

MULTIPLY – Gospel Movements

Vision

Acts 1:1-11

Mark Vroegop

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:1–11 (ESV)

Over the last few years, I've used a few metaphors to help us think through our vision for our church. These metaphors help us by illustrating—a vivid picture—how we view the church in general, and our church in particular. You see, how you view the church will shape your expectations, your involvement, your giving, and your sense of mission.

We all have subtle (or not-so-subtle) assumptions about the role of the church in our lives and in the world.

To help us think about this, I've talked about the difference between a cruise ship and a battleship. Both are ships. They both operate on the same natural laws that make them float. Both ships have an engine and a rudder. They both have people on board. But they couldn't be more different.

A cruise ship's mission is to please its patrons. Therefore, everything is designed with the customer in mind. The entire experience revolves around meeting the needs of the people who are cruising. Success is measured by the approval of those who are being served. The mission is for individual people to be pleased and to come back.

But a battleship is different. Everything about the ship, the culture, and the roles of the soldiers on board is connected to a battle-oriented mission. An individual contributes to something greater than his or her wants and desires. Success is measured by battles won.

Now the reason we've talked about this is because it can be easy for any church—but especially large churches—to be filled with people who think of their church like a cruise ship. Individual tastes, desires, approval, and needs can become front-and-center in people's expectations. It is very easy for any of us to develop a cruise ship mindset when we should be thinking more about the greater mission of the church. The church is surely supposed to be more like a battleship than a cruise ship.

Today I'd like to change that metaphor a bit because there is a fatal flaw in it. A battleship does all the fighting from the ship. It shoots artillery at the enemy. The implication of the metaphor is that the church does all the fighting, and the programs and services of the church could be seen as the big guns that "do battle."

There's another metaphor that I discovered in a book I started reading over Christmas break called *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*. The book identifies that the better metaphor is the church-as-aircraft carrier. The church needs to see itself as deploying planes to fight battles beyond the location of the aircraft carrier itself. Pastor J.D. Greer, the author of the book, says this:

"Churches that want to prevail against the gates of hell must learn to see themselves like aircraft carriers. . . . Members need to learn to share the gospel, without the help of the pastor, in the community and start ministries and Bible Studies—even churches—in places without them. Churches must become discipleship factories, "sending" agencies that equip their members to take the battle to the enemy."¹

This metaphor is more than a word picture. It is designed to help us think differently about what it means for us to be the church, what my role is in your life, and what God has called each of us to do.

Mission Critical Questions

Over the next eight weeks, we are going to walk through specific texts in Acts 1-11 for the purpose of answering three mission-critical questions:

- 1) What were the ingredients for the missional movement of the early church?
- 2) What unique mission is God calling College Park toward in 2018?
- 3) What is your Spirit-empowered mission?

Now you need to know that these are not new questions for us. We've been asking them for some time, and we've seen the fruit of sending our people. From 40 missionaries deployed, to people moving into Brookside, to the 350 people who helped start Fishers and Castleton, to sending out our Pastoral Residents, we have an emerging "life-as-mission" culture.

And yet there's more to be done.

¹ J.D. Greer, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 28.

I'd like to invite you to join me in asking "Why has God placed all of us together in Indianapolis at this moment?" I'd like for you to pray with us for God to open doors and clarify through the Holy Spirit what God is asking us to do.

And I'd also like for you to personalize this question. I'd like for you to wrestle with your Spirit-empowered mission. How does God want to multiply the gospel through you? How are you going to be a part of a gospel movement wherever the Lord has placed you?

The Vision of Acts 1: More power for Mission and Multiplication

We are going to explore the first eleven chapters of the book of Acts to see how Christianity grew from a small group of disciples who followed Jesus to a significant religious presence in the Roman Empire. The secret to this expansion was the way the gospel multiplied through people and churches.

Central to the vision of Acts is the simple fact that multiplication beats addition every single time—if we take the long view. For example, if you were given the choice between receiving \$10,000 per day for 30 days or \$0.01 doubled each day, which should you choose? After 30 days \$10,000 would equal \$300,000. But if you doubled your penny each day, you'd end up with about 10 million dollars.²

That's what happens in Acts. The church multiplied itself. People were sent (sometimes even scattered by God). The gospel advanced at an exponential rate because of the multiplying influence of the people in the church, not just by the organization called the church.

The book of Acts is the story of this movement of mobilized multiplication. Let's see how this vision develops. There are three aspects of this vision that I want to highlight.

1. A Vision for More

As we start our journey, there are a few things that you need to know about the book of Acts. Let me give them to you quickly.

