



**The Mission**  
**Acts 1:1-11**

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas  
©Monty Watson, August 19, 2018

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“The Bucket List” is a movie about a billionaire and an auto mechanic who share a room in the hospital. They have nothing in common except that both are terminally ill. This odd couple ponders the short time they have left and come up with a “bucket list,” a list of things to do before they “kick the bucket.” They set out on an adventure to experience every thrill imaginable. The billionaire and the auto mechanic help each other face death and squeeze the most out of their last days.

We’ve all thought about things we’d like to do before we “kick the bucket.” I’d love to take a European vacation or write a book. Maybe you’d like to take a family vacation to the Grand Canyon or second honeymoon to Hawaii, go to a favorite sporting event like the Final Four or the Masters, learn to fly a plane or run a marathon. Or maybe your “bucket list” is less glamorous. Before you “kick the bucket,” you’d be satisfied just to clean out the garage or sleep in on Saturday morning.

It’s okay to dream about adventure. It’s more than okay, even worshipful, to enjoy God’s creation and all He has put in the world. But the goal of this one and only life is not to experience a personally thrilling life. Rather, the goal of this one and only life is to experience a spiritually fulfilling life, a life in personal relationship with our Creator and a life of service to our Savior. For us, as Christians, life is not about what we extract from the world, but how we impact the world. It’s not about thrills, it’s about significance. And for us, as Christians, true significance is found in answering the call of God on our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Os Guinness writes that “answering the call of our Creator is ‘the ultimate why’ for living, the highest source of purpose in human existence.”<sup>2</sup> Responding to this calling, he says, is offering “everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have” to God.<sup>3</sup>

“Personally summoned by the Creator of the universe, we are given a meaning in what we do that flames over every second and inch of our lives. Challenged, inspired, rebuked, and encouraged by God’s call, we cannot for a moment settle down to the comfortable, the mediocre, the banal, the boring. The call is always to the higher, the deeper, the farther ... The call of God jerks us wide awake ... Calling is the supreme motivation, the ultimate ‘why.’”<sup>4</sup>

So, what is our calling? And who is calling? The invitation comes from the one who, on the cross, absorbed everything we deserved for everything we’ve ever done wrong. The invitation comes from the one who really died, was really buried, and really rose again. The invitation comes from the one who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God.<sup>5</sup> The invitation comes from the one who has been exalted and given a name above every name, that at His name, one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is the one who is calling us. He is our “ultimate why.” And the call on our lives is found in Acts 1.

This morning, we begin a fall series in the book of Acts. The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. The book includes incredible stories of faith. So who were these first Christians? What inspired them? And what sparked a movement?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ! They heard His teaching, they witnessed His miracles, and they were there when He was horribly crucified. And amazingly, they saw Him alive again, proving He is the Son of God and proving that everything He said is true. They were convinced. And they were compelled to proclaim it. At great risk, they courageously talked about Jesus everywhere they went, and many of them died for doing so.

***They were convinced it was true, they were compelled talk about it, and they were courageous to take stand at great risk.*** And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage. ***The story continues, and it includes us, and it's still about Jesus.***

#### THE STORY CONTINUES, AND IT'S STILL ABOUT JESUS

The book of Acts was written by Luke, a doctor and a companion of Paul. Luke wrote one of the four gospels about Jesus; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His gospel was about the life of Jesus and the book of Acts is about the birth of the Church, about the lives of the first Christians. Both Luke's gospel and his book of Acts were written to a man named Theophilus. Called "most excellent Theophilus" suggests he was some honorable figure, perhaps a government official. Luke writes as a careful historian, motivated to preserve the story of Jesus and the story of the early church. In reality, the book of Acts is incomplete. It's still being written today. Each generation of Christians adds another chapter, and we are living and writing our chapter.

"In my former book, Theophilus," a reference to Luke's gospel, "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" (Acts 1:2-3, NIV).

Notice the three great events of Jesus' life. Notice the history and the drama of these events. This book is about the people who were there, who were eyewitnesses. "His suffering" refers to His crucifixion, to the horrible execution of Jesus as He was nailed to a Roman cross. "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive." After such a horrific death, Jesus rose from the dead. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. And the phrase "taken up to heaven" refers to His ascension. They were eyewitnesses of the three great events in the life of Jesus – crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

These first Christians heard His teaching and they witnessed His miracles. They were moved by His words and amazed by His wonders. And they followed Him. But then their faith was devastated by the cross. They were there. They stood there watching Jesus bleed and suffer and die. Again, they were devastated. But on Sunday morning, the impossible happened. They looked inside the tomb and to their surprise it was empty. He was not there! And over the period

of 40 days, they saw Him several times, proving He was alive! And on the Mount of Olives, they heard His last words. And then they watched His feet lift from the ground as He ascended into heaven. They were there. They were eyewitnesses.

And that's why *they were convinced, they were compelled, and they were courageous*. And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage. The book of Acts continues to be written; every generation adds their chapter to the book. We are living and writing our chapter. *The story continues, and it includes us, and it's still about Jesus*.

