

The Power and Purpose of Christ's Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 April 2017

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon. Welcome to the Tron Church Lunchtime Bible Talk. It's very good indeed to see you, and welcome on this Wednesday afternoon.

We are beginning this afternoon a series in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. So please do turn there and we'll be reading from Acts chapter 1, and you'll find it on page 909.

Acts chapter 1, and I'll read verses 1 to 11. Acts 1 verse 1.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 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.

[1 : 25] For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Orjidea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

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 while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus, who has taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

[2 : 34] Amen. Well, this is the word of the Lord. I will spend a few moments looking at that in a minute, but before we do that, let's gather our hearts and pray to our Father in heaven. Let's pray.

Amen. Our Father in heaven, we can but praise you, because you are throned in the heavens.

The very sun, moon, and stars by your word are upheld. Time and eternity bow within your presence. And knowing these things, how surely can we trust you?

You hold all things in your hands, and so we humble ourselves before you, because you are great in majesty and power, and because we are frail creatures.

Would you help us to fulfill the task that you've called us to, that great task of proclaiming the truth about Jesus to all nations, so that your name would be praised.

[3 : 44] draw near to us this afternoon, as we gather here in this place. Refresh us with your word, that we would cling to your promises, and so live lives of witness to the wonder of the gospel through all that we say and all that we do.

So help us this afternoon, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. It's very important indeed, that we get the message of Acts into our bloodstream, so that we know what we're about as a church and as Christians.

Acts is a book that brings great clarity and certainty about the content of the gospel message. Great clarity and certainty about the priorities of the gospel church, and it also assures us of the unhindered progress of that gospel to the ends of the earth.

I wonder if you ever find yourself looking over the metaphorical garden fence to the lush grass of another church, a church that seems to have much more of a buzz about it.

There's much more excitement. That church does healings. They promise prosperity and happiness. Now that sort of thing looks very powerful and quite different from what we are doing,

what we focus on.

[5 : 22] Have we got it right? Should I perhaps try out that exciting looking church? Well, getting the book of Acts clear in our minds will help us think clearly about those impressive looking churches.

Sometimes we question the things that we major on. We perhaps doubt the gospel message we hold out. We wonder, are we doing the right things?

Well, getting the book of Acts clear in our minds will help us think clearly about all those sorts of issues. This first section we're looking at this afternoon is all about Christ's ascension and the giving of his spirit to the church and the certain purpose and power that gives to the church then and now. It's about Christ's continuing work in this world and what that looks like. Notice how Luke begins this account.

Look at verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach. Acts, this book we're looking at, is the second part of Luke's account, his work.

[6 : 43] The first part was his gospel, the first book in which Luke details all that Jesus began to do and to teach and the implication is that this second volume is all about what Jesus continues to do and to teach.

Remember Luke's great purpose which he states so clearly at the start of his gospel, a purpose that holds for the second volume as well. Listen to what Luke says at the start of his book, his first book, the gospel.

He says this, It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

So taking Luke's work, his gospel and his acts together, it's written so that we would have certainty about what Jesus has done and what Jesus continues to do and also about the way in which Jesus is at work now through his church.

Luke is writing to give us certainty about these things and this really is key stuff because it shapes the daily realities of Christ's church today.

[8 : 05] It shapes what we should be focusing on, prioritizing now in the life of the church. It shapes and directs the very message that we hold out and proclaim. So two key points this afternoon.

First, in verses 1 to 5, we see the power of Christ's church and then secondly in verses 6 to 9, we see the purpose of Christ's church. So firstly, verses 1 to 5, the power of Christ's church.

These verses show us the reality of the ascended Christ continuing his work, his reign over his church through his spirit which is given to his followers.

Jesus is risen. That is the astonishing and absolutely central truth to the Christian faith that guarantees our hopes for the future resurrection.

But Jesus is also ascended. And these two momentous events pervade the Luke Acts account, especially at the end of Luke's gospel and here at the start of Acts.

[9 : 17] It's Jesus' resurrection and essential that are in focus. And particularly here at the start of Acts, it's Jesus' ascension that is the pivotal point.

Look at verse 2. It speaks of until the day that he was taken up. Then look at verse 9. It speaks of Jesus being lifted up as he's ascended.

And then again verse 11. This Jesus who was taken up from you. Jesus is risen but he's also ascended.

