

Taking the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth

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[0 : 00] Well, it is a great pleasure to be here, to be back here, I should say. It's a great pleasure to see familiar faces. It's very exciting to see faces we don't know as well.

We're really thankful for St Lucia Bible Church, for your formative role in our lives and for your encouragement now and the partnership that we look forward to sharing together.

We're really thankful for that and excited to see that grow in the time to come. If you've been here the last couple of days, you've been thinking, we've been thinking, what is the Gospel?

What is the momentous news that God has gifted us with? What is the Gospel? This morning, we're moving on to think about what do we do with that Gospel?

What is it that we do with that Gospel? Now, I need to apologise because I'm starting with a sporting illustration. I don't often do that but I am this morning. Imagine, imagine this, some of you will know it deeply but some of you will have to imagine it.

[0 : 58] Imagine you're a passionate follower of AFL, Aussie rules. Your team is in the finals. They're playing. They're playing.

You're watching them. You're watching the way they're playing. They're professional. They're passionate. They're controlled. In the game, they're behind five points but that's okay.

One kick could put them in front and so you watch them and you're kind of excited but it's okay. But imagine this. Your team is playing and they're desperate.

They're giving it their all. They're giving it everything they've got. They look, well, there's nothing particularly professional or controlled about it. It's passion. It's urgency. It's desperation.

They're five points behind, exactly like they were before. What's different? What's changed? What has taken them from being professional, controlled, careful to desperate, urgent?

[1 : 58] Well, in the second case, there's two minutes to go. The game is almost over. They're still just five points behind like they were before but what has changed is the time.

And when the time changes, everything changes. Because at this moment, they're behind and their season is on the line. Everything depends on the next two minutes.

Whether you're an AFL fan or not, you're familiar with that feeling, aren't you, that time changes things. If you're at school or at uni, you've got an assignment and you've got to write a thousand words.

At one point, you have a day to do that. At another point, you have an hour to do that. It is exactly the same time. So I'm just waiting to see if anyone's breaking out into a sweat here.

Sorry, exam time students, I realise the trigger warning should have been applied. But you can see it's exactly the same task. There's nothing different about what you need to do.

[3 : 06] But the time changes and everything changes. The time is different and everything is different. The time we're in changes the way we perceive the world.

The time we're in changes the way that we live. And so, brothers and sisters, the question for us is, what time is it?

What time is it that we live in? And that's really what we're looking at as we look at this passage of the book of Acts. What time is it? What is the time that we are living in? If you've got your outline there, I'll more or less follow it.

The first big thing that we see from the book of Acts is what has happened? What has happened? What's the reality that we live in? And Luke wants to point us to a few things, significant things, about the time that we live in.

See it there, Acts chapter 1 from verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[4 : 18] And he's describing what has happened, what has happened up until this point for his disciples and what remains true and relevant for us. In verse 3 there, Jesus, he presented himself alive to them after his suffering.

The first big thing in terms of Jesus' story that Luke wants to point us to is Jesus' suffering. Now, what's going on there?

Is Luke engaging in a bit of classic Aussie understatement? Because he's not talking just about Jesus' suffering, is he? He's talking about Jesus' death. But is he doing the Aussie thing?

You know, you've had a friend, they've gone to the movies and you'll find out about us afterwards what the movie was like and it was a bit ordinary. What they actually mean was it was so dire, I felt like clawing my eyes out and I would rather die than go and see it again.

But because it's an Aussie, it was a bit ordinary. You see, is that what Luke is doing there? He's because, well, Jesus' death went far beyond suffering, didn't it? Jesus' death was appalling.

[5 : 26] So is Luke just kind of doing a bit of the classic understatement? It's not an accident because this is the way Luke refers to Jesus' death five times in his Gospel and four times in the Book of Acts.

So it's not just, he's not just grasping for extra vocab. This is a key way for him to understand the death of Jesus as Jesus' suffering. One of the things we're going to see as we look through this chapter of Acts is that God's purposes, God's actions unfold according to his ancient plans.

God's actions in Jesus unfold according to his ancient plans. And so a number of times just in this first chapter, Luke has the Book of Isaiah in the back of his mind as he describes what's going on with Jesus.

And that's the case here as he quite deliberately describes Jesus' death as his suffering. What Luke has in mind here is Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53. So that's going to flash up on the screen behind you there. Isaiah chapter 53. Now cunningly I think, I'll turn around because my Bible is different to my slides, but Isaiah 53, you see what he says there?

[6 : 40] Isaiah 53 is talking about the ministry of God's servant. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.