- The book of Acts is a narrative account of the events connected to the start of the church after Jesus ascended into heaven.
- Acts, however, is more than just an historical account. It is written to provide confidence in what happened and to provide spiritual lessons along the way.
- The book was written by Luke, probably between 70-80 AD.³
- The Gospel of Luke was the first book that he wrote, and Acts was designed to be a companion volume.
- Like Luke, Acts was written with a dedication to a man named Theophilus. The audience would have been broader than just one man, but some commentators suggest that Theophilus may have been a patron who helped pay for the costs of Luke's writing.⁴

² Greer, 32.

³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 30.

⁴ Polhill, 79.

- While the book is often called the Acts of the Apostles, it really could be entitled the Acts of the Holy Spirit because it traces the work of Spirit of Jesus through the birth and growth of the church.
- As we study the book, it is important to make a distinction between what is described and what is prescribed. This is tricky because not everything in Acts is meant to be a model. For example, we don't cast lots for new leaders like they did in Acts 1:12-26 (although the State of Virginia broke a tie for the Virginia State House this week this way). We have to distinguish between description and prescription.

With those few summary points, let's look at verses 1-2:

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. Acts 1:1–2 (ESV)

The phrase that I want you to really think about is found in verse 1: "all that Jesus began to do and teach." This serves as a summary of the book of Luke, and it sets the stage for what is to come in the book of Acts. In other words, this is the rest of the story of Jesus. But without Jesus.

In Luke, Jesus told His disciples that this would happen. Look at Luke 24:44-49, as Jesus unfolds His plan and commissions the disciples:

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:44–49 (ESV)

Jesus was never plan A and the disciples plan B. Jesus empowering the disciples was always the plan!

Acts 1:2 tells us that Jesus was taken up into heaven. More on this in a moment. But Jesus' exit from the earth and the completion of His ministry was marked by giving the disciples He had chosen a series of commands. We'll explore the specifics of this in a moment.

We also notice a very early and prominent mention of the Holy Spirit. This third member of the triune Godhead is vitally important to the continuation of Jesus' ministry on earth. That is why the Acts of the apostles could really be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. This book is a record of the activity of the Spirit in building the church of Jesus Christ.

In other words—and let this thought sink in—Jesus had more work to do, but He did it through the Spirit-empowered Church. That's the story of the Acts. And the amazing news is simply that God is still doing that work. The book of Acts may end at chapter 28, but the Holy Spirit is still at work.

Jesus is still building His church. And He still wants to do more. He is doing more. That has always been a part of His mission.

Luke is not the only gospel writer who picks up on this theme. In John's gospel, Jesus makes a startling statement:

¹² "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12 (ESV)

Did you hear what that passage said? "Greater works than these he will do . . ." Greater works than Jesus? But it also says, "whoever believes in me." So, whatever this promise is, we know it is not for the super-spiritual, professional class of ministers. This is for everyone—for all believers.

But how are our works greater? Anyone feed 5,000 people, walk on water, or raise the dead lately? Of course not! Jesus is not saying that we'll do more miraculous works than Him. So what is He saying? I think He's connecting the greater works to the completion of the work of salvation that Jesus bought at His death, burial, and resurrection.

After His resurrection in John 20:21-23, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said the following:

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." John 20:21-23 (ESV)

Jesus is commissioning them to preach and declare forgiveness to anyone who would place their trust in the finished and completed work of Jesus. This is the greater work!

This is the "more" that Jesus intends to do. This is what we are called to do. In the same way that Jesus was sent into the world, Jesus has sent us (John 20:21). Let me make that even more personal. In the same way that God sent Jesus into the world, Jesus has chosen those of you who believe to be sent as well. As He was sent, you are sent!

There is a vision for greater works—for more to be done. There's a vision for more.

2. A Vision for Power

The great thing about this mission of Jesus is that it is not based upon our ability to make it happen. Rather, it is based upon the authority of Jesus as the resurrected Savior and on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In verse three we learn what Jesus did after His resurrection. After He rose from the dead, Jesus remained on earth for 40 days, making various appearances to His disciples. Jesus appeared to the disciples who were walking along the Emmaus road in Luke 24 such that their hearts burned within them as He talked with them about the Scriptures. He appeared to the disciples, showed them His hands and feet (also in Luke 24), and He even ate with them (Luke 24:43). He appeared to Peter for the purpose of restoring him after his denial in John 21.

Jesus demonstrated that death was defeated, the once-for-all sacrifice had been made, and that He was indeed the Savior He claimed to be. They were serving the risen Son of God. Knowing that Jesus was alive served as a strong motivation for the movement of the gospel. They were witnesses to what had happened.

But there was also the promise of the Holy Spirit. In verses 4-5 we find the command of Jesus for them to wait for the coming Holy Spirit.

⁴ 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;⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Acts 1:4-5 (ESV)

This would be fulfilled in what we call Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit comes in a new fashion. They would all be indwelt with the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Previously they experienced the Spirit through the presence of Jesus. After Pentecost they would experience the presence of Jesus through the presence of the Spirit.⁵

The Spirit would be the fulfillment of Jesus' promise, their comforter, their empowerment, and the means by which they would do ministry. The Spirit would do different works through them, depending on the circumstances, situations, or the ministry needs.

