

Acts 1:1-11

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, if we've not met, my name's Andrew. I'm one of the elders here in Harvest Church, one of the leaders here in Harvest Church. Excuse me, we want to rearrange the furniture. And it's great to be together this morning.

Last week I was so excited as we started our devoted series, looking through the book of Acts. And Sean gave a wonderful overview of the story of the book of Acts.

And I want to encourage you, if you weren't here last Sunday, please try and listen to it online. It's on our website. In the media section of the website you'll find a recording of the whole meeting, including the worship as well, actually.

But it was such a great overview. I just want to pick up on this little phrase, which I've sort of devised really from drawing a number of drawn threads together.

It's a book about ordinary people who are saved and empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Saved by Jesus, empowered by God's Holy Spirit to live lives devoted to God, each other and mission, in order to see God's kingdom come through his church.

[1 : 1 1] Which, of course, is us folks. Each and every one of us are part of God's church if you're saved. And we do that by God's Holy Spirit. And that's the story of the book of Acts. And so I would encourage you, do have a listen to Sean's preach from last week if you haven't had a chance.

This week we're actually going to dive into Acts chapter 1, as it says on the screen. The words will be coming up in a moment. And we'll be reading that. If you've got a Bible, obviously you're welcome to turn to it.

But they will be on the screen as well. So Acts chapter 1, verses 1 to 11. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about... By the way, the former book is Luke.

Luke is the author of the book of Acts. 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 presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

[2 : 1 6] On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command. Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Then they gathered around Jesus and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, It's not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Men of Galilee, they said, Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you've seen him go into heaven.

And Father, we ask that as we have read your word, and as you've already been speaking to us so much during this time together, Lord, would you continue to speak to us through your word?

[3 : 36] Would you help us to hear what you're saying? And would you give us grace and courage to respond to all that you're saying to us, please? In Jesus' most precious name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So, what I want to do today is, in a moment we're going to focus on those two passages within what we've just read, where Jesus is quoted.

They've been put in red deliberately just to make them stand out. We're going to come and focus on that. But before we do that, I just want to highlight the rest of the passage and what it tells us. It tells us the story of Jesus' suffering, his death, how he then presents himself to the disciples because he's been raised from the dead, he's resurrected, and he gives many convincing proofs that he's alive.

And he doesn't just do this on one occasion, he does this on over a period of 40 days, and speaks to them about the kingdom of God, what he came to do, what he came to bring, the kingdom of God.

And I think it's so important, and it's funny because it already happened at our worship, in one sense, I don't need to say this, to remind ourselves that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. That's a fact.

[4 : 49] It's not just a theory, it's a fact. And that in being resurrected from the dead, he defeated sin and its power over mankind. And then, not only that, he was taken up, he ascended to heaven, proving he was God before their very eyes.

This Jesus wasn't just some person who had some good thoughts, he was the saviour of the world. And we need to remind ourselves, this is the Jesus we talk about, that Christ has been victorious over sin, and death, and shame, and guilt, and all those other things.

Forgiveness is assured for those who are repentant in Christ. I want to say that again. Forgiveness is assured for those who are repentant in Christ.

Amen. I wonder whether you know that today. Are you carrying guilt with you? Are you thinking, oh, yeah, but I'm not that good really. I don't live out my faith very well.

You may have a whole load of things. You may feel condemned. Understand this. Forgiveness is assured. It's not just a theory, it's something you can be assured of if you're in Christ.

[6 : 01] In other words, if you acknowledge that Jesus is your saviour and Lord, you can be sure you will be, or you are, saved. Friends, sometimes we need to get hold of our minds and go, hey, I know my head tells me all these other things.

I know I'm assailed by all these other things, but say you're useless, you're rubbish, you've done this, you've done that, you've done the other. No, no, let's get hold of the truth. We are assured of God's love in Christ Jesus.

We're assured of God's forgiveness in Christ Jesus. We don't have to live under guilt and shame any longer. Hallelujah. Why? Because what we've just read about in this passage, Jesus dies, he conquers sin once and for all in his death, and then proves it in his resurrection before ascending to the Father and sending his Holy Spirit to be with us.

