

ACTS 1:1-11, 2:1-13

Christ's Great Commission and Pentecost

Memory Verse

"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."

Acts 1:8

Real-life Problems

Feeling Distant from God—

Sometimes, Christians feel far from Jesus. When we pray, it can feel like our words don't get past the ceiling. When we worship or read the Bible, sometimes it feels no different than singing along with the radio or reading a non-religious book. It's easy to think that if only Jesus was on earth, in the flesh, where we could approach and speak to Him, we wouldn't experience this problem.

The Good News

Because of Jesus and His work on your behalf in His life, death, and resurrection, His Spirit is closer to you than your own skin. This is not any of your doing, but it's the gift of God (Eph 2:8-10). Even in your darkest moments, the Lord remains with you and for you.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: Think of your favorite book or movie series. What is it? Can you think of a series where the sequel is better than the original?

Idea #2: Can you think of a time when you were visiting family or friends and it was hard to leave? Why do you think it's so difficult to leave people that you love, even if it's only for a short time?

Idea #3: Have you ever been to a foreign country? If so, what was the hardest part about being in a different place and why?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's undeserved love for sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Acts?

Luke wrote Acts as a history of the earliest days of the church.

2) Who was the original audience of this book?

The original audience of Luke, narrowly speaking, is Theophilus. More broadly, though, Luke has written Acts with elements that appeal to both Jew and Greek, so the ultimate audience appears to be any Christian from any ethnicity.

3) Why was the book of Acts written?

The book of Acts was written to record the works of God in the early church.

What's going on?

REMIND

Luke wrote Acts as the second volume to follow on from the gospel that bears his name. His aim was to document the Lord's work in the first several years of the church after Christ's death and resurrection.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

- 1) That Jesus is risen from the grave.
- 2) That Jesus keeps His promises to His people.
- 3) That Jesus is always near to us.

Read

Read **Acts 1:1-11 and 2:1-13** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) To whom does Luke address this book at the beginning of Acts?

Theophilus.

2) How does Jesus present Himself to His disciples (v. 3)?

According to verse 3, He presents Himself alive to them after His sufferings, and He gives the disciples "many proofs."

3) Why does Jesus order His disciples to stay in Jerusalem (vv. 4-5)?

He commands them to stay in Jerusalem "to wait for the promise of the Father."

4) In verse 6, what question do the disciples ask Jesus (v. 6)?

They ask Him if He will now restore the kingdom to Israel.

5) According to verse 8, where will His disciples be witnesses to Him?

They will be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

6) What happens to Jesus in verse 9?

He is lifted up, and a cloud takes Him out of their sight. This is typically called "The Ascension" because it is when Jesus ascends to heaven after His resurrection.

7) In Acts 2:2, how does Luke describe the day of Pentecost?

There came from heaven the sound of a mighty rushing wind; it filled the entire house where they were sitting; and divided tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

8) What happens to the believers as a result of this in verse 4?

They become filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in tongues.

9) What do the Jews in Jerusalem hear the believers saying (vv. 6, 11)?

They hear the believers speaking in the native languages of the Jews; the believers are "telling...the mighty works of God."

10) What is the reaction of the Jews who hear their own languages coming from the believers (v. 13)?

They are amazed and perplexed, but some mock and say that the believers are drunk.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why does Luke make a point to say, in Acts 1:3, that Jesus presented Himself “alive...after his suffering...by many proofs”?

Luke is making it clear that Jesus really did suffer, die, and rise from the dead in His literal flesh and blood. The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, so it makes sense that Luke would emphasize not only that Jesus presented Himself alive, but also that He would do so “by many proofs.” It’s tempting for modern readers to think that folks in the first century were much more susceptible to hoaxes (like a fake or staged resurrection, perhaps), but they knew just as well as we do that dead people don’t come back to life. That’s why they required “many proofs,” and that’s why Jesus gave them many proofs—to show really and truly that He had died and risen.

2) What is the significance of Jesus sending out His disciples from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)?

It’s obvious in Acts 1:8 that Jesus is sending His disciples out into the world to tell everyone that He has died and has risen from the dead, paying the penalty for the sins of His people and ultimately defeating death. He sends them out from Jerusalem, where they’re dwelling, to Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth, to everyone, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile. This tells us that Jesus’ work is for everyone who will believe in Him, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or skin color, among other things. What’s more, this mission extends throughout the book of Acts, as followers of Jesus minister to diverse crowds in diverse places.

3) Read 2:5-13 one more time. This is Luke’s account of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Jews who follow Jesus. What is the significance of this event for both the Jews who follow Jesus and the foreign Jews who observe Pentecost?