The servant, God's servant suffers. His servant suffers in our place. His servant suffers in our place bearing our sin.

He dies for the sake of others and for their sin in their place. And so when Luke talks about Jesus' suffering, this is the picture that he has in mind. This is what he wants people to understand.

This is the significance of Jesus' death. An innocent one dying in the place of the guilty. Taking upon themselves their punishment so that they might be forgiven.

[7 : 45] What's the time we live in? This is the time. The time when Jesus has taken the punishment for sin on himself that we might be forgiven and restored.

We live in the time after Jesus' death, in the light of Jesus' death. We live in the time as well of Jesus' resurrection. That's there in verse 3 as well. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

The Lord we serve, as you've heard, we've heard again and again over the last couple of days, is a risen Lord. He's been raised from the dead. He's triumphed over death.

He's been established as God's reigning, ruling king through his resurrection.

This is the time we live in. Jesus has been raised from the dead, defeated death and reigns as king. So then, what happens now?

[9 : 01] Because that's the next thing that the book of Acts talks about. What happens now in the light of those great events of Jesus' death and resurrection? You see it there in verse 6.

Jesus' disciples, when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now that Jesus has triumphed over death, is this the time when everything will be made new?

Is this, well, although that's not actually what they ask, is it? Is this the time when you'll restore the kingdom to Israel? Their hopes are quite narrow.

Their hope is that Jesus will do something nationally, politically, here and now. Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Is their question. Jesus, in classic fashion, we'll see what he says. He said to them, it's not time for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

[10:03] But, and he goes on, his answers, well, it's not really an answer, is it? He kind of deflects their question. But in doing so, he gives a fairly clear idea of what he thinks about their idea.

The kingdom will not just be here and now, national, political, here and now. God has much bigger plans and purposes for his kingdom and for his servants.

And so, you see what he says in verse 9. He says to his followers, he says, but you will receive power and the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

He tells them, in answer to their question, will you restore the kingdom? He tells them in answer to that, that they are going to receive his spirit. They are going to receive his spirit, the long-awaited spirit.

Right at the very start of the book of Luke, is the promise that his followers will be baptised, not just with water, but with the spirit. And here at last, that promise is about to be fulfilled.

[11:16] And the giving of the spirit is highly significant for God's people, once again, in his ancient plans. And so, Isaiah chapter 32, Isaiah chapter 32, verse 14 and 15, shows us that giving God's spirit is a sign that his restoration has begun.

Giving his spirit is a sign that his restoration has begun. Look at it there. It talks about the first verse there, verse 14, talks about the context of judgment. So, the first half of the book of Isaiah is predominantly about God's judgment upon his people.

And you see that picture of judgment in the first half there. The fortress will be abandoned. The noisy city deserted. Citadel and Watchtower will become a wasteland forever.

The delight of donkeys. A pasture of flocks. The land of God's people will be a wasteland. It will be a wreck and a ruin because it lives under the judgment of God until...

Until... The moment of restoration is when God's spirit is poured out. Till the spirit is poured on us from on high and the desert becomes a fertile field and the fertile field seems like a forest.

[12:31] When God gives his spirit to his people, it's a sign that restoration has begun. That God is overturning his judgments. He's restoring his creation.

He's restoring his people. Not nationally, not physically, but spiritually. And so, the spirit is a sign of the end times, that restoration has begun.

And as God gives his spirit, as he works to restore, as he works to build his kingdom through the spirit, he calls his people, his apostles in the first instance, but his church beyond that, he calls his people to be his witnesses.

The giving of the spirit means that we are God's witnesses. You see it there in verse 8 there. He says, you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be my witnesses. Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. The giving of the spirit calls us to be witnesses. Now, once again, as Luke talks about that, he has the book of Isaiah in mind.

[13:46] He has the book of Isaiah in mind. Isaiah chapter 43, verse 9 and 10. In Isaiah 43, God is on trial. He claims to be the only God.

But will these claims hold up? As the nations have surrounded his people, as the nations have triumphed over God's people, can you really say that he is the one true God?

And so, Isaiah 43, all the nations gather, the peoples assemble, and the question is, which God is God? Which God is truly God? And God asks of the other so-called gods, which of their gods foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things?

Which other God actually had a plan for all of history and can point to that? And those other gods, well, maybe they might try to call their own witnesses in this trial about who was God.

Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they're right so that others may hear and say it's true. The implication is, well, that's not going to happen, is it? But our God, he has witnesses, our God, he has people who will stand in the dock and testify to his plans and his purposes and his truthfulness.

