

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

As has been my experience dozens of times before, I have a new favorite book of the Bible; so join me in the Book of Acts, if you will. I can't wait to continue to work our way through this book. We just got started last week, so we are taking our first steps into this adventure. Last week, I gave the title of the introduction to it as "Acts: The Saga Of Your Spiritual Family." These are our roots, if you will. This book records the seamless connection from the prophecies of the Old Testament (Lk. 24:44; Acts 26:22) to the arrival of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:1) to His ministry (Acts 10:38), His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-4), and then the continuation of His work on Earth in the era of the New Covenant (Matt. 16:18; cf. Is. 49:6; Eph.2:11-16; 3:4-6).

I heard someone musing on a radio program this week about when the New Covenant began. Well, it was first announced as a "New Covenant" through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31; it was described again by Ezekiel in Ezekiel Chapter 36. But it didn't *begin* then; it was a promise that it *would* come.

So, did it begin that night before Jesus went to the Cross, when He sat around the table and He instituted the Lord's Supper in place of the Passover, and He held up that chalice and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood"? (1 Cor. 11:25; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted) Did it begin when He said those words? Did it begin when He touched it to His lips? Did it begin that night, the next day? Did it begin when He shed His blood *on* the Cross, and *before* the Cross? Did it begin when He said, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30), and "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"? (Matt. 27:51) Or, did it begin when He rose from the dead? Or, did it begin in Acts Chapter 2, when the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:17)—which was so much a part of that promise (Ezek. 36:27)—actually came to pass? Or, did it begin later, as the Church began to grow and Jews and Gentiles were folded together into this new "body"? (Acts 11:17-18) Finally, we know that by the time of Second Corinthians, the Apostle Paul writes that they were "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6, ESV), and he contrasts the Old and the New.

Well, here's the point: *When* did it begin? Was it one of those points? Well, *yeah*—or *all* of them. It wasn't an instant. Well, now, in the mind of God, I'm sure there *was* an instant. Or, did the Old Covenant continue until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70?—and that was the *final* end of the Old Covenant (Matt. 23:38-38; 24:1-2), and now it's *only* New Covenant? The point is: Things do not change in an instant in real life with real people. Acts is the *history* of the *transition* from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant; approximately 30 years following Jesus is recorded in the Book of Acts. Our passage today includes what you can arguably say is the exclamation point on Jesus' life, when He ascended back to the Father from whom He came (Jn. 17:5).

Now, as we have jumped into the Book of Acts, you noticed last week that I labelled it Chapter 1, Verse 1, and you're thinking, "Oh, my goodness! There are 28 chapters, and he's going to go *one verse a week!*" No. This week, we are doing 11 verses. And where we can through the Book of Acts—since this *is* a historical book; it's a narrative, not an epistle, not primarily doctrine—I want to take the largest chunks we can logically take; and there will be places to slow down and do more spiritual mastication on some of the special parts, but we will see them as we get there.

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

But today, the first 11 verses of Chapter 1.

And here is an outline to hang your hat on:

Verses 1 and 2 refer back to Luke's Prequel.
Then Verse 3—Jesus' Presentation.
Verses 4 and 5—The Father's Promise.
Verses 6 through 8—Jesus' Prediction.
And Verses 9 through 11—Jesus' Promotion.

Well, first, we dealt with this in some detail last week; I just want to include it today because it is part of what we are dealing with. We covered it in detail last week with the introduction: Luke wrote a two-volume treatise. The Gospel of Luke is about the life of Jesus Christ through His ascension (Lk. 24:50-51); the Book of Acts is the next thirty years' history.

The initial target of this book was a Roman official, probably a regional governor named "Theophilus"; but it was included by God in the canon of Scripture for *all* of us (Deut. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; 3:2).

The first two verses say: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen."

So he describes the *entire* life of Christ as what He "began to do"; and so, Acts is "what He *continues* to do"—but it's a whole different era.

Then, there is mention of Jesus' Presentation: "To these"—that is, "to the apostles" and to others—"He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5-8) "Many convincing proofs" that He "rose from the dead" (Mk. 9:9; cf. Acts 2:24).

I would submit to you that the best way to convince somebody you are alive would be: Talk to them, meet with them, hang out with them. Well, "many convincing proofs"—all of His appearances after He rose from the dead are His "proofs" (e.g., Jn. 20:26-27; cf. Acts 2:32).

