

The Unstoppable Mission Of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as a family, when our children were young and as they were growing up, we spent lots of holidays in Comrie and Perthshire in central Scotland. Great place to go on holiday, lochs and hills, climbing, dog walking, all the rest of it. One of the things that we really enjoyed doing when we were on holiday was throwing stones into Loch Arne. And it's not that any of our family members are competitive to any extent at all. But what we enjoyed doing was seeing who could throw the stones the furthest into the loch, or even seeing who could do the best skimming of stones in the water. And because the loch was so still so often, you would often get that ripple effect, you know, when you drop a stone into the water and then these concentric circles expand and spread.

And as we begin studying the book of Acts this afternoon, just think of that image of the stone dropping into the water and the concentric circles spreading. This ripple effect is a good one to keep in mind because it's not only good for helping us get a handle on the book of Acts, but it helps us understand how the mission of Jesus continues to advance and spread and grow today. Because the impact of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus around 2,000 years ago continues to spread throughout our world today. And so the book of Acts essentially records the beginning of this mission of Jesus as it advances out towards the ends of the earth. And so as followers of Jesus, we are part of what is an unstoppable mission in this world. We are part of a movement. And so as we begin our study in the book of Acts this afternoon, I trust it will encourage us to play our part in the mission of Jesus in this world. And so we're going to look at the opening verses, Acts 1, verse 1 to 11, by way of introduction and overview because they are critical and crucial for us understanding all that follows.

And so we're going to look at the passage this afternoon under four headings. First of all, we see the mission plan. Secondly, we see the mission power. Thirdly, the mission pattern. And then fourthly, by way of application to us, we see what it means to be mission people. Mission plan, mission power, mission pattern, and mission people. So first of all, the mission plan there in verse 1 to verse 3.

The mission plan is essentially the continuation of the work of Jesus in this world. So let's read again. Acts 1, verse 1, in my former book, Theophilus, 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.

Now, Acts was written about AD 60, so roughly 30 years after the death of Jesus. And these are the words of Luke, who is, of course, the author of the gospel of Luke and the author of the book of Acts. And so Acts is essentially the second volume of Luke's two-volume work on Jesus, where both volumes are dedicated to this man called Theophilus. We don't know much about him, but Luke is writing to him. And in the beginning of his gospel, Luke says that he was writing an orderly account to provide Theophilus with certainty of all the things that have been taught about Jesus. So he wants Theophilus to be able to trust everything he says about the person and work of Jesus. But of course, Luke is more than just simply a historian, though he is. Luke is writing history from a theological point of view. In other words, what he's saying to us in both his gospel and the book of Acts is that what has happened in history concerning Jesus Christ impacts everybody from all ages. And so Luke is not writing the Acts of the

[4 : 43] Apostles, as it's sometimes called, nor is he writing the Acts of the Holy Spirit, as it is also sometimes called. He is writing the Acts of Jesus. Because here, Luke tells us that his first book is, verse 1 and 2, all about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when he was taken up to heaven. And so now the implication is that Acts is all about what Jesus continues to do, continuing what he began.

Because we see in Acts how the risen Lord Jesus Christ continues to do his work through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's saving purposes in this world. In fact, Luke's gospel ends the very same way that the book of Acts begins. So let me just read from the end of Luke chapter 24.

And this is what Luke says. Luke chapter 24 from verse 44. He said to them, This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, This is what is written, The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised. But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God. Those are the final words of Luke chapter 24. And they are essentially like a bridge connecting the gospel of Luke to the book of Acts. Because Luke is recording here Jesus' words that he would suffer and die and rise from the dead.

Then that the gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations and it would begin in Jerusalem. And that the apostles were to be witnesses to this. And that the power to do this would come from the Holy Spirit who would come after Jesus had gone. And then Luke's gospel ends with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. And then now Luke comes to the book of Acts and he repeats all of this again at the very beginning of Acts. Well, why does he repeat it? Essentially because he's telling us that the mission of Jesus is operational, it has started and it is continuing and it is unstoppable.

