The Apostles

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: 29 January 2017

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0:00] So this is the second sermon in our series on the book of Acts. And the book of Acts is the Gospel of Luke part two. And the basic idea in the book of Acts is that because Jesus is alive, because Jesus has been resurrected, He continues to minister.

And the book of Acts, the question is how does He continue to minister? And in verse 8, which is the thesis statement of the book of Acts, it says that Jesus continues to minister by commissioning the church, by sending us to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
And the book of Acts is outlined in exactly that way, the ministry to Jerusalem, Judea, to Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. And the book of Acts ends abruptly. There's no ending, because we're still taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.
And so the book of Acts is about Jesus' ministry through us, through the church. And the question in this part, you know, when you read this passage once through, there's... It's like, okay, I don't really know what to take from this passage.
It's just the choosing of a new apostle. But in this passage, there are lessons that will help equip us, or equip the church, to carry on the mission, the thesis of the book of Acts.
[1:10] And these lessons are for all of who you are, your whole person. So you're, as a human being, you think, you know things, use your mind, you feel, you have emotion, you feel things, and you act. You do things.

You move, you speak, right? You know, you feel, and you act. And this passage has a lesson for each aspect of who we are when we go on mission.
There's something we should know or think, there's something we should feel, and there's something in this passage that we should do. Okay, so as we prepare for our mission, we're going to look at those three things. First, what should you know, or what should you think?
And the answer, the reason Callum read the preceding two verses to give context, is because you can't understand this passage without understanding something of the ascension.
That's the context. And the answer is, what should you know to be a person on mission? And the answer we're given is you should understand the times. You should understand the time you live in.
[2:12] In other words, you should have a Christian worldview. Your brain should be wired towards a Christian worldview. Now, what do we mean by this? Verse 12 is the first moment of the church without Jesus.

This is it. It's the first moment of the church with no Jesus in bodily form before them. And there's 50 days between the resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost, which we'll preach on next week.
But in between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, there's 10 days. And there's this very unique 10-day period in the history of redemption. And that's what we're looking at here.
And the 10-day period begins with an existential crisis, which we read about in verse 11. So Jesus ascends in verse 10 into heaven. And we know, we're 2,000 years in, and we have the rest of the New Testament.
And we know what the ascension is about. The ascension is God's pronouncement of victory. The word ascension has a double meaning to it.
[3:22] So, of course, you can think of an ascension as somebody, as Jesus literally raising up into the heavens, right? Which means just literally the air, not heaven as God's kingdom.

But there's another meaning for the word ascension. And you know it, right? Because if you guys have seen the show, The Crown on Netflix, you saw an ascension. Queen Elizabeth ascended. Ascension is a word for a coronation. And when she walked down the steps, walked down the Isle of Westminster Abbey, she walked up five steps and ascended onto the throne.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

And that's exactly what the ascension is. It's Jesus going up, but it's Jesus going up to his coronation. It's God's pronouncement that everything that Jesus did really does matter, that it was a victory.
And that now that he's taking his place at God's right hand side, he can apply Jesus' benefits to us. That's the ascension. That's what he does in verse 10.
[4:22] But in verse 11, there's a crisis. There's a crisis of confidence. The start of the church is a crisis of confidence. In verse 11, it says that the disciples are left there gazing up into the heavens, looking up, staring, right?

And Derek alluded to this last week at the end of his sermon. The disciples' entire lives have been turned upside down by this man. And they've been traveling with him for a little more than three years now.
And now there's a wonder, there's an amazement at his victory, but there's also a worry and a lostness. They feel lost because they don't know what it looks like to be Christians without Jesus' physical presence with them.
You see, they're having to move from a position of sight to a life of faith sight. And that's exactly the life we live in, the life of faith sight.
We don't see him physically. We live by faith sight, not sight. And so we're living, although this is a unique period in history, there's something that's the same for us in this period.
[5:35] We both live by faith sight. And so this angel, as they're looking into heavens, the angel comes and says to them, Why are you staring? This very same Jesus who went up is coming back down in the same way that he went up.