But the point in Acts is simply that the same power, the same Spirit, that rested on Jesus will now rest on His disciples. That's why the tongues of fire rest on each of them at Pentecost. The idea is that the personal presence of Christ now rests with each of His disciples.

It is important for us to remember that our mission is still under the authority of the resurrected Christ. He won the battle with sin, death, and the grave. Jesus' final words to His disciples in the Great Commission started with "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me . . ." (Matthew 28:18). That's still true. Jesus is building His church, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That's still true.

There are spiritual strongholds in our lives, our city, and around the world that the gospel could transform. There are people in bondage to their sin. You work with them, they live next to you, you are friends with them on social media. Imagine what would happen if they understood the liberating power of Romans 8:1—"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit in order to empower the church for the "greater works" of Jesus. The mission of the church has not changed. And God has provided the personal presence of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to empower His people toward that mission.

Next week we'll start a three-week prayer meeting at 7:00 AM on Sundays at North Indy for the purpose of asking God to give us power, to direct our steps in 2018, to open more doors of ministry,

⁵ Pohill, 81.

and to make us the kind of church that He wants us to be. I'm praying for 100 people who would give up some sleep for the purpose of seeking the power of God for our church.

The authority of Jesus and the presence of the Spirit compel us—every one of us—to be bold, courageous, risk-takers for the glory of God and the multiplication of the gospel.

3. Vision for Mission

The aim of this first message is for us to wrestle with our Spirit-empowered mission. In Acts 1:6-11, we get a sense of the strategy that is connected to that mission.

In verses 6-7 the disciples ask Jesus about the timing of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. And Jesus identifies that the question is of secondary importance and under the providential care of God. Instead, Jesus focuses them on their mission.

⁸ 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." Acts 1:8 (ESV)

The purpose of the coming of the Spirit will be to make them effective witnesses. They will be called to give testimony to what they have seen or heard about Jesus. The Christian mission is essentially about telling people about who Jesus is, what He did, and how He's changed our lives. One writer said, "The less Jesus is the core of {our} witness, the less power we have."⁶ The aim is to tell people about Jesus.

But notice where this is to happen: "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth." The vision for mission was for Jerusalem to be the starting point, but for the gospel to spread from there. The disciples were to wait in Jerusalem. At Pentecost the nations would come to them (see Acts 2:14ff). But then they were to go.

The disciples were to think about their mission through the expanding circles of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. This strategy serves as the outline for the book of Acts: Jerusalem (Acts 1-8), Judea/Samaria (Acts 8-12), and the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28). This strategy is still operational today.

The church needs to prioritize all four areas. We need to ask ourselves four critical questions:

- Jerusalem – "Who are the people near me every day?"
- Judea – "How do I reach the people around me?"
- Samaria – "How can I bring the gospel to those who are different than me?"
- Ends of the Earth – "What is my role in reaching people who've never heard the name of Jesus?"

At College Park, we think of answering these questions by categories in our outreach efforts:

- Personal – How can you share the gospel with people near you?
- Local – How can we take the gospel to our neighbors and neighborhoods? (Next Door Mission)

⁶ Pohill, 86.

- Urban – How can we see the gospel transform areas of our city with the greatest need? (Brookside)
- Global – How can unreached people be reached with the gospel? (Missions)

This is more than simply a structure for our outreach program; it is a biblical strategy for a balanced spread of the gospel. This is how the gospel was multiplied in the first century, and it is still the way the Holy Spirit is working.

These are the arenas in which we are to be sent. If you think of College Park like an aircraft carrier, these are the battlefields that we want to deploy you to. And the measure of success is not how many people attend our weekend services, as important as that is. Our long-term strategy to reach our neighbors, our city, our nation, and the world in sending you with the gospel to wherever the Lord has called you.

Every aspect of the church is meant to be a part of this mission of multiplication. Every program, every service, every Bible study, every activity needs to be a part of helping us to accomplish that mission.

That is why the angels appear in verses 9-11. After Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples find themselves gazing into heaven. It seems that they are lingering there. Two angels appear to them, telling them that Jesus is coming back.

In other words, it's time to do what Jesus said. Go to Jerusalem, wait for the Spirit, reach the world with the gospel. It was time to embrace the mission. It was time to do greater works. It was time to tell the world about Jesus. That's what they did. And that's why we're here today.

Why has God placed College Park Church in the city of Indianapolis? Why has He chosen us to be together for this moment in church history? What is God calling us to do in 2018 to reach more people?

On a personal level, let me ask you: Where has God providentially placed you? How has God uniquely gifted you? Where is He calling you to be sent today?

The question is not *if* you are sent; the question is *where* are you sent.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com