So I started looking for a way to portray that for you, and I found a really nice graphic presentation of the 40-day timeline of all of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances; and then I put it on a slide, and it would have looked to you like a picture that I drew in the Third Grade—you would not have been able to distinguish any of the detail of it. But if you want one, it is at the "Answers in Genesis" website; look up "Post-Resurrection Appearances"; it's a really well-done thing.

Well, with *my* graphic ability, *here's a list* of the times that Jesus appeared. These we know were His "many convincing proofs":

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

He appeared to Mary Magdalene, early Sunday morning, right at dawn (Jn. 20:11-18).

Then He appeared to the women who were returning from the tomb (Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:10).

Then He appeared to two disciples going to Emmaus that day—what an interesting story *that* is, and Luke recorded that for us (Lk. 24:13-35).

Then He appeared to Peter, later that same day (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

And then that evening, He appeared to ten of the other eleven Apostles; Thomas was not present at that meeting (Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-25).

Then the following Sunday, He appeared to all of the Apostles, with Thomas present (Jn. 20:26-29). Remember when they told Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn. 20:25), and he said, "Oh, yeah, yeah; I'll believe it when I can see the wounds"—and he *saw*; and remember what he said? "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28), and he fell at His feet.

And then He appeared to seven Apostles fishing on Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:1-23). He had told them to go up and wait for Him in Galilee; and they went up there and they waited, but they decided fishing is a good thing to do while you are waiting. There may have been some faith issues involved in that; but anyway, Jesus met them there and gathered them around.

Then He met with the eleven disciples in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-17).

Then, we are told He appeared to over 500 disciples at once (1 Cor. 15:6). We do not know the exact location; there is a lot of speculation about it, which proves that we don't know the exact location—and it doesn't really matter.

Then He appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Now, when we say "James," we do not mean "James the brother of John" (Acts 12:2), one of the "sons of Zebedee" (Mk. 10:35); and we do not mean "James the son of Alphaeus" in the list of the Apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13)—"James the Less" (Mk. 15:40). This is James, His half-brother (Gal. 1:19); this is the oldest of His half-siblings born naturally to Joseph and Mary (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:4; cf. Matt. 1:25; 12:46; Jn. 2:12). And Jesus had some very specific things to do with James, who became the de facto leader and spokesman of the church at Jerusalem for the first generation of believers there (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12).

And then He appeared—we are going to see it in our text today—to the Apostles at His ascension (Lk. 24:49-53; Acts 1:3-11).

And then—this not referred to in Acts Chapter 1, Verse 3, because these came later; but, speaking of "many convincing proofs," He appeared to Stephen, as he was martyred; we're going to see that in Acts Chapter 7 (vss. 55-56).

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

He appeared to Saul, on road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5; 22:6-8; 26:12-18; 1 Cor. 15:8); and that was the conversion of the Apostle Paul; we will see that in Acts Chapter 9.

And then, not in the Book of Acts, He appeared to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-20).

He rose from the dead! That's the point. And *no one* can refute it!

And as we go through the Book of Acts, you are going to see how fun it would have been to preach in that city, in that time, and be able to say, "That empty tomb over there"—and *everybody* knew where the tomb was, and *everybody* knew it was empty, and *nobody could refute it* (cf. Acts 4:16). "*Many convincing proofs!*"

Well, then we have reference to The Father's Promise: Verses 4 and 5—"Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem..." So first, He told them, "I will meet you in Galilee." They went to Galilee; He met with them there. Then He said, "Okay, go to Jerusalem," and now He meets with them again, and "He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" "Baptism" means "immersed"—"You will be *immersed* in the Holy Spirit; He will come upon you."

Now, interestingly, what is translated there "gathering them together"—it's one of those very unusual words; it only occurs *once* in the whole New Testament. When you have a word that only occurs once, you can't compare its usages in all of the other places to get its meaning. There are places outside the Bible where the core meaning of this word comes through as "eating with someone." You'll even find some English translations that say "while eating with them," rather than "gathering them together." It doesn't make *any* difference about the meaning of the passage, but the idea of Him eating with them more vividly portrays the reality that it was a *real* resurrected body, and He did real body-type things like eating and drinking and walking and talking, and all of that (cf. Luke 24:39). And from a reference that Peter makes in Acts Chapter 10, Verse 41, about having eaten with the risen Christ—that kind of supports that idea. And we know that He also fried some fish on the coast of the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:12-14). We don't know exactly when, but He ate; He had a real body. That's all I'm trying to say.