This very same Jesus. Now, here's the first lesson, what you need to know. This is a time of victory and it's a time of uncertainty.
And that's exactly where we live. We live in a time of victory where Jesus Christ has indeed killed sin, death is on its deathbed, and we live in a time of uncertainty where we still sin and where we don't see him.
And it causes doubt sometimes. And that's exactly where the disciples were. And here's the lesson. The disciples are saying this, and that one little phrase, Jesus went up and Jesus will come down again.
They're saying this, you have to reorient your entire view of history according to this man. In other words, what has just taken place is revolutionizing your entire view of what history is about.
[6:41] Jesus went up and the same Jesus is going to come back down. In other words, the angels are appealing to the doctrine of the first and second advent of Christ.

The first advent of Christ we celebrate in December is his incarnation. And it's the whole of what he did. Incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, all five phases of Jesus' life, that's the first advent.
But now they've given us, for the first time in history, very clearly, a second advent. They've changed our view of time, of where we're going, of what's coming up for us in the future.
And that's exactly what they left the disciples to wrestle with at this extremely uncertain moment in their lives. It was an existential crisis. What do we do without this guy? Now, I've used this illustration before, three times, twice, I think this is the third.
But I'm going to use it again because the Bible keeps saying the same stuff over and over again, believe it or not. One day, when you finally make it and you have all the money you can possibly want in the world, and you go to build your dream house, and you go to, maybe it's the Highlands, maybe it's the South of France, maybe it's the Florida Keys, wherever it is, you go to build your dream house, and you're going to build, we're going to build our house, Southern, Southeast style from America, and that's a wrap-around porch all the way around, the old style.
[8:15] And we've laid the foundation, we've put up the two by fours, the porch is there, but one of the things you have to do before you can make it livable is that you have to go underneath and you have to put in the plumbing.

And that's a dirty job, and it's a mess at a building site. And you're building it yourself, and I've done a little bit of this, and some of you have too. And every day you walk down the stairs into the basement, and you start to put the plumbing in, and you hate it.
And if you've ever turned your house into a workspace, which some of you right now are in that situation, you know that you end up waking up every morning and saying, why in the world did I do

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

this? This is terrible.
And that's exactly how you start to feel about your life. So what do you do? Well, when it comes to sunset, you walk up the steps, you sit on the porch, you pull out a beautiful glass of red wine, and you look at the sunset in the Florida Keys.
And the next day, you're able to walk right back down the steps and start putting in the plumbing again. You see, the vision of the future, what sits on the horizon of your sight, even if it's not already present for you in this life, makes a difference on how you live, on how you see your mission, on how you see what you're doing.
[9:39] And at this moment when the angels say to all the church of all the history, look, you thought that this was the only coming of the Messiah, but there's a second one. They've completely reoriented our entire vision of history. We're used to it, but this is new for them.

And what they've said is, look out onto the future of the horizon, and until you see that man coming with the sun in the clouds, you're going to have to go downstairs and work on the plumbing. You have a mission.
And look out into the future. This is your motivation. Now, it's hard for us to realize in the 21st century how much that verse 11, the ascension, and the pronouncement of the second coming was a revolution for the way all of humanity understands history.
So for instance, at that time, one of the most popular ways of thinking about history was the Greek way. And many of you will be familiar with the Greek way, or you'll immediately recall it, of understanding history.
And one way to illustrate it is through the Sisyphian tragedy. So if somebody calls you a Sisyphian, it's not a pejorative necessarily. It means it's about futility. So Sisyphus, you'll remember, was doomed by the gods his whole life to push a rock up a hill.
[11:01] And then when the rock gets to the top of the hill, what happens? It rolls right back down. And Sisyphus is forced to walk back down the hill, push the rock up again. The Greeks viewed time as cyclical in that way. Everything is futile. Everything you do in life is futile.

