

Up, Up and Away
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
May 17, 2026

Text: Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-11

Purpose: To enable the congregation to have a deeper understanding of the book of Acts and realize that even today, we are in the midst of that commission found in Acts 1:8 to go into our community, state, nation, and to the uttermost parts of the world as witnesses for Jesus Christ.

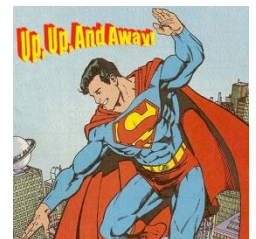


A man had been working for several years and felt compelled to have a conversation with his boss. He said, "I HAVE to have a raise! There are currently three other companies after me."

"Is that so?" asked his boss. "What other companies are after you?"

"The electric company, the telephone company, and the gas company."¹

This week as I was preparing for today's sermon and reading over the well-known passage from Acts, I could not help but think of the phrase that was frequently used by Superman in a DC comic series. Superman often shot straight up into the air – "Up, Up, and Away!"





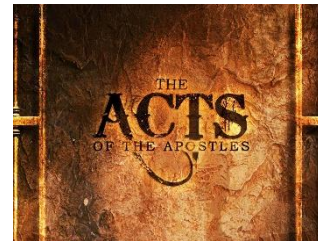
The scene we see in the book of Luke and Acts was one of the original “Up, Up and away!” events. Another similar event is the story of Elijah being caught up in a whirlwind and he was taken to heaven by way of a chariot in II Kings 2.

The passage of scripture we have before us today comes from the last chapter of the Book of Luke and the first chapter of the Book of Acts. The reason I wanted to focus on this passage of scripture today is that Thursday of this past week marks 40 days since we celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sadly, this day passes without many American Christians even being aware of it. When I was in Germany in 2004, at noon on Ascension Thursday, all the churches in the village we were in rang their bells non-stop for about an hour. They were celebrating Christ returned to His Father, but He is coming again – that is news worth celebrating!



The Book of Acts has been called the History book of the early church. This book ties the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) to the letters of Paul, James, John, Peter and Jude. In chapter one we see Jesus Christ return to heaven and Judas, who betrayed Jesus and later died, is replaced by Matthias. Later on in Acts, we have the recorded history of some of Jesus’ disciples, their mission trips, the affairs of the early church in Jerusalem as led by Peter, as well as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus whom we have come to know by his Greek name Paul.

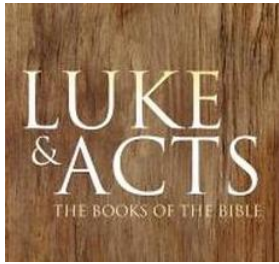
The last half of the Book of Acts tells us of Paul’s mission journeys and the spread of the Gospel. If we did not have this book in the New Testament, then all the other letters of Paul would not make as much sense. We would not be able to put them into context of the life and times of the infant church.



The title of the book, “The Acts of the Apostles” is a title that was added later by scribes that copied the biblical text. Tradition ascribes this book to Luke. It was written around 80-90 AD or about 50 years after the ascension of Jesus. Scholars have decided on that date since Paul and Luke were last mentioned together in Rome about that time. In preparation for today’s message, I found many scholars consider the Book of Acts was written as a defense of Paul while he was in Rome.

As we read in verse one, the letter is addressed to a person called, “Theophilus” which means, “friend of God.” It was thought that Theophilus was an official of that day and may have been a convert or a financial sponsor. If you have your Bibles with you, I want you to turn over to the Book of Luke, chapter one and read verses 1-4.

¹ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, ² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; ³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)



If you compare Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:3, you see that our physician Luke has written a two-part volume. The first part was on the physical life and ministry of Jesus while the second part reveals the acts of the Holy Spirit in the early church through the Apostles.

Let us try for a moment to walk in the disciple's shoes. They had given up their various livelihoods; they ignored the pleas of their families to remain with them to follow Jesus and embrace His teachings. They thought that Jesus was coming to set up His kingdom here on earth. They were so sure of His success; they were all vying for a key leadership position in the new kingdom. Jesus, however told them over and over that He must go away so the Comforter could come. He would return to the Father, but He would send the Holy Spirit.

I am sure the disciples heard this. Yet they were so enamored by the potential for success with an earthly kingdom that those promises fell on deaf ears.

Let us look carefully at the first eight verses of Acts to see if we can unlock this book and see how it applies to us today.

¹ The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Again, in verse one; we see that this is the second part of Luke's writing. The purpose of Luke was to record what Jesus had done and what He had taught. Since Jesus was no longer with them, people would question "Did Jesus really

say that? Jesus could not have really meant for us to do that could He?" It goes back to the question of authority. By writing down what they had seen and experienced, it brought authority and clarity to the new church.