You can search back through the Gospels—and *especially* John [Chapters] 13, 14, 15, 16: Jesus' teaching with the disciples around the Passover meal—and you can see all the places that Jesus had stated the promise: "The Father will send the Holy Spirit after I am gone." And Jesus reiterated it again at this meeting, that that was going to happen.

As a matter of fact, in John 16:7—I was just looking at it this morning—He said, "It is to your *advantage* that I go away..." Now, they were not thinking, "Oh, yeah, we can't wait for You to go away!" They *didn't want Him to go away* (cf. Vs. 6). But He said, "It is to your advantage that I go away"—so that the Holy Spirit will be coming from "the Father" (Jn. 14:16, 26; cf. 15:26).

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

And then, remember John Chapter 7, where Jesus had said that out of your "innermost being will flow rivers of living water" (vs. 38)—and that refers to the Holy Spirit (vs. 39). It was another picture of that "promise" from "the Father." And so, it's all building.

And then comes Jesus' Prediction. We read through those first five verses last time. Now, look what Jesus is going to predict; it starts in Verse 6. The prediction isn't until 7 and 8, but look at Verse 6 with me: "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' "

That's a straightforward enough question; there is no *doubt* about what they were asking. But the *background* of that question is important. Luke recorded that on the day just before Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for what we call the Triumphal Entry (Lk. 19:28-46), He was teaching the people who were with Him; that would have included the Twelve, and whatever size entourage of other believers were walking along that road from Jericho up to Jerusalem. As far as the elevation change, it is almost identical if you were to walk from Heritage Bible Church to the top of Bogus Basin, so it was a big uphill climb; it was basically a two-day journey; a little less mileage from here to Bogus Basin, but it was a big deal, and people usually made it two days.

And while they were going along, He was teaching—as He always was: teaching, talking, answering questions. And Luke recorded this for us in Luke 19, Verse 11—"While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable..." I'm not going to teach you the parable—you can go look at it for yourself—but the parable is about people and their stewardship while the Master is away; He is trying to plant that idea in them, as He had in many of His parables. He was telling them "a parable, because He was near Jerusalem"—He knew what was going to be happening there; they didn't—"and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."

They believed they were on their way to Jesus' coronation for the Kingdom of God on Earth. They *knew* the Old Testament. They were *expecting* the Messiah (Ps. 110:1-2; Mic. 5:2). They understood that "Jesus" *is* "the Messiah" (Matt. 1:1, 17; cf. Jn. 4:25-26). And they knew that the Messiah would bring the Kingdom of God to Earth (Dan. 7:13-14). But, since the Old Testament does not make clear that there are *two separate comings* of the Messiah, they "supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."

So, this entire group could not yet understand that Jesus was going to Jerusalem, exactly according to the plan that He and the Father had (Acts 2:23), but it was *not* for His coronation; He was going to Jerusalem to *die* as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29; cf. Is. 53:7-8; 1 Cor. 5:7; Col. 1:20, 22).

Now, He *told* them *several* times that He was going to go there and be betrayed and arrested and beaten, and that He would be "killed" (Mk. 9:31), but that hadn't sunk in (Lk. 9:44-45). Their expectation of the immediate arrival of the Kingdom of God continued.

Now, when they got to Jerusalem, it was a *big deal*! We've studied it before, in Matthew and Mark and John, and someday maybe we will in Luke. It was quite a scene! There are

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

reasons why we call it the "Triumphal Entry." But the Kingdom did not come that day, so they were forced to wait.

They went to bed that night, with maybe a little bit of mixed feelings: "Glad to hear He was welcomed that way, but, no Kingdom. Well, I guess it'll be tomorrow!" Didn't happen the next day. Didn't happen the *next* day. When you get to Tuesday of the week before Jesus went to the Cross on Friday, they had gone through Monday and Tuesday, and Jesus had done a bunch of things in the Temple: He had chased out the money changers, He had answered a bunch of questions, He had dealt with a bunch of challenges, He had preached the Gospel, He had said so many interesting things; and by Tuesday evening, *still* no Kingdom!