And they said, look, Sisyphus is the sun. The sun comes up every day. It goes down every day. Sisyphus is getting up at 7 a.m. every day and going to work and doing the same what we call today, the daily grind, right?
It's a cyclical view of time. You do cycles and cycles and cycles and then you die and then somebody else does the cycle. That was the Greek way of viewing time. There's also a modern way of viewing history.
And that history is ultimately progress, right? So in our progressive view of history today, we think that every century people are getting better and better in two ways.
Because of technology, we can control our lives better so we can make life easier until we get to the point where we can live forever. That's the ultimate hope, a human utopia where humans can upload their consciousness, for instance, onto a computer.
[12:13] And no joke, this is being worked on as we speak in places like Silicon Valley. It's an ultimate human utopia of progress. And the other aspect of progress is the human ethic that we keep getting better and better, treating each other better and better.

And eventually war will cease, conflict will cease, and we'll all just love each other and be tolerant, right? Those are two, that's the ancient view of progress, ancient view of history and the modern view of history.
Christianity comes in and says something totally different. In verse 11, this one little verse, Jesus is coming back again. You have a mission. You see, the reason us moderns view life as progress is because of a distortion of the Christian view of history.
Christianity introduced the idea of progress into history. But the progress is of the gospel going to the ends of the earth until Jesus establishes a final kingdom.
That's the true view of progressive history, right? Set against the modern view. One, in the Christian view, it's a kingdom of God that we look forward to in the future.
[13:16] In the modern view, it's a kingdom of humans, of a human utopia where humans live longer and are nicer to one another. The 20th century busted that bubble. The 20th century had the most wars in all of recorded history that we know of and the most deaths from war.

There are 31 armed conflicts or wars being fought today as we stand here. Progress hasn't happened like that, but the Christian idea of progress remains true.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

Look, here's the difference. The Christian worldview offers a hope in history. If you subscribe to the Greek view or the modern view, all you end up is making your life a little longer at best and then you die.
That's what the modern view of history offers. That's the utopia. The Christian view of history says that there is a kingdom. A kingdom where death will be no more and where there will be no more tears.
It's only in this Christian worldview this very same Jesus who has come will come again. That's your Christian worldview that you can truly have any hope and that's what you have to know.
[14:29] That's what you have to think. That's how you have to have your world oriented if you want to be on mission. Now, that's what you need to know. Secondly, what do you need to feel?

The answer that we're given in this passage from verse 12 to 14 is that you need to feel inadequacy. You need to know a Christian worldview that Jesus is coming again and you need to feel totally inadequate to the task in order to do it.
So immediately as soon as Jesus goes up into heaven and the angels say, stop looking up there and get busy with the job, the first thing they do to get busy is they go back down the mountain of all of that into Jerusalem, into an upper room, which would have been a second floor of a building and they pray.
And they pray. In other words, well, let me say this as well. Luke thinks that this scene is so important that he records it twice. He records it also in Luke chapter 24. And in Luke 24, when after Jesus ascended, they come back down into Jerusalem and it says that they were worshiping in the temple day by day in this 10 day period.
So the two things we know that they did in this 10 day period where they went and huddled up together in an upper room and they prayed 120 of them. And then they went to the temple and worshiped God for the ascension.
[15:55] So in other words, prayer and worship, that twofold matrix. Prayer and worship, as soon as you enter into those activities, are the pronouncement of your inadequacy before God.

You see, the very act of just saying, Father, and entering into prayer is a pronouncement before God that you are inadequate to the task. It's saying that you must depend, that you need something outside of you, some resource outside of you to help you.
And as soon as they've been given this mission in verse 8 and as soon as Jesus ascends into heaven and the angels say, get busy. The only thing they know to do is to depend. Prayer and worship, they feel totally inadequate to the task.
You know, Jesus felt this way. Jesus, the perfect God, meant he felt this way. At every single major moment of his ministry, when he felt like he might not could go on, he went and he prayed.
He depended to the Father. He went up this very mountain in the Garden of Gethsemane just 40 days before this and said, oh Lord, would you let this cup pass for me?
[17:16] It's human nature. He was human like we were. And he had to depend. He felt inadequate. Even on the cross, as he was being crucified, he prayed to the Father four times.