Hallelujah. Isn't that wonderful? Let's just thank God for a moment. Let's just express our thanks to God. That was very British.

We'll get better at that. But for now, we're going to go on back to this text. So, I've called it verse 4b. It's the second half of verse 4.

[7 : 20] Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

I just want to focus on that wait word a moment. Wait. He's saying, wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, of course, we know the story. Pentecost happens. They do wait, and Pentecost happens. And I'd like to suggest to you today that we often don't wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We are so busy, and just active, and all sorts of other things. We'll come into thinking about what those are in a moment. But we can forget to stop, and wait for the Holy Spirit.

It was just a wonderful time of worship, wasn't it? Just allowing the Spirit to come. Holy Spirit, you are welcome here. Come flood this place in there. Yeah. Come flood the place in my heart. Yes. Absolutely. We do need to pause, and allow the Holy Spirit to come in, and dwell richly in us.

[8 : 26] In Matthew, chapter 5, verse 6, one of the Beatitudes, Jesus says this, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. And while he doesn't explicitly state what he means by, they will be filled, whenever I read that, I think, yeah, maybe hunger and thirst for God's Spirit, Holy Spirit, who assures us of the righteousness of God, that is imputed to us through Jesus' death, resurrection, we will be filled.

Friends, it's good to stop, to wait, to allow the Holy Spirit to come, and dwell richly in our lives, to enjoy that sense of the love of God, which he brings, the peace of God, which he brings, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, is so important.

So I just want to ask this very simple question. Do we? Do you? Do I? Do we stop? Do we hunger? Do we thirst for more of God in our lives? Actually, I'm going to get a drink of water while you just think about that for a moment.

Funny that.

Quite thirsty at the moment. When you're thirsty, what do you do? You go and get a drink. When you need more of God, do we come to him, and do we go seek him? Do we ask for him?

[9 : 57] Do we hunger for him? So often, I think it's so easy for us to be busy, distracted, do things in our own effort, all those sorts of things. So let's ask the question, why do we not wait or hunger for more of God?

Now, to be frank, I think I've come up with about seven, eight answers here, but I reckon the 70 or 80 answers we could easily come up with if we had half an hour to think about it. So here's just a few.

Actually, the first one's not on here. I've decided to add this in this morning. Sometimes we don't choose to trust God. Maybe we are concerned that, why is God trustworthy?

What will happen if I wait? What happens if nothing happens? We may have expectations, what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. What happens if nothing happens? And so we can struggle to trust God.

Trust is like a muscle. It's something as we exercise trust, we grow in trust, because actually trust is another word for faith, putting our faith in God.

[10 : 57] Anyway, here's another one, wrong thinking. Lack of understanding or experience that we really need God all day, every day. I wonder, if you're away from this meeting at this moment in time, and somebody asked you this question, do you really need God every day?

How much do you really need God each day? How much do you seek him each day? And you were real. I wonder what the answer would be. Maybe it's a question we each need to ask ourselves.

It's certainly a question I've been asking myself as I've been preparing through this passage. Another thing which can stop us from being hungry for God, from going seeking God, is a sense of self-sufficiency or an independent mindset.

Well, yes, I know God's son, Jesus, has died for me, and I'm grateful that he's died for me, but now I can just get on with life. I don't really need him. And the Father hasn't designed us to do that.

Our loving Heavenly Father has made us to have intimate, ongoing relationship with him, where we are assured that we are saved, that we are loved, that we can enjoy the peace of God.

[12 : 06] What's it going to be for you? What's your plan, your intentional plan for this year? Are you going to give a bit more looking for God's assurance, God's love, God's grace, God's mercy, or are we just going to get on with life?

Life goes on at a frantic pace around us. We have to pause. And go, God, I want more of you.

Another area which may stop us looking for more of God can be sinfulness, condemnation, shame. Maybe sin which we haven't resolved. Or maybe Satan just say, hey, you're no good.

