not know you, we ask by your Spirit that you would open their eyes. And that you would change their hearts.

Father, we pray that all of us would leave this morning service transformed by the power of your Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.