Father, I commend myself to you. Why have you forsaken me? Forgive them. You see, the fact of Jesus constant dependence on the Father, the constant feeling of his need for help from the Father is exactly his perfection.
Not sin. And so in the same way, the first thing the disciples do when they lose this victorious Jesus, this ascended Christ, is they feel inadequate.
And that's exactly what they should have done. It's part of being righteous. It's feeling like you don't have the resources. We said a couple weeks ago when I was preaching on prayer, in Romans 8.15, it says that the Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are children of God.
And because of that, when we believe we're adopted, sons and daughters, it says that we cry out, Abba, Father. And if you were there for that Sunday morning, we said that Abba is the Aramaic word, not for Father.
[18:33] When it says Abba, Father, that's too precise. That's the way a seven-year-old would speak to their dad. But that's not what's being said. Abba is the Aramaic word for Dada.

It's exactly what all of our kids do when they're little. It's exactly what some of you are called, Mama, Dada, Papa, Mima, whatever strange grandma name you might have.
That's exactly what the Spirit testifies to us. And that's exactly what the disciples felt. Righteousness is not maturing unto the point of not needing.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

It's maturing unto the point of saying, more and more, Papa, Dada. It's the little girl that reaches up her arms to her dad and says, hold me, carry me. And that's the only thing they need to do.
We don't know how to fulfill this mission, so we must feel inadequate. We must completely depend.
When I was in seminary, one of my professors always would say, he would tell this, he would ask, what characterizes the Christian above all?
[19:42] What two words? And his answer was humble confidence. Humble confidence. You see, Christians, because they know how inadequate they are, because they know themselves sinners, because they depend in prayer and worship, ought to be the most humble people in the world.

And precisely because they depend on the ascended Christ at the very same time, the most confident. And so everybody functions in their mission out into the world to go to the ends of the earth with this attitude of humble confidence, not insecurity and not competition and not overbearing or self mastery or domination, but humility and confidence.
Because of the ascension, because you depend on a victorious Christ. Alright, so what should you know? You should know that you're situated between the first and second coming, and your mind has to think like that.
What should you feel? A total inadequacy at your calling, the mission, so you go and cling to prayer and worship. And thirdly and finally, this passage teaches us what we should do.
And this one's a bit more specific. The thing that we're taught in this passage that we should do is prepare our leadership. Prepare our leadership.
[21:03] There was no going forward starting in verse 15 on, there's no going forward with the mission without replacing Judas, without replacing the lost apostle.

Let me just say briefly address something that quite often comes up in chat about this passage. And that's why if you read the Gospels, if you read Matthew in particular, you'll know that there are different accounts of Judas' death between Matthew chapter 27 in this passage.
So in Matthew chapter 27, it says that Judas hung himself. And also that the Pharisees bought the field that he was hung in.
And in this passage, we have something different, especially the fact that it says Judas fell headlong, head down, and his bowels burst open in the field. So a lot of people, there was one commentator I was reading, a critical commentator, that said there's no way to reconcile these two accounts.
But most commentators in the academy and in the church both say the same thing, and that's that there's really no problem. Probably what's at play here is simply that we're not given the whole story.
[22:16] And the rest of the story was more than likely that Judas hung himself in the field, that just like every other body would do, he started to decompose and bloated, and that at some point after so many days, he broke from the noose.

And it was a gory mess on the ground, right? And it's a very simple reconciliation of these two passages. But that's quite often two passages that people will want to push against the Bible on, and so it's important to have something of an answer for that.
But there's no going forward without replacing this man. And so what they do is they prepare their leadership for the mission. Now, what was their leadership?
These are apostles, and this is a unique moment in history, and it's a unique office, and it's never been perpetuated since. What's an apostle?
We're given it right in this passage from verse 21 and 22. It says, apostle must have accompanied Jesus the whole time during his ministry, and apostle must have been a witness, literally a physical witness to his resurrection.
[23:29] These are the ultimate leaders of the church. They're not the same thing as elders and deacons. Elders and deacons do not have the authority of the apostles, and we learn in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says this to the Corinthians, if anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I'm writing is the Lord's command.