You don't deserve to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You know, Satan is a liar. He's an absolute liar. He can't do anything apart from lie. And he loves to condemn. And condemnation is part of the work of Satan.

It's not part of the work of God. If you're feeling condemned today, that's Satan having a go at you. God's Spirit comes and convicts us. Convicts us of sin. Yes, absolutely. And we need to know that he convicts us of sin.

[13 : 15] And when he touches us and prompts us and says, hey, come on, get that sorted. That's good. Respond. Say, yes, God, I'm so sorry I've done that again.

Please forgive me again. Too busy. I mean, this is just such an easy one, isn't it?

Too busy. Life goes at a frantic pace. Too busy to stop and wait. We live, I mean, as he says it, we live in an instant society and it gets faster all the time.

And therefore stopping and waiting gets harder all the time. Here's another one. Don't want to let go of our agendas, our hopes, our dreams. That's ultimately saying, hey, God, I've surrendered my life to you for salvation, but I'm not sure I want to surrender the rest of it yet.

And so we don't wait to know him. We wait. We allow him to take hold of our dreams and our agendas.

[14 : 20] We allow him to shape us and mold us. You know, as we surrender ourselves to him, God changes our desires, and that's great.

It draws us closer. And yet, within that also, he also hears our heart's desire and loves to. He's a good father. He's not a punitive father. He's not a father who wants to take things and rob things away from us.

He wants to bless us. But within that, impurity and holiness and goodness and grace. Confusion. Or bad experiences.

Well, once upon a time, I waited for God and nothing happened. I said, no, I don't bother any longer. That's for those people who are more spiritual. I think we've addressed that in our preaching series last term.

If you run around, you can find the recordings online. Actually, we're all called to be spiritual. God makes us all spiritual as he fills us with his Holy Spirit. But for some of us, we may feel confused or have had bad experiences or have been prayed for or looking to receive the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 25] Don't let that stop you from asking again. Maybe you need to have somebody with you when you do that just to help you in that journey. Maybe there's some bit of conversation needs to happen just to understand what our expectations are.

I think some people think, you know, God's spirit falls. You've got to fall over on the ground and shake and laugh out loud or whatever, whatever, whatever. And that's not the case. And God works within our personalities.

So some people who are much more extroverted than others may well respond in different ways and know him in different ways. But ultimately, how do we know when we're filled with the Spirit? Well, you're sure, first and foremost, that I'm a child of God.

You've got that deep sense of assurance. That's what Galatians, end of Galatians 3, beginning of Galatians 4 tells us. We read again in Romans 8. It's the Spirit in us who cries out, Abba, Father.

Oh, God, I'm yours. I'm loved by you. I'm in your family, Lord. I'm a child of God. God. That's got to be one of the hallmarks of the work of the Spirit.

[16 : 25] Now, there's lots of other things. He produces fruit in us, as we've talked about in the last series in Galatians 5. He gives us gifts and all sorts of other things. So those are maybe some of the reasons why we don't stop and wait.

Maybe some of those are things which you need to think about today. I need to think about today. Many, many more. I just wanted to give a quick plug for a book.

Now, I read this book about 30, maybe 40 years ago. I'm getting older. Andrew Murray, *Waiting on God*. I think it was originally published in the 70s.

But it's still available out there. I did a quick Google search and I found it on various retail online platforms. But it's also available as a PDF. It's also available as an audio file which you can listen to.

But I think you have to have an account with a particular thing for that. I just want to encourage you. If you want to think about what does it mean to wait on God? How can I actively wait on God, seek God?

[17 : 28] It's a great book. It's not very long either, which is... I like short books. Although the type is quite small. Isaiah chapter 40, verses 30, 31.

Well-known passage. I've just taken a little bit of it. It's that passage which some people quote, where youth grow tired or weary. That passage. It says, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Do you know, depending on the translation of the Bible you're looking at, it's often also those who wait on the Lord or wait in the Lord will renew their strength. You know, that's part of what happens when we come to God and we wait on Him.