And Luke is at pains to provide evidence not only of Jesus' resurrection but also his ascension. It is the risen Lord Jesus who ascended to heaven who now sits at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is right now in his resurrected body sat in the heavenly throne room and from it he directs the admission of his church which is the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations.

[10 : 26] And Jesus does that. He directs his church through his spirit. And it is the giving of his spirit that Jesus promises at the end of the gospel.

At the end of Luke's account he says this Behold I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you but stay in the city until you are clothed from power from on high.

And here again at the start of his act Luke records again that promise he says in verse 4 And while saying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father.

It is a promise that was long anticipated by God's people. The prophets Joel, Isaiah and Ezekiel all looked forward to a time when God would pour out his spirit in fullness upon all his people. And so this pouring out of the spirit that Jesus promised and which we read about later in the chapter is the great fulfillment of those Old Testament promises.

[11 : 34] And Jesus is now through his spirit with his church directing everything. And that is a great source of encouragement for Christians today, isn't it?

It is simply not the case that Jesus had three intense years with the leaders of what would become the greatest worldwide religion that is Christianity and this left them to it.

He didn't just wind them up and let them go. No. Jesus has given his spirit and it's through his spirit that Jesus is still with his church, still directing and still leading, still equipping.

The church has real power. It has the power of the spirit and here at the start of Acts Jesus promises that power.

But it's a pouring out of the spirit for a specific purpose and that's what we see in verses 6 to 11. We see the purpose of Christ's church and we see here in these verses that Jesus sent his spirit in order that his apostles would be his witnesses.

[12 : 51] The giving of the spirit is linked with proclamation. Look again at verse 8 there. This is what Jesus says 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.

The giving of Christ's spirit leads inevitably to witness and witness that will go to the end of the earth. And what is the content of that witness?

What are they witnessing to? Well they're witnessing to the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and eventual return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the explanation of his words and works, how they are the fulfillment of all that the scriptures pointed forward to. And it's the call to the obedience of faith, to the submission of Jesus as Lord, demonstrated in repentance and faith.

That is what they're witnessing to. That is the content of their witness to the end of the earth. Two things to say about the purpose of the church, about its task of proclamation.

[14 : 14] That's what Jesus tells them to go and do. That's what the spirit is equipping them for, that task of proclamation. But two things to say about it. Firstly, it's proclamation with power.

It's proclamation with power. Notice what Jesus says at the start of verse eight. but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

The task of proclamation requires power. And power is required because of the very nature of the thing being proclaimed.

They proclaim Christ crucified, God himself, come to earth, crucified on a tree, the promised one who died, who rose again, who now reigns in heaven over the entire cosmos.

That is a controversial message. It is a message that will provoke huge opposition as the rest of the book of Acts shows us.

[15 : 22] Jesus equips his witnesses with great power. And it's a power that is evidenced in a very weak looking thing.

It's power that is evidenced in proclamation. Proclamation. The power that he gives through his spirit enables proclamation. That is the sign that the spirit is at work.

And it looks very weak. True filling of the spirit leads to bold proclamation of the gospel of witness to Jesus. That's what we see the apostles doing in the following chapters, witnessing to Jesus.

So if you're looking for a spirit-filled church, a church of spirit power, then look for a church that is bold in proclaiming the gospel. Look for a church that is laser focused on proclaiming the gospel message.

That is the sign of a spirit-filled church. Now that is not to say that every church member must be preaching or leading Bible studies, not at all.

[16 : 36] There are many ways to serve in the life of the church. many practical things that need to be in place to enable the proclamation of the word to move forward. But if witness to the truth about Jesus is not central, if that is not the heartbeat of a church, then it's not really a spirit-filled church at all.

The teaching of the word of God must be the absolute heartbeat, the central thing in all areas of the church life, faith, that is the priority that Jesus sets for his followers.