If he ignores this command, he himself will be ignored. In other words, what Paul is saying is, no matter how eloquent or popular or how much leadership any one person conveys in the church, if they say anything that's not in alignment with what the apostles have spoken, what Paul says, what I have already told you, then he should just simply be ignored.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

And you know what that means? It means that all of us are equal. That elders and deacons are simply people that have been recognized with particular gifts given by the Holy Spirit to lead all of us in the same exact ministry that we all do, the ministry of word and deed, of proclamation and mercy.
All of us have been called to it, and elders and deacons are simply people who have been given particular gifts to help lead in that, but we're not apostles. And so if any elder or deacon or any other person in the church comes and says to you, God told me that you should do X, Y, or Z, then it should always be checked by the Scripture.
There's no strain on your consciousness. You're totally free. John Calvin pronounced this in the Reformation that the main idea of the Reformation is that every single individual has a free conscience before the text, before the Scripture.
[25:05] It's our only judge, except if you're listening to the apostles, and they wrote the text. So the apostles have an authority over us in a way that elders and deacons don't.

Now, how did finally the last thing is, how did they choose their leaders? And you'll see at the very end of this passage, they cast lots. They cast lots.
This would have been probably putting stone, marked stones in a jar, and shaking the jar, and casting the lots out onto the floor, and seeing what stone was upturned or downturned.
This is an ancient way of listening to God. There's no getting around it. It's the coming of the Spirit. This was an ancient way of listening to God.
They saw this as a way that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of God, worked amongst them. Acts chapter 2 is the coming of the Spirit to the church, and never again will lots be cast in the New Testament.
[26:05] A different era has come since Acts chapter 2, but this is Acts chapter 1, and they cast lots. But they didn't just cast lots to choose their leadership.

The first thing it says they did is they determined that they had to replace Judas by reading the Scriptures. So it says that they read Psalm 69 and determined they had to replace him. It says in verse 24, the second thing they did was they prayed together.
And the very next verse it says, they chose to. They deliberated. They had a group discussion. And then they cast lots.
This is the point. How do you prepare your leadership? You have to prepare leadership if you're going to be affected in ministry. You have to be a church and a group and a body with leaders. How do you do it? How did they do it?
These are the apostles, but they're something the same for us and them. And that's this. They prayed. They looked to Scripture to help them determine leaders. They discussed their leaders.
[27:05] They deliberated. They thought. And they turned towards the Spirit. And it was a combination of all of those things. Not one of them, never one of them. And never is it only one of them in any of our decisions in life.

That's not how ethics works in the New Testament era. In other words, they're saying anytime that you have a major decision, anytime that you want to choose your leadership, it's a combination of thinking biblically, discussing it in groups, praying and trusting in a deeper line.
So I'm a Holy Spirit. And it's always a combination of all those things. Anytime you want to make a major decision in life, there is no effective ministry without the Spirit.
And there are no effective leaders chosen without relying on the Spirit. But there is no effective ministry or leaders chosen without thinking, without deliberating, without discussing, without turning to Scripture and prayer.
So to be on mission, you need to have a Christian view of history that you are situated between the two great adivants of Christ.
[28:12] You need to know your inadequacy and your dependence in prayer and worship. And you need to lead and be led through prayer, Scripture, deliberation, and a deeper line on the Holy Spirit.

The ascension is Jesus turning towards all of us and saying, my ministry is your ministry. You see? My ministry is your ministry. Your ministry is my ministry, he's saying. What you are doing is my work. And so the pronouncement is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to Edinburgh.
Let's pray. Father, we ask, oh Lord, that you would prepare us for ministry by helping us to see our future in Christ Jesus on the horizon by seeing our inadequacy this morning and by turning towards

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23

a deeper reliance on the Spirit through prayer.
And so we do that now. We turn to you and ask that you would affect and change our hearts towards the mission. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-05-25 00:52:23