[15:05] You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I've chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me. There in Isaiah, God calls his people to witness to his truth.

And again, Luke has this in mind, that when the Spirit is given, God's people will witness to him. And so that's the picture that's here in the book of Acts.

It's still like a law court and the apostles will testify to what they have seen and heard, the death and resurrection of Jesus. They'll testify to the veracity of those things, to the truthfulness of the fact that Jesus is in fact risen from the dead, that he is now ruling and reigning.

And the task for God's people is to be that witness, well, in ever-growing and ever-spreading circles. You see it there in verse 9 there. You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria.

[16:28] What he's talking about there is essentially, what he's talking about there, the picture is, kind of the restored Israel. Judah, Judea, Samaria.

That's the kind of borders of Israel. The task for God's people is to be a witness to him. But that changes between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

So the Old Testament was talking about God's people being a witness to him. In the Old Testament that happened, it was kind of by attracting people to the nation of Israel.

So the idea was that the nation of Israel would live under God, enjoying his grace, living obediently to him, and that would be startlingly different, and the people around would notice that and be drawn in to find out about that.

So in the book of Kings, 1 Kings 10, the story of the Queen of Sheba, she hears about Solomon's wealth and wisdom, and she comes from afar, kind of, for the Queen of Sheba, it's like a trip from Adelaide to Brisbane.

[17:31] She makes that trip on camel or on foot because she has heard about Solomon, she's heard about his wisdom, she's heard about his relationship with the Lord, and so she's attracted, she wants to come in, she wants to know.

And that's the picture of the witness of God's people in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament that changes. It's no longer that God's people just live their lives there in Jerusalem and everyone comes to see and hear, but here in the New Testament, God throws his people out, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and beyond.

It's a little bit like, if you've got kids or you've been a kid recently, you go to the playground and they have those, I'm not exactly sure what they call them, you know those kind of spinny kind of things, they're like a little stick and they've got a thing and you stand on them and they kind of spin round and your kid gets a little bit dizzy.

They're pretty tame. I mean, the only real danger is if your kid's been at a birthday party and they've had a little bit too much birthday cake, well, if they spin on that too long, that could have unfortunate consequences. But generally speaking, I'm kind of fairly tame, fairly kind of controlled.

A few years ago, Linda and I had the great pleasure of being able to, on long service leave, to go back to South Africa, where Linda's from, take our kids, show them where she grew up and that kind of thing.

[18:54] Now, we got there and we took the kids to the local park, once we'd recovered from jet lag, and walked into the park and had a revelation, because if you are kind of my age or older, you might remember a time when we didn't have those kind of little stick, kind of spinny things.

Instead, what we had was this kind of vast circle of kind of bare metal with some poles on it, like bigger than that kind of fan there, this kind of vast piece of metal, and the kids would kind of stand on it and there'd be handles on it, and you would spin this thing and it would take like four hours and kind of three muscle men to get it going.

But once it did, this thing was just kind of, this kind of vast crunching, kind of round and round and round, and your kids had to hold on for dear life, because the vast centrifugal forces, like your kids let go, you would watch children just kind of arc across the sky and kind of land in the bushes.

Oh, it was beautiful. You can kind of see why they've done away with them when you see what happens, but it was so different. But you see, that's God's plans and purposes.

His purpose is to throw His people out all through the world with His gospel. We stand, sit, whatever you want to do on that great merry-go-round, and God's purpose and plan is to send us out with the gospel through the world.

[20:26] That's why we're going to Vanuatu, and that's why we together are partnering in that work, because this is God's plan, to send His people through the world as a witness.

And it is through all the world, because, you see, in theory, Jesus could simply have died for the sins of Israel. He could have died just for the sins of His ancient people, and Acts 1.8 could have read, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.

Full stop. But that's not what it says. That's not what it says. It goes on. It's Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

I think, once again, Isaiah gives us a picture of why this is and what's going on there. Isaiah chapter 49, verse 6. Did I not get that one on the screen? Sorry, I'll have to read it for you. Isaiah chapter 49, verse 6.

Once again, it's talking about the ministry of God's servants. God's talking about the ministry of His servant, and He says, it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.

[21 : 44] Jesus could have been the servant who restored Israel to God. But that would have been too small. That would have been too pathetic.

That would have been too... Well, for the glorious Son of God, really, that would have been nothing. It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob.

Instead, I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. That's the work of our Saviour.

His salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. And so that's the work of His people. To witness to His kingdom and His salvation to the ends of the earth.