They're leaving Jerusalem; they get as far as the Mount of Olives—it's a *spectacular* view of Jerusalem there—and Jesus said, "Look at that. Not one stone will be left on another." And so, Matthew 24:3—"As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately." He had been doing everything publicly, but they got Him alone, "came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when *will* these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' "

Well, they knew "the end of the age" would be the coming of the Kingdom (Dan. 12:13); that was how *they* had understood it all that time. And Jesus went on to begin to answer their questions; He explained a lot about the time and the events that will happen "immediately" before He returns in glory to set up the Kingdom (Matt. 24:29-30; 25:31-34). If you have been with us on Wednesday nights, he talked about the "Seventieth Week of Daniel"—a seven-year period leading up to His Second Coming (Dan. 9:27).

And then in the midst of that teaching—which goes on through Matthew Chapter 24—when you get to Matthew Chapter 24, Verse 36, and Jesus says: "But of that day and hour *no one knows*, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

Now, *surely* it *had* to be *starting* to sink in! They *still* weren't crazy about that "He's going to die" stuff; *that* they didn't figure out until it happened. But it seems that they probably thought something like, "Oh, I get it! We've been so impatient; we have already waited *days*. A few more days will be okay." They knew Friday was the Passover, and then seven days beyond that was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Maybe somewhere in *that* time frame.

But then, Jesus died. They were *crushed*. They "scattered" (Matt. 26:31); they hid; they prayed. John is the only one we know of that stayed with Him all the way to the Cross. That was a *horrible* weekend for them. And then, Jesus rose from the dead, and their elation was as unstoppable as their grief had been inconsolable.

But, Jesus didn't launch the Kingdom. Instead, He said, "Guys—meet Me in Galilee." "Oh, boy, another hike! Okay, we'll wait." He met them in Galilee, and then He said, "I'll meet you again in Jerusalem." Oh, boy. And then in Jerusalem, He said, "Now you have to wait for what the Father promised"—which has to do with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

Well, *forty long days* had gone by. They were *still* waiting! And when they got together, whether a meal was involved or involved or not, you can imagine how the question burned in their thinking: "Lord, is it at *this time* that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" And they were just *so ready!* (cf. Ps. 14:7; 53:6; 139:19-22; Is. 62:11)

Well, I don't think they were turning cartwheels over the answer that Jesus gave. Acts Chapter 1, Verse 7—"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know'—*Oh!*—"It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.' "

Now, understand: Jesus did *not* tell them they were *wrong* to be wanting the Kingdom, that there was going to be a literal earthly Kingdom! He did not try to disabuse them of that (cf. Lk. 22:29-30). The Old Testament predicted it (e.g., Ezek. 34:23-30; 37:24-28; Zech. 14:9-12, 16-21). He had been *specific* about it in the Olivet Discourse (e.g., Matt. 25:31-34). But they still needed to understand that that Kingdom was not beginning *that* day, or *any* day soon (cf. Matt. 25:5).

There is an interesting confluence of two words in that verse: "times" and "epochs"—and together, they paint quite a thorough picture.

The word "times" is the Greek word *chronos*, from which we get our words like "chronology," "chronometry," "chronometer," etc. It describes the sequence of time, as denoted by calendars and clocks and stopwatches and sunrises and sunsets. It refers to *specific* times, such as: Sunday mornings at 9 and 10:45 A.M.—that's the "chronology" or the "chronometry" of our worship schedule.

The word "epochs" is the Greek word *kairos*, which describes time in a different way. That's how you would say, "This is the right time to invest"; or if you were a fancy author, you might say, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times," or, "These are the times that try men's souls." This is "times" as in "*opportune* times"; or "blocks" of time—like...well, say, a thousand-year kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6).

So, you can't know the day it *begins*, and you can't know *when* that thousand years is going to happen.

Now, though we *do* know a lot about the features of the Kingdom of God when it will be instituted on Earth—we know things like: many aspects of the "curse" on the Earth will be lifted (Zech. 14:11); long lifespans will be restored (Is. 65:20); we say things like, "The lion will lie down with the lamb," without one of them being the other's lunch (cf. Is. 11:6; 65:25), the "child" will "play" by the "adder's den" and not be hurt (Is. 11:8, ASV); it is going to be a glorious, glorious time, and we know a lot about that—but we can't know the exact time of Jesus' return, and *that* is what will kick off that "epoch"; so that "time" will kick off that "epoch."