[7 : 56] And so everything Luke is saying must be fulfilled. Everything that Jesus has said would happen must happen. And so at the beginning of Acts, the mission plan of Jesus continues to move forward.

And that's why the risen Jesus here speaks about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God will continue to advance and grow until the day that Jesus Christ returns. In fact, the first and last references to God in Acts refer to the kingdom of God here in chapter 1 and then at the end in chapter 28.

And that is essentially why Jesus gives his marching orders to his apostles here before he ascends into heaven. Jesus is preparing them for deployment in his mission. Remember what Jesus promised in the gospels? He said, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And so Acts is this remarkable account of the unstoppable mission of Jesus as he builds his church. And it's a mission that's not just confined to back then, but it is a mission that continues today. A mission that we, as the church, are caught up in. And it's a mission that cannot and will not fail. Which is what we need to remember in our own day, isn't it? Because we live in secular Western Europe, where the church is small and the mission to reach the lost is hard and the advancement of the kingdom seems slow.

But wherever we are in this world, we must never forget that the mission of Jesus will never, ever fail. Jesus is building his church and the kingdom of God will come in all its fullness.

And so we can and we should take confidence in the mission plan of Jesus. That's the first point. Second point is the mission power. What is the mission power? The power for mission is the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 13] So in Luke chapter 24, Jesus said to his disciples that they would be clothed from power from on high. And here we read verse 4 verse 5, 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 have heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And this is a reference to Acts chapter 2, to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to empower the apostles to be witnesses for Jesus.

And then verse 8, see what Jesus says, So see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying he would continue to direct his mission from heaven through the Spirit who would soon be sent to the church on earth.

And that's why the Holy Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in Acts. But what's interesting is that if we trace the references to the Holy Spirit, they aren't evenly spread throughout the whole book of Acts.

They seem to appear in clusters throughout Luke's book. And in each cluster, the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is always the same.

[11 : 53] Where the Holy Spirit has a singular purpose. What is that purpose? Essentially, it's mission. The Holy Spirit is given to the church as the power for carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ in this world.

And that's the context in Acts. The Spirit is always empowering God's people to be witnesses to Jesus. He's always moving the church out further from Jerusalem into the world.

He's always emboldening believers to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Despite persecution. So that the message of Jesus and the gospel of Jesus Christ spreads further and wider.

Into new territory and reaching new frontiers. So the Holy Spirit is the power for the mission of Jesus in order to fulfill the mission plan of Jesus in the world.

And so, for example, the Holy Spirit is mentioned here in Acts chapter 1 at the commissioning of the apostles. Where the Spirit is specifically given to them, Jesus says, for worldwide mission.

[13 : 08] Then in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost, the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they were speaking in different tongues. But what were they saying?

They were declaring the wonders of God. And in Acts chapter 6, the choosing of leaders. The Spirit is mentioned as the apostles choose the right people to be leaders in the church.

Well, why? We're told so the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. And what was the result of this devotion?

Well, we're told that the word of God spread and the number of disciples increased rapidly. Then in Acts chapter 8, the Holy Spirit is involved in spreading the gospel further afield into Samaria.

Then in Acts chapter 10, it's the Spirit who propels Peter to go to a man called Cornelius. And as a result, the gospel then reaches not just Jews, but Gentiles.

[14 : 13] Then in Acts chapter 16, the Spirit propels Paul and Silas across to Macedonia and then into Europe. And then finally, Acts chapter 20, the Spirit propels the apostle Paul towards Rome, telling him that he must suffer, but he will also testify to the good news of God's grace.

And so in Acts, throughout all of these clusters, the Holy Spirit is working constantly to push the church outwards, to push the church onwards, to advance the mission of Jesus Christ.

So in one way or another, the Spirit empowers God's people to witness to Jesus, to tell more and more people about him. And so Acts reminds us that the Holy Spirit has come, not simply for our own benefit, but for the benefit of the church in order to reach people with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

And so if we want to see the power of the Holy Spirit working in our church, it will be because we have got a desire to tell more people about Jesus.