We are strengthened in our inner being, in our inner person. We're strengthened. We're strengthened for what we're called to do. We're given gifts. We're given power. But it requires intentionality.

Waiting on God is something which is intentional. It requires focus. And it's a choice to put our trust in Him rather than just finding the solution ourselves, just being busy and doing what we normally do.

[18 : 45] It's a moment to stop. Waiting on God is saying, hey, I'm going to stop. And I'm not going anywhere until I've reconnected with you. Where I've fixed my eyes on Jesus, author and perfecter of our faith.

Where I've said, hey, I'm going to rest in you. I'm not going to strive any longer. I'm going to rest in you. I'm going to pause.

I'm going to allow you to bring things about rather than me working, working, working, working, working, working hard to try and make something happen which perhaps God doesn't even want to do. It's about coming to Him and surrendering our deepest desires and asking Him for His presence in our lives.

Welcoming Him in and receiving Him. Just as we, when we're given a gift, we have a choice whether we receive it and open it and use it or whether we may just look at it and go, well, that's nice and put it to one side and never use it.

I wonder how many people have done that this Christmas. Oh, well, yeah, it was very nice but I'll put it in the back of the cupboard and it's still there five years later. The gift of the Holy Spirit is for us to take hold of, to embrace into our lives and welcome Him into our lives but it starts with welcoming.

[19 : 58] Welcoming Him, giving time to His presence. So here's just a quick reminder of some of the things the Spirit does. The Holy Spirit is God's gift for all believers to receive, to journey with us through life.

He wants to walk with us through life. Walk them by the Spirit. Ephesians 5, 16, I think if I remember correctly. To help us keep our eyes on the Father who loves us and delights in us.

To draw us into intimacy with Him that we don't just know that God exists but we have an intimate relationship with Him where that defines and shapes our lives. To guide us in living rightly, in righteousness, in right living.

To help us spot sin and to avoid it, spot temptation and not surrender to it. To empower us with God's gifts which He gives us in order that we can be fruitful to the world around us and to produce godly character in us.

We've talked about those things already. The fruit of His Spirit. And this is all around not just a one-off moment but a dynamic, ongoing relationship.

[21 : 01] I know I've used this illustration before but the best illustration I can find in the world today as it were for that relationship with the Holy Spirit is that of a sailing boat's relationship with the wind.

You can either point the boat into the wind and the sails will flap or you can turn it away from the wind at an angle and it will start moving. And it will only start moving when the sails are up and the boat is in the right relationship with the wind.

And the Spirit of God, the wind of God, the Ruach of God wants to come and fill the sails of our lives and take us on a journey day by day. A dynamic relationship where we can choose to take the sails down, where we can choose to turn in the wrong direction but actually what He's after is for us to be in that ongoing relationship with His wind, with His Holy Spirit.

We need, friends, we need to be filled with His Holy Spirit. I want to encourage us, let's make a deliberate choice this year, an intentional, deliberate choice to grow in our relationship with God which includes waiting on Him to be filled with His Spirit, with His Spirit's power, to become more dependent on Him, to trust Him more and ourselves less and to do that we need to receive more of His Spirit.

Amen? Let's wait on His Spirit. Now I just want to take a very quick step aside from this subject for a moment and just remind you we're just entering a week of prayer and over this next week there are five corporate opportunities where we're doing an hour of prayer.

[22 : 38] Monday 2.30 to 3.30pm the focus will be around things to do with Harvest Church. Tuesday 8.00 to 9.00 our focus is going to be praying on youth and our town.

Wednesday we're going to be praying around our ministries. That's 7.30 to 8.30am. By the way you may want to take a photo of this but it has been sent out. Thursday again 8.00 to 9.00pm and then Friday 9.30 to 10.30am.

Friends, can I encourage us let's try and make one or two of these? But even if you don't remember there's going to be daily notes being sent out by email if you're on our what's happening email list if you've got that you will get daily notes sent to you each day to help us grow in devotion to God devotion to each other and devotion to God's mission.

