

What is the mission of the church? Fighting poverty and injustice, tackling climate change, feeding the poor, encouraging other believers? Although these things will rightly be of concern to Christian believers, it seems that in Acts chapter 1, Jesus teaches that the primary focus of our church's life together is to bear witness to him as the risen Lord.

In the first few verses of his second book (Acts), the author Luke, reminds us what has happened at the end of his first book (The Gospel according to Luke): Jesus has risen from the dead, and given lots of evidence to this fact so that people can be in no doubt. Jesus was dead, and then he rose from the dead!

Recorded for us in Acts 1vv7-11 we have Jesus' last words to the apostles before he ascends.

### **1. The command to witness to all nations**

The command to witness in v8 is very clear. Jesus tells the apostles they are to be 'my witnesses'. They are to bear witness, tell others, give testimony to Jesus' story rather than their own. Having seen and heard for themselves, they are now to tell others... and they are to tell the whole world, beginning in Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth! They are not to remain an exclusive club, but are to spread the good news of Jesus far and wide.

And it is not just the role of the apostles. In Acts chapter 8, severe persecution of Christians has broken out and so in verse 4 we are told that '*those who were scattered went about preaching the word*'. Now, we might naturally assume that this referred to the apostles, but verse 1 says all the Christian believers were scattered '**except** the apostles'!

Despite the fact that their leaders were not with them, the believers continued to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

Christian believers today are not apostles (for we are not eye-witnesses of the risen Lord Jesus), but we do have 'their testimony to Christ' in the four gospel accounts. The apostles were '*eye-witnesses*'... you and I are '*ear-witnesses*', and so our evangelism is to bear witness to Jesus Christ through His testimony as recorded in the Gospels.

### **2. Our witness continues the work of King Jesus**

Although we read that Jesus ascended to heaven and could no longer be seen, we must not think that his work was finished. Although Jesus finished his work of redemption on the cross, he didn't finish his work in the world.

So whilst the work that only Jesus could accomplish has indeed been accomplished (salvation)... the work of *proclaiming* that salvation is ongoing.

This is why the apostles are told in v11 to stop staring at the sky and to instead get on with witnessing! King Jesus still has much work to be done on earth, and this will be accomplished through his people.

And the great news is that Jesus has not left them, or us, to get on with things on our own. In fact, it would be impossible for us to do this on our own...

### **3. The crucial role of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus' words in v8 make it very clear that our ability to bear witness to Jesus is only possible once we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit. That is why, back in vv3-4, the apostles are told to wait 'for what the Father had promised'... the Holy Spirit. Without Him they will be useless, ineffectual. Only when the Holy Spirit is given will they be ready to witness.

As followers of Jesus Christ this side of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit is given to believers straight away... we don't have to wait.

Isn't it exciting! We are commanded to be part of King Jesus' work here on earth. We do not do it on our own, in fact we can't. But God gives us His Holy Spirit, and it is by His power that we bear witness to the fact that Jesus died and rose again in order to give new life to those who trust in Him.