The Jews who follow Jesus receive the Holy Spirit in a way that’s new and different from the way that God’s people experienced the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, we read of the Holy Spirit “coming on” or “coming to” people, but never really staying. Here, though, we have the Holy Spirit being given in a more permanent way (see Peter’s quoting of the prophecy of Joel 2 in Acts 2:17). The Holy Spirit is poured out in a way noticeable even to outsiders, as the foreign Jews each hear their own language being spoken. They are “bewildered” (v. 6), and “amazed and perplexed” (v. 12), though some mock (v. 13). These foreign Jews take notice, through the speaking in tongues, of the “mighty works of God” (v. 12).

4) Read John 14:16. Do you notice any connections between the words of Jesus in John 14, the promise of Acts 1:4-5, and the Pentecost scene here in Acts 2?

Jesus promises that, even though He is going to leave, He’s going to send another comforter to His people. This is the promise that Jesus is referring to in Acts 1:4-5, which is ultimately fulfilled in the scene at Pentecost. It’s worth noting that in the John passage, Jesus follows up His statement that He will leave the disciples with the promise that another comforter would come to them—He must have been anticipating some sadness on their part at His departure, and He meets that with a promise that an ever-present person, the Holy Spirit, will be poured out on His people after He ascends, and He will be with them at all times and in all places.

5) Why do you think Luke notes the two reactions—one of amazement and one of mockery—in Acts 2:5-13?

These, in truth, are the only two reactions we can have to the Lord. We can either be amazed, or we can mock—we’re not left with a third option, as C.S. Lewis notes in his famous “Lunatic, Liar, or Lord” trilemma (see illustration). Either the God of the Bible really is the triune creator of the universe, or He is a liar and a false god—if

He exists at all. For God to say the things He does about what He has done leaves open to us only these two options.

The Trilemma

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis observes that Jesus cannot be merely a good, moral teacher. A person who said the things Jesus said can only be one of three things: a lunatic who thought He was God, a liar who was merely trying to fleece some gullible Galileans into giving Him power or influence, or the Lord of the universe who was in fact everything he claimed to be. He simply hasn't left open the option for us to admire Him as a good moral teacher. The observers at Pentecost bear this out—they respond in amazement or mockery and unbelief. There doesn't seem to be any shoulder-shrugging or impartiality to what God is doing in their midst. So who is Jesus, and by extension, who is God to you—a lunatic, a liar, or the Lord?

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Even though these events took place 2,000 years ago, what is significant for you, today, from this passage?

Answers might vary, but be sure to point your students toward the fact that after Jesus' ascension, He sent us the Holy Spirit to be a comforter who is always present with us. This means that even though we can't have coffee with Jesus the way we might with our friends or family, He's present with us in a much closer way through His Spirit, who dwells within us.

2) How does the fact that God's Spirit lives within you affect your daily life?

If God's Spirit lives within you, it means that you're never alone. It means that even in your darkest, loneliest moments, the Lord is never far from you. In fact, Jesus' Spirit is closer to you than your own skin. We should find a whole lot of comfort in this. Even when God feels far from us, in reality He's never more than a breath away.

3) The people at Pentecost responded in either amazement or mockery. Which response do you resonate with most, and how can you cultivate more amazement at what God has done?

While all Christians would like to read this passage and resonate most with the amazement of the people who were near the disciples at that moment, the truth is that we often approach life and the Lord with more skepticism or unbelief than we would like. Part of the Christian life is growing in amazement at who God is and what He has done and is doing. The best way to do this is to approach Him through His Word, in prayer, and among His people—the church. In these things, we see a clear picture of God's power and His person, of what He's done and who He is. Christians must take time to meditate on God and His works, and we must let ourselves be amazed at just how awesome God is.

Main takeaway

Even when it seems like Jesus is far from us, He remains closer to us than a friend through the power of the Holy Spirit.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Because of Jesus and His work on your behalf in His life, death, and resurrection, His Spirit is closer to you than your own skin. This is not any of your doing, but it's the gift of God (Eph 2:8-10). Even in your darkest moments, the Lord remains with you and for you.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, and for His work on our behalf. Help us to feel Your nearness to us this week, and draw us into a deeper knowledge of You and of Your love for us. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) When was the last time you were truly amazed at God and what He has done? How did that feel?
- 2) How would your life be different if you were always aware of how close to you the Holy Spirit is?
- 3) How can you grow in amazement of God—of who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Talk to your student about a time when God felt particularly close to you. What was that like?
- 2) Do you ever struggle to believe that the Holy Spirit is in you, with you, and for you? Why or why not?
- 3) How has your wonder at God changed or grown over time? How has that happened?