### THE MISSION CONTINUES, AND IT'S UP TO US

And here are His last words before He ascended into heaven. "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" (Acts 1:8, NIV).

This is the theme verse of the book of Acts. This is the mission of the church. This is mission of every follower of Jesus Christ. To "go and make disciples of all nations," as Jesus said in Matthew 28. To "go into all the world and proclaim the gospel," as He said in Mark 16. This is the Great Commission. Jesus is calling us to join a long line of followers and take the Gospel to the entire world.

If this is not the mission of our church, then our church is not fully devoted to Jesus Christ. If this is not my mission and your mission, then we are not fully devoted to Jesus Christ.

Again, they were witnesses.

Under threat of being beaten Peter declared, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). He was flogged for saying it. Paul said, "I am obligated ... I am so eager to preach the gospel ... (and) I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:14-16, NIV). He was eventually beheaded for it. And John, the only apostle to escape martyrdom, reminisced when he was 90 years old, "The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ ... he is the one who is eternal life ... We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard" (1 John 1:1-3, NLT).

Historian Michael Green writes about the passion of the early Christians. "They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. (The gospel was) the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God's love (and wanted) to pour it out on a needy world. They (embraced) the Great Commission. They sought to penetrate society with the gospel which had such a profound effect upon them ... It affected everything they did and everyone they met ... In the early days, the quality of their lives was blazingly distinct."<sup>7</sup> I love that. "Blazingly distinct."

Again, they were witnesses, and so are we. Not philosophers or professors or even theologians. First and foremost, we are witnesses. A witness in a courtroom is sworn to tell the truth about what they have witnessed. Our witness is not based upon hearing Jesus with our own ears or seeing Him with our own eyes. Our witness is based upon our experience of hearing the Gospel as recorded in the Bible and Jesus penetrating our hearts. We bear witness to that experience. And Jesus is just as real to us as He was to those who heard and saw Him in person. We are “witnesses” of the love and grace of Jesus. And witnesses must tell what they have seen and heard.

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8, NIV). He told them to stay in Jerusalem until they were “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). He said, “John baptized you with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5).

Jesus knew that the Christian life would be difficult. That’s why the Holy Spirit is called “the Helper.”<sup>8</sup> That’s why Jesus left a part of Himself to be with us and in us. The Bible says, “You are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16, NAS).<sup>9</sup> Jesus calls us to live Spirit-filled lives. He promised, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

Power to do what? Jesus said, “Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father” (John 14:12, NLT). “Even greater works.” The Spirit-filled life means living with supernatural potential, no longer relying on our ability. As we will see next week in Acts 2, we have been empowered to accomplish the mission. Living the Spirit-filled life is living with expectation, anticipating what God will do next. It’s living with a confidence and boldness and courage that only comes from God.

And with that boldness, we are to take the gospel across the street and to the “ends of the earth.”

Coca-Cola is the most famous brand in the world. You can buy a Coke anywhere in the world, except North Korea. Some 1.9 billion drinks are consumed every day around the world. Coke is everywhere. It’s advertised in bright lights in Times Square and on double-decker buses in London. It is distributed in the jungles of South America and by donkeys in Morocco. Coke is sold from bicycles in Africa and from walking vending machines in China. Everyone loves Coke, from Tibetan monks to camels. The Coca-Cola brand is worth \$79 billion. And except North Korea, you can drink a Coke anywhere in the world.

The church’s mission is to do what Coke has done. To take our product to every country in the world. But we’re not selling sugar water. The mission of the church is to take the Gospel to the entire world, and every Christian plays a role in that mission. ***The mission continues, and today, in our generation, it’s up to us.***

## CONCLUSION

Every page of the book of Acts points to Jesus. Every story, every speech, every miracle, every person. They were witnesses, and so are we. There is one statement in Francis Chan’s book

*Crazy Love* that defines the Christian life, when he says, “The point of your life is to point to Him.”<sup>10</sup> That describes the life of the early Christians in the book of Acts.

***They were convinced it was true, they were compelled to talk about it, and they were courageous to take a stand at great risk.*** And these first Christians are our mentors. We need their 1st century passion for our 21st century world. May their passion revive our passion. May their faith revive our faith. May their courage revive our courage. This fall, as we walk through the book of Acts, the goal is that we would love Jesus more deeply, that we would follow Him more diligently, that we would worship Him more passionately. The book of Acts continues to be written; each generation adds their chapter to the book. We are living and writing our chapter. ***The story continues, and it includes us, and it’s still about Jesus.***

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This invitation, Dallas Willard adds, is an invitation “into the heart and life of God.” [Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), page 11.]

<sup>2</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998, 2003), page 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., page 144.

<sup>5</sup> See Psalm 110:1, Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 1:3, 1 Peter 3:22.

<sup>6</sup> See Philippians 2:9-11.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 2003), pages 17, 20.

<sup>8</sup> See John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7, 13.

<sup>9</sup> “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you” (Romans 8:11, NLT).

<sup>10</sup> Francis Chan, *Crazy Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), page 44.