² Until the day in which he was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen:

Verse two lets us know what happened to Jesus. If He was still alive, where was He? If he was still dead, where was His body? This reaffirms the account of Jesus' return back up into heaven. It also affirms that the commandments that the Apostles are teaching come directly from Jesus.



³ To whom also He shewed himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Luke affirmed the period of time Jesus remained with the disciples. This is the only record of how long Jesus remained with them. The fact that Jesus ascended is recorded in both Mark and Luke, but there is no mention of how long Jesus remained with them after His resurrection before He returned to His Father. During that time, Jesus continued to preach and teach them what He wanted them to know.

⁴ And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me.

The disciples knew that in their own strength, the only thing they could do is go fishing. That is what the disciples returned to doing just a few days after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. What they needed was the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them that the Spirit would come if they would return to Jerusalem and wait. Jesus did not make a suggestion. The Bible says that He "commanded" or insisted that they go and wait.

⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

John the Baptist had baptized believers in water for the remission of their sins. John had traveled all around the area telling people to repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Many people's hearts were touched and they repented and were baptized. Some of Jesus' disciples had initially followed John the Baptist. However, Jesus was promising a special baptism.



⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

After all that the disciples had seen and witnessed, they were still wishfully thinking about those positions of power. They were so wrapped up in the desire for power that they

just did not want to let it go. Jesus gives us an answer when we are asked these kinds of questions.

⁷ And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

God will decide in His own time to restore the kingdom of Israel. So many people get excited about world events and begin to weave a story together that says, "Oh the time must be at the end. God is coming soon. We as a church need to get ready." Many ministers believe if they would only do certain things, they can in some way; help God usher in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said that is not for us to know the times or the seasons. But I do believe

One day the trumpet will sound for
His coming,
One day the skies with His glories
will shine;
Wonderful day, my beloved One
bringing,
Glorious Savior, this Jesus is mine!



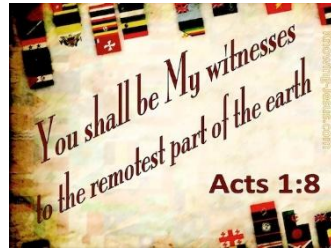
Living He loved me, dying He saved me,
Buried He carried my sins far away,
Rising He justified freely forever:
One day He's coming, O glorious day!

I do believe that one day; God will roll up time and judge the world. Our world has seen almost 100 generations (20 years per generation) since Jesus walked this earth. For each generation, their time has come. Each of us will face judgment day, one day. We do not know the time or season

of our passing from this world into the next. We should be more concerned about our personal relationship with God, and the eternal destiny of our children before we attempt to understand the time table of God.

⁸ But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Verse eight is the key to unlock the whole book of Acts. *“But you shall receive the power of the Holy Spirit in just a few days.”* Up to that time, the Holy Spirit had not been a part of their lives. In the Old Testament we find that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon several individuals, but the Holy Spirit did not indwell every believer.



I believe that every person that accepts Jesus as their Savior, at the moment of their conversion, the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside that believer. As we yield our will to God’s will, as we continue to reject those sins that have bound us for so long, the Holy Spirit leads and guides us. I have heard testimony after testimony of people that have been radically transformed after accepting Christ. They could not make any change in themselves without the power of God residing within them.

Some would say that the Holy Spirit only comes upon you after you have had hands laid upon you. There are a few verses of scripture that seem to support this view. From my experience, the overwhelming evidence points towards

Christ’s indwelling Holy Spirit entering a believer at the moment of conversion.

Jesus told those gathered there that morning, that they would be witnesses. I have thought about that word “witnesses.” The emperor Nero, who reigned in Rome around 60 AD, sought out “Christians” to persecute. They would be caught and compelled to recant their faith in Jesus Christ. When they did not recant, they were burned to death. The emperor Domitian came to power in 90 AD and he was even more wicked towards Christians than Nero was. It is possible that the Book of Revelation was written during this time of Domitian’s persecution.

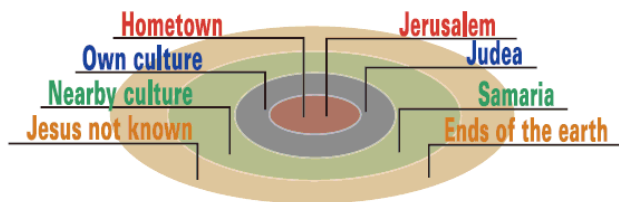


During this time, to be a witness meant that you were willing to attest to your faith with your life’s blood. A church historian of that day wrote, “The blood of the martyrs became the seeds of life for the new church.” Even unbelievers understood there must be something special about this “Jesus Christ” if so many people were willing to die for Him.