Anytime though you can also pop into our prayer room it's just in the corridor behind here and you can use that as a place of quiet and solitude just to spend time with God but over this week friends we don't do this just to make ourselves busy we do it because we want to be intentional about meeting with God and spending time with God allowing him to shape our lives and mould us as we start this year together.

So I want to encourage you please get involved whether you are able to attend one of those or two of those or whether it's just using those notes which will come out each day you'll know if you're going to get them because if you had the introductory email which was sent out on Friday then you'll know you've got it.

[24 : 05] If you didn't get that introductory email you may not get it in which case Karen down here at the front who's been hosting our meeting this morning has got clipboards where you can sign up to go on that email list and we will get that to you tomorrow and you'll get on that email distribution list so come and find Karen after the meeting and that will be possible.

Now we've only covered one of the two phrases which Jesus said is reported as saying the other one's this and it's sort of a balanced thing we wait on God because we receive God's love and his power and his gifts but also we need to understand that as we wait on God and receive his spirit the spirit does something in our hearts or he wants to do something in our hearts and that is to make us witnesses of all that God's done for us and that's the second thing Jesus is recorded as talking about here but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you that's you me and you will be my witnesses that's I will be you will be each one of us will be witnesses in Jerusalem Judea Samaria and to the ends of the earth friends when the Holy Spirit comes on us we can be witnesses in our neighbourhood in Alton in Greenfields in Holybourne in Borden in Medstead in Formox in Lys and the rest of

Hampshire and even if you live outside of Hampshire wherever you are and to the ends of the earth that's part of what the spirit does it's not just a promise of power but it's really important for us to know that we are given authority and responsibility the two go hand in hand to see God's kingdom come God's kingdom advance through us with power to bring God's influence that is the rule and reign of God to those people that God puts around us to everybody he puts around us see the Holy Spirit when we've received the Spirit yes it does affirm who we are he does affirm who we are in Christ absolutely he does draw us closer to the Father but he also works in us to lead us into mission that's why we've called this study in the book of Acts devoted yes to God first of all devoted to each other that is the church and devoted to mission because it's all part of what the spirit of God does in us that's what we're called to be

I'm just bringing things to a conclusion at this point but I want to encourage you why don't go away and look at 1 Corinthians 3 12 to 15 I've not actually put it on the powerpoint so apologies it's not going to come up 1 Corinthians 3 12 to 15 it is a sobering passage talking about how at the end of our lives as we get to heaven God will look at what we've given ourselves to and it would be remiss of us if we don't mention this regularly because what it talks about is how the works of man will get burnt up like wood and straw and the works of God in our lives will survive the fire the testing of God in our lives like jewels what are you giving yourself to what am I giving myself to what are we giving ourselves to are we giving ourselves to God allowing him to fill us dwell in us and call us on his great mission his great adventure together friends I want to encourage you let's try and do just that let's look to stop learn to stop learn to wait on God learn to receive his Holy Spirit in this season ahead so that his spirit dwells richly in our lives so that we can be witnesses of his great love to those he puts around us we've

I started talking about how we were going to ask Jesus to talk to us from this passage and we had these two sections of this passage which were Jesus' words I wonder what he's been saying to you today I'd like to just take a moment please now to pause maybe he's calling you to repentance maybe you know the things which you've been doing which actually don't glorify God and which are alienating you from trusting him more well that needs repentance but know this God is just he's faithful he's good and he will forgive if we come truly repentant to him and say God I'm sorry I'm sorry I've blown it in that repentance though part of that response may also be and I need to surrender my agenda to you Lord and trust you completely and I don't want to keep on pursuing my agenda any longer it may be all this conversation about being filled with the spirit you're a bit oh I've never come across this before please can we pray with you come and talk to us come and help let's help you to explore this it's a fundamental part of the bible the new testament let us help you if we can and for some of us maybe it's just actually

[29 : 22] I'm okay with my relationship with God but I've not been filled with the spirit for some time and we need to pause and say Holy Spirit come and fill us so I'm just going to have a moment of quiet now your choice how you respond which is going to be quiet before God for a moment you you you