Because we'd love to see more people come to believe in Jesus as their Savior, and to trust him as their Lord. And so the power for the unstoppable mission of Jesus comes through the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 45] And so while it's important to have the right strategies, the right leaders, the right committees, the right ministries, all of that's good, but we must never forget that God's kingdom expands through the work of God's Spirit.

So as we proclaim the Word of God, the Spirit of God does the work of God in this world. And that's why we've got to have total and utter and complete dependence upon God for all that we seek to do for him.

And so we should be encouraged that it's his power, and not ours, that advances his kingdom in this world. So that's the mission power.

First of all, the mission plan. Secondly, the mission power. Now thirdly, the mission pattern. Verse 6 to 11. Now the mission pattern is set by Jesus.

Let's read these verses. Verse 6 to 8. Then they gathered round him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

[16 : 54] He said to them, It is 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 in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So Jesus commissions his followers to be his witnesses. Remember the image of the ripple effect of the stone dropping into the water and the concentric circles?

Well, here it's like the stone has been dropped in Jerusalem in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the ripple effect is about to take place, first in Jerusalem and then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

So Jesus outlines his pattern for mission here. Jesus is setting the agenda here for what is going to happen in the world.

In fact, the words of Jesus here in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8 really give the structure for the book of Acts, where in chapters 1 to 7, the narrative essentially centers on the mission in Jerusalem.

- [18 : 17] And then in chapters 8 to 12, it transitions into the mission in Judea and Samaria. And then in chapters 13 to 28, it moves into the Gentile world, beginning in Asia and Europe, and then ending up in Rome.

And it all happens as the good news of Jesus spreads out from the center in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But while this is the pattern in Acts, the mission of Jesus still continues today.

Because while Acts finishes with the Apostle Paul in Rome, that is not the ultimate goal of the mission of Jesus. Because today, the good news of Jesus must continue to spread to the ends of the earth because, well, there are still people in this world who need to hear about Jesus Christ.

But that's not the only pattern here in Acts. There is another discernible pattern for how the mission moves forward. Because when you track how the mission of Jesus, the message of Jesus advances in the book of Acts, it always seems to go in this way.

Proclamation, persecution, scattering, and growth. Proclamation, persecution, scattering, and growth. So the believers witness to Jesus.

- [19 : 50] They preach the message of Jesus wherever. Persecution comes because people reject the message of Jesus. And so then believers are scattered out to different places.

But what happens? The church grows because that's the plan of Jesus. Proclamation, persecution, scattering, growth. And as we look at Acts, we'll see this again and again and again.

And actually, we still see this pattern throughout church history. And it's a pattern that still happens today. So yes, Acts tells us about the mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

And yet, Acts also tells us that whenever people are involved in the mission of Jesus, then they will face persecution and opposition. But that doesn't stop or hinder the work of Jesus.

In many ways, it simply advances it and it spreads further and wider. So the rejection of the gospel message and persecution of the church never, ever stops the advance of Jesus' mission.

- [20 : 59] It keeps going and it keeps growing. And I'm sure we can all think of examples of this. Let me just give one. I was reading a few years back of some Christians in Sudan who were severely persecuted for their faith in Jesus.

And so what happened is that the Christian church that these Christians belonged to, it was bulldozed. So they came along and just demolished it because they hated Christians and hated hearing about Jesus.

But what happened to the believers? Well, they had no building, so they just scattered out in the area that they were in in Sudan. And then the end result was that four new churches were planted instead of just one.

And that should surely motivate us, shouldn't it, to press on with the work that God has called us to do. Whatever opposition we will surely encounter.

Because opposition will come, but where will it come from? Well, as we read the book of Acts, we see that opposition comes from various quarters. It comes from the world where Herod kills James and then puts Peter in prison, the world.

- [22 : 14] Opposition comes from the religious establishment where they want to stop Peter and John proclaiming the good news of Jesus. The religious establishment will oppose the true church of Jesus Christ.

And it even comes from inside the church through the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. And so God's people, we see in Acts, are killed for their faith. There are trials and imprisonments.

There is opposition. There is scandal. But that seems to be the normal pattern for how the gospel advances in Acts. That seems to be the mission pattern of Jesus for doing his work in this world.