It is hard for us to believe today, but more have died for their faith over the past 100 years than in the prior 1900 years combined. There are pockets around the world where being a Christian and sharing your faith will have you thrown in jail, beaten, and killed. All because you believe in, and share the message of Jesus Christ.

Even though Jesus has ascended and returned back to heaven, Jesus in verse eight is giving the disciples their marching orders. They are to carry this message of forgiveness, love, and salvation to their local community. They were commissioned to carry it to Jerusalem first. Salvation came to the Jews and they rejected it. Salvation came to God's chosen people, and they would not accept God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

The message was not to stop there though. They were to carry it to the neighboring communities in Judea. Most of the Jews that accepted Christ thought carrying it to Judea would be sufficient.

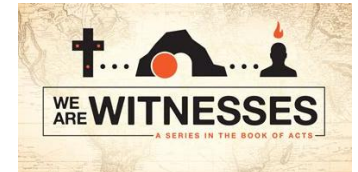


But Jesus did not stop there. He said they were to carry it to the Samaritans. This was the group of people that the Jews considered half-breeds. After the destruction of the first temple built by Solomon, many Jews were captured and taken to Babylon, and those left behind intermarried with non-Jews. These people were called Samaritans. It was this same region where Jesus met the woman at the well and told her about the living water that is only found in Jesus.

But Jesus did not stop there. Jesus told them to go to the Uttermost parts of the world – the far corners of the globe to tell this good news found in Jesus. The Book of Acts tells the story of the early church doing this. It details the trials and tribulations that Paul and others endured as they attempted to carry the gospel to all nations.

You might say, “What does this have to do with me?” It is a part of your faith story as well. Those disciples told someone, who told someone, who told someone else, who eventually led to you. We are a part of that unbroken chain of faith that has led us here today to either hear the gospel for the first time or to hear it for the millionth time. The commissioning in Acts 1:8 is also for us!

Sometimes we forget that there are people right here in our community that have never heard the gospel of forgiveness and grace that can only be found in Jesus Christ. There is a world out there that needs to hear from us.



Is our gospel good enough to save us? Then why don't we continue to love those outside the church until they see they need the same kind of Savior. Jesus' commission to the disciples that day is a word for us as well. Let us carry the message of Christ to our community here in Kinston. Then we can share it as we travel in Lenoir County. As we travel across this nation, why don't we share as we go? If we have the opportunity to go to the far corners of the world, why not share it there?

This command of Jesus to carry the gospel is the call to cross boundaries. We need to realize that ALL the world needs Christ. The rock has been thrown into the pond and the ripples are reaching out to all the areas of life.

I want to close this morning with this story.¹

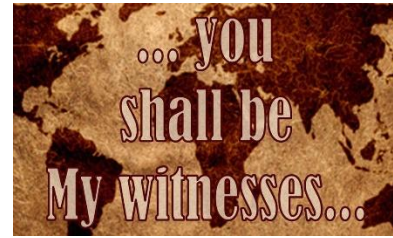
There was a man who had been a hold-up man and a kidnapper for twelve years, who met Jesus Christ while he was in prison. He felt that Jesus said to him, “I will come

and live in you and we will serve this sentence together,” and they did. Several years later he was discharged, and just before he went out, he was handed a two-page letter written from another prisoner. After the salutation, it said in effect,

“You know perfectly well that when I came into this jail, I despised preachers, the Bible, and everything. I went to the Bible class and the preaching service because there wasn’t anything else interesting to do. Then they told me you were saved, and I said, ‘There’s another fellow taking the gospel road to get a parole’; but, Roy, I’ve been watching you for two and a half years. You did not know it, but I was watching you when you were in the yard exercising, when you were working in the shop, when you played, while we were all together at meals, on the way to our cells, and all over, and now I’m a Christian, too, because I watched you. The Savior who saved you has saved me. You never made a slip.

Roy said, “When I got that letter and read it through, I came out in a cold sweat. Think what it would have meant if I had slipped even once.”

Yes, Jesus has gone “Up, Up, and Away” and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. Verse nine says, “*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*” We are told in verses 10 and 11 that Jesus will return one day. Until then, He has left instructions for us to follow until He calls us to be with Him.



Let me tell you, someone is watching you. You are a witness for Jesus everyday. The question is, “What kind of witness are you?”

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mickey’s Funnies, A Raise Funny, Jan. 19, 2026

² Heartwarming Bible Illustrations, Number 774, Someone Else Is Watching, page 304-5.