Now, that was not the answer those guys wanted to hear, but it was the answer they *needed* to understand. And even though they did not yet grasp it, the truth is: There was *going to be* an extended time between *then* and the arrival of the Kingdom, so Jesus told them what was going to happen. We have it as Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8:

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

"But"—now, the "but" is in contrast; you can't "know the times or the epochs" which have been "fixed" by the "Father"—"but you *will*"—so, there's one thing you *can* know; this *will* happen—"you *will* receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea"—the area around Jerusalem—"and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Oh, how they *wanted* to hear Jesus say, "Guys, it's next Tuesday," or, "Later tonight"! They wanted to know. They wanted to hear that the Kingdom was coming *right away*! But Jesus predicted something very different; in fact, He *mandated* it. Technically, Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, is *not* a command; it is a statement—a prediction of two *very* important things that will happen.

Number 1: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The eleven Apostles there had had a *taste* of that: Twice, Jesus had sent them out preaching; they had performed miracles in His name. They had a *sense* of what that Holy Spirit power was, and now He was going to be coming on everyone and remaining with them. We're going to see how that unfolds when we get to Chapter 2.

But He says: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Now it doesn't seem like in their memory banks they were replaying the words "I have to *go away* so the Holy Spirit can come." But He says: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

And, Number 2, He says: "You shall be My witnesses..." Now, they *expected* to be His *Co-Regents* with the Kingdom in place (Lk. 22:30); but *instead*, they were going to be going around giving testimony; they were going to be testifying to what they knew about Jesus—His life, His death, His resurrection, the Gospel, and the plan of God to build His Church that would eventually include Jews and Gentiles.

"Witnesses" are those who describe what they have "seen and heard" (Acts 4:20; 1 Jn. 1:3; cf. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39). If you have ever been a witness in a courtroom—or, you've surely seen it portrayed in movies or television—they put you under oath; you have to promise to tell the truth, and then they say, "Okay, on the date of such-and-such, in the place of such-and-such, what did you see so-and-so do? What did you hear?" And you describe it, and you tell the truth of what *you* know to be the case.

That is what our job is: We are to be witnesses to who Jesus is and what He accomplished (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Oh, and it is fine to throw in: "And by the way—He is coming back, and you have to deal with that." (cf. Acts 17:30-31; 2 Thess. 1:7-9)

The word "witness"—the Greek noun is *marturese*; the Greek verb is *martureo*. And because of what happened, mainly to early Christians who were faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, the word for "witness" has turned into our word "martyr"; a "martyr" is a person who is *killed* because of his or her beliefs (cf. Rev. 2:13).

Oh, and by the way: Guess what happened to the Apostles? John was the last one, and he may or may not have been violently put to death, but he was exiled.

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

At this point, notice that Jesus stated in advance what was going to happen; that's why I call it "Jesus' Prediction." Now, can you take this as a mandate, that it *is* our responsibility to go to "Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria...the remotest part of the earth"? Absolutely, you can. We *should*; that *is* our job description (e.g., Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Acts 22:15). But His followers on that day *did not* take it as a command. They *did not* start planning: "Okay, Guys, let's form a team. We need a team for Jerusalem. We need a bigger team to spread out to Judea. And guys, I know you don't like them, but *somebody* has to go to the Samaritans. And then comes the *big* one—we have to go to the 'remotest part of the earth,' and you know who lives there: *Gentiles!*"

They weren't *planning!* That was *not* a time of rejoicing for them. They wanted to hear: "The Kingdom is here! Take your throne next to Mine" (cf. Matt. 19:28). That's what they wanted. But there was going to be a plan that would last—well, we know of roughly 2,000 years, so far. We still live in Phase 3 of that plan.

And would you notice that Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8, is not only Jesus' Prediction of what was going to happen, it is the inspired outline of the Book of Acts. Two books of the New Testament have, if you will, one verse in each one of them that is the outline for the whole book. In Acts, it's this one. You have the Gospel going to "Jerusalem" and "Judea," and you have it going to "Samaria," and then to the Gentiles: the first seven chapters, then "Samaria" in Chapter 8, the Gentiles and "the remotest part of the earth" in Chapters 9 through 28. The other one—since you are wondering what it is—in the Book of Revelation it says "write" down these "things" (1:19): "the things which you have seen"—that's the vision of Jesus in Chapter 1; "the things which are"—that's Jesus' letters "to the seven churches" (1:4; 2:1-3:22); and then "the things which will happen after these things"—that's the rest of the Book of Revelation (4:1-22:21), which takes us all the way to the end of the story.