And so that's why we should never be surprised when opposition happens and persecution comes to us. Whether it's persecution from the world outside, or whether it's opposition from the established church, or even sin from within our own church.

Whatever happens, we should never be thrown off course as if this caught Jesus out by surprise. And we should never be discouraged.

[23 : 26] And we should never feel like giving up. Because none of this, none of what happens can ultimately thwart the progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that's why we need to note this pattern in Acts. So yes, there will be opposition. But there will also be gospel growth.

In fact, just listen to how this growth is described in Acts. It's basically like a drumbeat that gets louder and louder and louder and louder. Because the growth of the church in Acts is always described as the growth of the word.

The growth of the word of God. So in Acts chapter 6 verse 7, we read, So the word of God spread. In Acts chapter 12 verse 24, we read, But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

In Acts chapter 13 verse 49, we read, The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. Then in Acts chapter 19 verse 20, we read, In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

[24 : 44] That is church growth. Church growth is the word of God spreading and multiplying in the world. And that's why we shouldn't put too much confidence in our clever strategies, In our meticulous planning.

And of course we need to work hard to do what we can, when we can, by all means. But it is the word of God that does the work. That's what Acts is telling us.

Listen to what Martin Luther, the German reformer, Said in one of his sermons in 1522, a long time ago. He said, I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's word.

Otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends, Philip and Amsdorf, The word so greatly weakened the papacy That no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it.

I did nothing. The word did everything. There's lots of reasons why I love that quote from Martin Luther. But the main one is his supreme confidence in the word of God to do the work of God.

[26 : 01] And so what Acts does is it gives us this confidence in God's word to grow God's church in every place. In Glasgow, in Inverness, in the Highlands and Islands, In the south of England, in Vietnam, anywhere in the world, To the ends of the earth.

It is the word of God, By the power of the Spirit of God, That reaches the lost, In any place, And at any time. It's interesting that that is Jesus' plan A For building his church.

There is no plan B. He's working. And his way of working is always the same. Now, what happens to Jesus As soon as he's outlined his mission plan?

Let's read verse 9 to 11. 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 have seen him go into heaven.

[27 : 22] So Jesus ascends into heaven, But did you notice how there's more focus On the apostles' response, And the angels' words, Than there is on the actual ascension of Jesus into heaven.

As if to drive home the urgency of the mission of Jesus. So Jesus has now ascended into heaven, But that doesn't mean his work stops on earth.

No, his work continues. And it's as if the angels are saying to the disciples, Don't stand there looking up into heaven, Because Jesus will come again, But before he does, You've got a job to do.

There is work to be done. In his name, With his power. So get on, And do it. Get to it. So the ascension, Followed by the sending of the Spirit, Indicate that the mission of Jesus Must be carried out by his church Until the day that Jesus Christ returns.

And so that's where we come in As the mission people. So the mission plan, The mission power, The mission pattern, And then as we apply this, The mission people. And it applies to us Whether we would call ourselves A Christian believer or not.

[28 : 43] Because we live in the light of Jesus giving his mission plan, Of Jesus sending his mission power, And of Jesus setting his mission pattern.

And so now, Jesus calls his people, The church, To be his mission people Until the day that he returns. And so that means That we have got a job to do.

God is moving things forward In history Until the day that Jesus Christ returns. And then, The mission will be accomplished.

It will be complete. And so this ripple effect That began in Jerusalem Will continue to spread As the gospel is proclaimed To people of all nations.

And no power of hell And no scheme of man Can fight against The inevitability Of the advance Of the mission of Jesus. Which means Any opposition To the continuing mission of Jesus To the ends of the earth Is absolutely And completely futile.

[29 : 54] No matter where that opposition Comes from, No matter how extreme That opposition is. You can't stand in the way Of what Jesus is doing In this world.

You can try, But you will fail. And that should encourage us And it should motivate us To press on With the mission That Jesus has called Each of us to do.

As an individual, But also as a church. Because as Jesus' people, We are never excused From participating In his mission. Because there are people Who are lost And who need to hear The saving message Of Jesus.