That's why we're going, and it's why you are coming with us in partnership as you support us, as you pray for us, as you care, and as you give for the work. So that the world might know.

[22 : 59] We can be encouraged in that because the Lord we serve is a risen and exalted Lord.

You see that in verse 9, when Jesus had said these things to the people, as they were looking up, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.

And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes 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.

Jesus has been lifted up. He's the exalted reigning Lord. He's the exalted reigning Lord who will return. And that's the time we live in.

We live in the time when Jesus reigns in heaven and we await His return. The apostles in the story are waiting too.

And it's interesting to notice what they do as they wait. They return to Jerusalem in verse 12. Then in verse 14, all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and His brothers.

[24 : 14] Throughout the book of Acts, as we see God powerfully at work by His Spirit, sending out His Word, bringing people into His Kingdom, growing His people, again and again and again, as we see God powerfully at work, we also see His people dedicated to prayer.

The people who most clearly see the power of God at work, the people who most clearly see God working in amazing ways, above and beyond the dreams and imagination of His people, are the people who pray.

And I think it's a great encouragement for us to be people who pray, who call on God to accomplish His plans and purposes, who call on God to be generous in sending His salvation to our suburb, to our schools, to the ends of the earth.

So, brothers and sisters, what have we seen? Well, we've seen the time we live in. The time we live in is the time of Jesus' suffering for sin.

The time we live in is the time of His resurrection, His triumph over death, His proclamation as King. The time we live in is the time of the Spirit.

[25 : 38] The time we live in is the time of witness to the world. The time we live in is the time of our risen Lord who is coming back.

And so, brothers and sisters, I need to ask you the question, does your life fit with the time that we are living in? Does your life fit with the time we are living in?

Imagine the coming week, someone shadowed you for the week, just kind of lurked around at the edges of life, kind of work, school, home, didn't really interact with you at all, but just kind of watched.

That's a bit creepy, isn't it? But imagine it, just kind of watched. What would they see? What would they see from your life? What would it tell them about you?

What would it tell them about the things you value? What would it tell them about the things you love? What would it tell them about the things you're invested in?

[26 : 49] What would it tell them about the things you're passionate in? At the end of the week, would that sneaky observer walk away and be able to think something about the time that you live in?

As they looked at your life, would it only really make sense if they knew about the death of Jesus? Would it only make sense if they knew about the resurrection of Jesus?

Would it only make sense if they knew that you were one of God's people called to be his witnesses? Or would they be able to look at your life and your neighbour's life and kind of say, well, yeah, they're just like everyone else.

See, brothers and sisters, the time we live in changes us. The time we live in changes us. It changes what we love.

It changes what we invest in. It changes what we invest our time in, what we invest our energy in. It changes what we invest our money in. It changes the things we're passionate about, what we desire, what we wake up dreaming about.

[28 : 01] It changes our hopes. It changes our dreams. the time we live in changes everything. Brothers and sisters, fix your hope on him, our risen and returning Lord.

And can I encourage you, as you are no doubt doing, to keep on investing your time, your energy, your money in the kingdom that will last.

Keep investing in the work of Jesus. Share those realities with others. And for some of you, you should seriously think about changing what you're doing or changing what you're training to be doing.

You should seriously think of leaving your study or your job and your preparation for your study and dedicate yourself to the work of sharing Jesus.

I mean, that's what we should all be doing. But for some of you, it ought to mean stepping away from what you're doing now and making that the thing you do in your life.

[29 : 20] But regardless of whether or not that is you, all of us should live differently because of the time we live in. The time we live in affects the way we live.

Imagine you're in the city. You're catching the bus home. You're 100 metres from your bus stop. But you've got an hour until your bus arrives.

So you kind of walk along. You're in no great hurry. You kind of walk past mine. Do a bit of window shopping there. You go into the food court. You have lunch. Leisurely, pleasurable.

You never break a sweat. But imagine you're 100 metres from your bus stop and your bus is coming in 60 seconds' time.

Well, you move a bit differently, won't you? You're not going to run madly, but you'll move with purpose. You'll be single-minded. You might glance at the shop at Maya, but you're certainly not going to go into Maya and check out their specials.

[30 : 17] And you're not going to go into the food court and have a meal because your bus is coming in a minute's time. And so you move with purpose. You move with focus. You move deliberately and certainly in one direction, with one purpose, because you understand the time.

Your bus is coming. And the time shapes everything you do. Well, brothers and sisters, the bus is coming. Jesus is returning.

We live in the life of his death, his reign, his rule. And that changes everything. Amen.