

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

The Good News reveals that Jesus rules through faithful people
Acts 1:1-8

Although Luke only wrote two of the New Testament's books (Luke and Acts), his pair occupies as much space as Paul's thirteen letters. A good reason motivates the volume of Luke's writing – he wrote to affirm Theophilus' conviction about the Good News concerning Jesus (*Luke 1:1-4*). That purpose means Luke's writings offer insight into the meaning and application of the gospel ("gospel" and "good news" translate the same Greek word *euangelion*).

We have been moving through the major sections of Luke's writings, considering what insights they offer into the Good News. So far, we have explored:

- Luke 1-2: Jesus' birth reveals that **the Good News is about Jesus' kingdom and rule.**
- Luke 3-9a: Jesus' ministry narrates that **the Good News about Jesus is for everyone.**
- Luke 9b-19: Jesus' teachings explain **the rejection of the Good News of his kingdom and rule.**
- Luke 19:41-23:56: The last week of Jesus' life reveals **that the Good News of his kingdom and rule focuses on his death.**
- Luke 24: Jesus' resurrection illustrates **the Good News of his kingdom and rule changes everything.**

Today, we will consider Acts 1-7, the first section of Luke's second book. That section's narrative indicates **the Good News about Jesus reveals that he exercises his kingdom and rule through faithful people.**

"You will be my witnesses"¹

Although he divides his writings to Theophilus into two parts (the Gospel of Luke and Acts), Luke connects the two volumes by intentionally overlapping the closing of Luke with the opening of Acts (*Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-9*). That overlapping material emphasizes that Jesus' death and resurrection ushered into the world the kingdom that the Jewish people expected (*Luke 24:21; Acts 1:1-3, 6*). Both accounts also emphasize, albeit obliquely, Jesus' rule over the kingdom (*Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9; Daniel 7:13-14*). But rather than exercise his authority in anticipated ways, Jesus empowered his apostles to act as representatives of his rule. Consider:

- Luke's introductory comment offers a crucial insight into the material in his second letter – the book of Acts records Jesus' *ongoing* activity and teaching through the commission he gave the apostles (*Acts 1:1-9*).

¹Acts 1:8. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted



- Jesus commissioned his apostles to be his “witnesses” (*Acts 1:8*), charging them to testify to the truth of his identity and kingdom because of their experiences with him.
- However, the apostles’ witness did not rest only on what they saw; Jesus also empowered them through the Holy Spirit to act as representatives of his kingdom and rule (*Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 3:1-10; 4:1-12*).
- John offers an insight into the commission Jesus entrusted to the apostles – the Holy Spirit-empowered responsibility Jesus assigned to the apostles seeks to draw others into the mission with them (*1 John 1:1-4*).
 - Rather than a legal arrangement, John depicts the commission as a “fellowship,” a word signaling an intimate relationship (*1 John 1:3*).
 - The relationship the apostles had with Jesus is for everyone and allows anyone in it to experience the same fellowship they enjoyed (*Acts 2:38-39; 1 John 1:3*).
- Because the mission he gave to the apostles seeks to draw others into it, Jesus did not limit the Spirit’s empowering role to the apostles only. Peter, speaking to the crowds who witnessed the Spirit empowering him and the other apostles (*Acts 2:1-13*), announced that “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is for everyone (*Acts 2:38-39*).
 - Even though the Holy Spirit does not work within Christians’ lives in the same way he worked in the apostles (*cf. Acts 8:14-18*), he nevertheless works within them to transform them into individuals who reflect Jesus’ identity and rule.
 - The Spirit cultivates specific characteristics within Christians that distinguish them from the world (*Galatians 5:22-23; cf. Exodus 34:6-7*).
 - The changes the Spirit effects within Christians transform them into people who reflect God’s image (*2 Corinthians 3:1-18; cf. Exodus 34:6-7*).
 - Christians’ Spirit-transformed character witnesses to Jesus’ reality and sovereignty (*2 Corinthians 3:1-3; 4:7-12*).

Applications

- Jesus believes that, despite our failures, we are suited/capable to act as his authorized representatives.
- Jesus empowers us through the Holy Spirit, who accentuates our ability and transforms our character.
- The Spirit’s empowerment serves a specific goal – he enables us to be effective witnesses for Jesus’ kingdom and rule.
- Being a witness for Jesus involves more than our words. It also involves demonstrating the reality of the Good News about him through the changes he effects in our lives. We must learn to partner with and submit to the transformation of our character.
- Our mission seeks to do far more than teach truth; it instead focuses on cultivating transformative relationships between individuals and Jesus, relationships like the one we claim to enjoy with him.



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Evening discussion

The expectation of sharing one's religious convictions with others with the goal of changing their beliefs challenges many Christians. We can quickly compile a list of potential problems, such as fear of rejection, concern about creating a rift in an already established relationship, or not knowing the answer to difficult questions that might be asked. But other, deeper issues frustrate evangelism. For example, we live in a society whose beliefs about freedom shape our convictions (we do not believe people should impose their beliefs on us, so we do not 'impose' our beliefs on them). Additionally, politics in our nation has seemingly devolved into conflict and character attacks that create division rather than unity. That fractious backdrop makes some wary of sharing their beliefs with others because, for many, their political and religious beliefs co-mingle.

Given those challenges, **how do we fulfill our mission to act as faithful representatives of Jesus' kingdom and rule?**

Discussion questions

What insights do you think Luke's presentation of the Spirit in Acts indicates about the role he has within our efforts to share the Good News about Jesus?

What do you think you can do to prepare yourself to recognize the Spirit's work in your life?
What can you do to prepare yourself to join in his work?

While the book of Acts offers insights into the evangelistic activities of the early church, the letters written by the apostles to churches and individuals do not feature the same emphasis. What emphases occupy the epistles, and how might they connect to the mission Jesus entrusts to the church?



Paul wrote that a critical part of the Spirit's work centers on character transformation (*Galatians 5:22-23*). Why do you think the Spirit focuses on character, and what place do you think changed character has within evangelism?

Given the role of the Spirit in the mission Jesus entrusts to his followers, what practical, everyday things do you think we can do to prepare ourselves for evangelism?