It is that task that he promises to be with his followers in as they go about it. That's what he promises there in chapter 1 verse 8. So we must trust God's word to do his work in all areas of church life.

so that means that we see the vital importance of praying corporately for that mission of the church and not praying primarily for our own felt needs this task is what we pray for primarily so it means that our confidence is in God working through his word through the regular Sunday ministries through the regular preaching of his words that is where our confidence lies not in other special events useful as they may be we must have confidence that God is at work through the seemingly weak looking proclamation of the word what we're doing here this afternoon doesn't look very impressive but it is how God is at work it is how God strengthens and builds his church so do we have confidence in that we must trust God's word to be at work in all areas of church life so that means that our focus in our children's work is firmly on teaching the Bible and on teaching it without authority without apology is that our focus in our youth work in our churches we must trust God's work to do its work we could go on looking at each different area of church life but it is the teaching of the Bible the witnessing to the truth that is our task it is what Jesus set as the church's priority and purpose he promises to be with us in that task proclamation with power but it's also proclamation with perspective

Jesus gives us the right perspective on his kingdom about when we can expect it to really come so are we to expect God's restored kingdom now no the task of the church is not to build the restored kingdom now no but it is the task of the church to proclaim the kingdom now just look again at the apostles question in verse 6 and Jesus response the apostles ask him will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel that's their question in verse 6 and it's a good question they've seen all that Jesus has done they remember the promises of the Old Testament they were expecting a real king over a real kingdom in a real world and they wonder is that going to happen now and Jesus doesn't blow them out of the water with his response no he says in effect not yet he gives them the right perspective look at what Jesus says it's not for you to know times or seasons that the father has fixed by his own authority it's not for you to know that with Jesus' ascension with his ascension to the right hand of the father the restoration is only beginning it's not yet completed and it will only be completed when he returns when he comes again look at verse 11 the two men in white robes they say that this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven verse 11 hasn't happened yet we are still in the verse 8 days he hasn't yet returned in the same way that he ascended so says Jesus you're not to worry yourself about the complete and final restoration of God's kingdom that's not for now it is coming but that's not your concern now what is your concern now is verse 8 proclamation of God's kingdom that's what he goes on to say isn't it but you will receive power and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth the agenda now is not restoration the agenda now is proclamation they are to announce the kingdom and as we've seen it is Christ's spirit that gives them the power for that proclamation that was the task of the apostles and their witness was going to the end of the earth nothing would stop it nothing will stop it the gospel without hindrance the gospel to the end of the earth until he comes that is the age the apostles lived in and that is the age that we still live in the church today still faces that same task we're not about restoration we're about proclamation we're not about restoration because that will only happen can only happen in its true and full sense when Christ returns only then will there be a new heaven and a new earth only then will you and I have resurrected bodies only then will every tear be dried only then we'll be free from sickness and death our task now

[23 : 17] is proclamation it's witnessing to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ testifying to the historical facts of his life his death his resurrection his ascension his return it is testifying to those events and giving explanation pressing home the response repentance of faith that's our task so we we proclaim with the right perspective and so that means that we don't promise too much now we don't promise the sorts of things that can only be true when Christ returns so we don't promise healings now we don't promise freedom from sickness now we don't promise health and wealth now now you may well think there's not much danger of me falling for that for the prosperity gospel so blatantly not right but it holds great power it's what our itching ears want to hear it's what our clutching unsatisfied hearts leap for doesn't the world around us urge us to seek what brings happiness now isn't that what we hear all the time isn't that what we fight in our own hearts and in a sense those are right desires who doesn't want freedom from pain now who doesn't want comfort now but the thing is

Jesus doesn't promise those things yet yes one day we will be with him in a restored world a new Eden a new creation yes our hearts long for that but it's not yet we live for a postponed happiness we live for a genuine everlasting comfort in the new creation now we might experience foretaste of those things now but not fully not yet we don't promise too much now but we also don't promise too little for the future there is a great and wonderful future that awaits all who've trusted in Christ it is a real future it is guaranteed because of Jesus' resurrection it will be fully consummated one day when he returns so we're not to promise less than what the Bible does we don't promise too little for the future for what is coming it's wonderful we should proclaim that but with the right perspective not now but one day proclamation with power and with the right perspective we don't need to wonder about our task as

Christians we don't need to work out the content of our message we don't need to worry about the outcome these verses settle all those issues they assure us that Christ's spirit is with us with you with us as a church as we go about that task gospel progress gospel proclamation without hindrance to the end of the earth that is Christ's mission for his church so your task my task our task together is to keep proclaiming to keep witnessing to the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ to be as witnesses to the end of the earth he gives us his power his spirit for that very task so we do it in his strength and with his help let me pray father father it is a great and an awesome task that you call us to to be your witness to the end of the earth but we thank you that it is a task that you equip and enable us for so would you help us in that task we're so aware of our weaknesses and frailties of our shortcomings you promised to be with us in that task so please help us strengthen us by your spirit that we might honor and glorify you as we witness to you we ask it in Jesus name amen that you