Finally, for today: Jesus' Promotion. Back in Luke—and here again is another part of this connection—Luke, in Luke 24:51, had already given a brief description of this event. Now, he is going to elaborate, so I call this the exclamation point on Jesus' life in His First Coming: Chapter 1, Verse 9—"And after He had said these things"—about the plan—"He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Now, I have had *thousands*, multiple thousands of conversations in my lifetime; not one has ever ended like that! I've had people go away laughing. I've had people go away mocking. I've had people go away offended. They've hung up on me, or they've cheerfully said, "Goodbye"; or they'll give you a handshake or a hug, and the conversation is over. He was just "lifted up"! Nobody has ever left like that before!

Well, there's Enoch and there's Elijah; they were the two in the Old Testament that are types, not of Jesus but of the Rapture, where God takes a believer, without dying, to be with Him (1 Thess. 4:17; cf. Jn. 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). In Enoch's case, it's just real run-of-the-mill: "Enoch...was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24); it doesn't give any description. In the case of Elijah, a *lot* more dramatic scene involving "a chariot of fire and horses of fire" (2 Ki. 2:11). And you know what music was playing—it was where the guys were running down the beach. A lot of people have watched that, haven't they?

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

Those are pictures of the Rapture. But they were taken without dying; Jesus had *died*, and He had risen again! This is His ascension. Here there are no chariots, no horses, no fire, no fanfare, no music; they're just talking, and "He was lifted up...and a cloud received Him."

It was *as dramatic* as Elijah's departure, but *this time*, God sent play-by-play announcers. Look at Verses 10 and 11—"And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them." Now those are angels; it's pretty obvious that they are angels (cf. Rev. 15:6). Picture the scene: Jesus is talking, they're looking at Him, He ends the sentence, and He's "lifted up," and their eyes are following Him, "and a cloud received Him out of their sight." So, "they were *gazing intently into the sky* while He was going." Yeah, I would have been, too! So, "These two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'"

So, two angels show up: "Men of Galilee, why are you staring into the sky?" "Men of Galilee," by the way, is quite accurate; because, of the Twelve Apostles, only Judas was *not* from Galilee; and he had killed himself by then (Matt. 27:5), so yeah, "Men of Galilee"—that's *exactly* right. But *every time I read this*, I can't help but think that the *silliest* question in all the Bible is: "Why do you stand looking into the sky?" I'm *pretty sure* I know what *I* would have said! "*Because Jesus just went there!* Where do you expect us to be looking? *Of course* we're staring into the sky!"

Now, we can see the glory in this, but just try to *imagine* what the disciples were feeling and thinking when that happened. I'll bet you that *three* of them were having a flashback, because "Peter and James and John" had been there at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1); they had *seen* the glory (2 Pet. 1:16), they had *seen* that blinding light, they had *heard* the voice: "This is My beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5)—they had heard that voice from Heaven. I bet Peter and James and John expected that, "As soon as these two angels hit the dimmer switch, Jesus is going to be standing here; we might hear a voice from Heaven!" But that didn't happen.

All eleven of them had to be gut-punched. Even the angel said, "This Jesus, who has been *taken up from you*"—He was with you; He has been "taken...from you into heaven." What a gut-punch for them! He was *everything* to them! They had given up "everything" and "followed" Him (Matt. 19:27). They had been sent out *twice* to preach at His command, and they had done miracles in His power. Surely they had to be thinking, "How can we *possibly* go on without Him?"

And remember what had been *constantly* on their minds now for over a month—they *ached* to see "the kingdom of God" launched on Earth (Acts 1:3). They *expected* it as they went up to Jerusalem for the Triumphal Entry. They waited patiently; they were *still* expecting it when they got the Olivet Discourse instead; they *still* expected it—and then He had died, and then He had risen again, and they were still expecting it, they were still yearning for it.

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

As I said, John is the only one we know of the Twelve that actually stayed nearby Jesus all the way to the Cross. Remember, Jesus handed off the care of His mother to the Apostle John (Jn. 19:26-27).

It's hard to imagine how *crushing* it was for them, as they had scattered and hid that night. Some of those believing women had followed Jesus all the way; they were rewarded with being the first to see Him after the resurrection.

And I think especially of one of the ones that we know was there; we are going to see her mentioned by name, Lord willing, next week: His mother, Mary, saw this.