And so we must do What the apostles do In the book of Acts. We must urge people To repent of their sins And to put their faith In Jesus Christ.

That is the constant call Of the gospel Throughout the book of Acts. And so whatever context We live in, Whatever we spend our week, We need to go out Into the world Around us To reach people Who don't know Jesus.

[31 : 06] And that might mean Going to the other side Of the world As a missionary. But it might mean Just going Across to the other side Of the street Again, As a missionary.

Last weekend We had an American friend Who was staying with us And as we showed her Around Glasgow I was just reminded Of how culturally Different Glasgow is.

It is really diverse Different parts of Glasgow And the diversity Is to some extent All mixed up together. So you don't need To go to another land To experience culture shock.

You can get on the train And go one stop And experience culture shock In Glasgow. And so wherever There are people And they're everywhere We will need to find Ways of engaging With them.

And that's what Acts Shows us. Because the reality is That the majority Of people That you know And I know Aren't suddenly Just appearing At church on Sundays And coming through The doors.

[32 : 16] They're not here. David Cook One of the commentators On Acts Says this He says The impossible application For the individual Christian Or Christian fellowship Is that they are Excused from Participating in God's mission.

The progress of the Gospel does not Stop with us. A church that Claims to be Christian Yet has no concern To get the gospel Beyond its doors Is not a Christian Church.

And so how does The church go about Its mission? How do you go about Your mission On a day-to-day basis? Well in Acts Here's how it happens. It happens In public spaces.

It doesn't happen Within the walls Of a church. There were no Church buildings then. William thinks His church has got A problem Because they don't Have a building. Well they didn't Have buildings in Acts.

So what did they do? Well they met In public spaces. In people's homes. In the streets. In lecture theaters. In courtrooms. In the temple courts. In prisons.

[33 : 20] And in marketplaces. In places. Anywhere. And everywhere. Where there were people. The church was Advancing the message Of Jesus Christ. And so wherever You spend your week.

And I spend my week. That is where Jesus Is sending us out On his mission. And we might be put off By thinking Well Our culture is just So hostile.

And it is. And increasingly so. It isn't A Christian culture. If anything. It is described as A post-Christian culture. It is definitely An anti-Christian culture.

But hey. Welcome to the book of Acts. It is all of that. And although Acts Has ended. The work of Jesus Still continues today.

Through his church And by the power Of his spirit. Jesus is building His church. And that is why This passage And this book Should be Not just an encouragement To us If we are a follower Of Jesus But it should Also be a warning To us If we don't Follow Jesus Because we are Either part Of the unstoppable Mission of Jesus Christ To the ends Of the earth Or we are Against the mission Of Jesus Christ We are either Living and witnessing For Jesus In this world Or we are Fighting against Jesus In our hearts In this world And yet That is Utterly foolish To try and stand In the way Of the work Of Jesus Because Jesus Will accomplish His mission Jesus came To save Through giving up His life On the cross To take away

[35 : 09] Our sin And to bear The punishment It deserves And that is Why the wisest Thing any human Being can ever Do is to Stop rebelling Against our Loving creator God And to turn From our sin And to trust In Jesus As our saviour That is why Jesus came And so now Is the time To respond To Jesus In this life Because one day When Jesus Returns He will judge Us And how we Have responded To him And what he Came into this World to do So as we Close It is interesting That the very Last verse In Acts Says this Of Paul Acts chapter 28 verse 31 Says Of Paul He proclaimed The kingdom Of God And taught

About the Lord Jesus Christ With all Boldness And without Hindrance Without hindrance Is literally The word Unhinderedly And that is not A word we Use very often But it's a great Word Unhinderedly So the story Of Acts Concludes Essentially With the Task Unfinished But whilst The task Is unfinished It will be Carried out Unhinderedly Nothing will Hinder the work That Jesus Is doing In this world As to As those Of us Who have Experienced The grace Of God Towards us In Jesus Christ Well why Would we Want to Invest our Lives In anything Less Than the Great And the Glorious The certain And the Unstoppable Mission Of Jesus Let's go For it And be Part Of the Story Of what Jesus

Is doing Until he Comes again