About 33 years earlier, when she and Joseph had dedicated Jesus in the Temple—remember, they took Him there. Oh, yeah, and guess who recorded this? Luke. They heard some amazing words from a man named "Simeon" (Lk. 2:25), who had been told that he was going to get to see the Messiah before he died (vs. 26). Luke 2:34-35—"And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed...' You are going to "fall" if you don't follow Him (Jn. 8:24); you are going to "rise" if you do follow Him (Jn. 5:24). And then Simeon says to Mary, "and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.' "

What a unique role in history Mary played. Her "soul" was "pierced." I've seen parents when a child dies, even an adult child. Children are not supposed to die before their parents! It's a *soul-piercing* thing. She had watched her son die on a Cross. And He is the only "innocent" man that was ever executed (Heb. 7:26; cf. Is. 53:9; Matt. 3:17; Jn. 8:29, 46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18).

Then she had the elation of seeing Him after the resurrection. Now, this! She was part of that group that believed the Kingdom of God was coming immediately. What could *she* have been thinking? We will never know, until we meet her, and we can ask in person.

But that isn't the point here. Look again at Verse 11—"This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, *will come* in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." The point is that He is coming again. How did He go into Heaven? Physically, literally, visibly, in *plain sight*. He is going to come in the same way.

Oh, but when you read it in Revelation 19, and you can also read the description in Matthew Chapter 24, Verses 29 through 31: He is going to turn out every single light in the Universe; and I don't know how this works with a spherical world, but *everybody* is going to see Him—*everybody* is going to see Him in His glory! (Rev. 1:7; cf. Matt. 24:27)

He "*will come* in just the same way as you have watched Him." You were looking up; you watched Him go into the clouds. When He comes for His Church, He's going to come into "the clouds" and receive us to Himself (1 Thess. 4:17), and we will be with Him. Seven horrible years will go by on Earth (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:21), and then He will come again (Rev. 19:11-21), and then will come "the kingdom" (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 20:4-6).

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

We can put all those pieces together as we move along, but the point is that now, we have a God-given, Spirit-empowered task to do until Jesus comes for us: We are to be His "witnesses." It is our calling, it is our privilege, it is our *duty* to give testimony: "Speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), declaring the "good news" (Acts 8:12)—"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Rom. 5:8-10; Heb. 2:9).

And in the meantime, it is *just fine*—as a matter of fact, it's a *good thing* for us to pray: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). We need to yearn for that Kingdom *just as much* as those people did (1 Thess. 1:10).

Paul, at the end of his life, wrote this in Second Timothy Chapter 4, Verse 8—"In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have *loved His appearing*."

I *love* to think about Him appearing! (cf. 2 Pet. 3:12) Someday, we will hear a "trumpet" and the "voice" of an "archangel"—"Then we who are alive and remain" will be *snatched up* to be with Him! (1 Thess. 4:16-17) Oh, wow! I hope it's before the end of this service!

But as long as we know people—or we even know *about* people anywhere in the world—who have not yet dealt with the Gospel, we have a job to do (cf. Mk. 6:12; Acts 26:20).

And unlike the Apostles that day, we are blessed to have the *rest* of the New Testament. We *know* how all of this is going to play out! We don't know the "day," we don't know the "hour" (Matt. 24:36); but we know it is coming, and *we know the end of the story!*

If you go to the last chapter of the Bible—Revelation Chapter 22—listen to Verses 16 and 17, and then down to Verse 20—"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches"—the "seven churches" that that's addressed to (Rev. 1:4), and *all* the churches of all the places in all times—"I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

It goes all the way back to the promise of the Kingdom! He is going to reign on the "throne" of "David" (Ps. 132:11; Is. 9:7; Lk. 1:32) in "Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:3, 5; Zech. 14:16-17). "I *am* the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

And by the way, notice: "I am *the root* of David *and the descendant* of David." Well, what is He saying? Is He *eternal* or something? Yeah (Mic. 5:2a; Jn. 17:5; Heb. 13:8; cf. Matt. 22:41-45). He says: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' " That's us! Tell people: "Come to the Lord" (cf. Acts 2:40) "And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." John Chapter 7—"From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water" (vs. 38).

And then skip down to Revelation 22:20—"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Sermon Title: You Shall Be My Witnesses
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1-11 (Acts #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 1-15-23

Let's pray:

Father, what more can we say than, "Come, Lord Jesus"? Please, our Father, let us understand the seriousness of our responsibility to be faithful witnesses, and let us know the joy of seeing souls harvested by the Gospel. Have Your way with us to that end. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Amen.