

CHURCH

Creation to Conclusion Series

Text: Acts 1:1-11

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So, what is the Church?

The simpler answer that we find from scripture is that the Church is ...

- ... those who received [the] word ... (Acts 2:41)
- ... [those] who believed ... (Acts 2:44)
- ... those who [are] being saved. (Acts 2:47)

The Church is not a building or location, but a people. So, they are the people who have received the word, believed, and are saved. But I do not think that is sufficient to grasp this thing that is the hope of the world. Some questions to get to are ...

1. Who are those people supposed to be?
2. How are they supposed to be who they are?
3. What are those people supposed to do?

These are natural questions, and my hope is that God's Word can answer them for us.

Who is the Church?

At the beginning of the book of Acts, the author makes it clear about the function of what he wrote previously, and then he gives the background and context of what is to come. He talks about Jesus's resurrection, what He spoke about after his resurrection, and the Kingdom of God. Then, it says that Jesus "ordered them not to depart Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father ..." He goes on to clarify that He is talking about the promise of the Holy Spirit.

"... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5)

God is letting us know through the book of Acts that Jesus sees this as a very big deal. While His work on the cross was done and He had been resurrected, He still was telling his followers "not yet." His disciples have no ability to accomplish God's purpose in the world because they had not become the Church Jesus had envisioned just yet. Instead, they were to wait until the Holy Spirit arrived, because the Holy Spirit changes people into God's people.

This would be like trying to use an old, rusty pair of scissors that do not even work to try to mow your lawn when you have a brand-new tractor on the way. All you should simply do is wait for it to arrive, and do not waste your time trying to use the scissors. This illustrates what Jesus is telling His disciples, they can't do it without the power that is coming very soon. The same is true of believers today; without the Holy Spirit we would be unequipped, unprepared, and disconnected. But, the outpouring of the Spirit of God empowers all those who follow Jesus. We hear about this empowerment in a prophecy through Joel, a prophet in the Old Testament.

*"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28)*

The Holy Spirit empowers all those who have faith in Jesus. Those who have confessed and repented of their sin, accepted Jesus as Lord, Son of God, and King, and sought to follow Him through obedience to His Word have the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says...

... when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance ... (Ephesians 1:13-14)

This inheritance comes through the baptism of the Spirit. What that means is that not only are we empowered and sealed by the Spirit, but also adopted. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ... (Romans 8:16-17).*

What I want us all to see is that through Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit equips, prepares, and connects. The Holy Spirit makes the Church a powerful family.

POINT 1: THE CHURCH IS A POWERFUL FAMILY

How is the Church supposed to be a powerful family?

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he spends time talking to the church in Corinth about the Church and its function. Paul writes, *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ..."* (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) Paul is talking about the baptism of the Spirit that we hear Jesus talk about in Acts one. Paul continues with the illustration of the body and its implications for the Church. He talks about how one part of the body is critically impactful to the rest of the body.

A few years ago, I was working in my backyard. I was spreading mulch and utilizing a trailer attached to my tractor. I had finished all the gardens and I usually take a load or two of mulch and put it in the woods for additional projects throughout the summer and fall. So this is what I was doing. I backed up the trailer in such a way that I thought the easiest thing would be to detach the trailer from the mower and dump the load of mulch with my own two hands. I did so, and without realizing it, I released the dump lever. When the trailer is upright, it dumps the bed of the trailer, but I had already lifted it. So the hitch came down instead of the bed going up, and it landed perfectly on the big toe of my left foot. On that day, I came to appreciate the beauty, necessity, and amount of pain receptors on my big toe.

Paul is saying the same thing to the believers who make up the Church. We are a powerful family, and we have gifts and abilities as a part of the body that are unique and interconnected with others. The individuals that make up the Church are uniquely equipped. Again, the Church is uniquely equipped. You are uniquely equipped as a part of this powerful family to Jesus's mission.

POINT 2: THE CHURCH IS UNIQUELY EQUIPPED

What is the uniquely equipped, powerful family supposed to do?

Let's jump back to Acts 1. Jesus makes a statement in Acts 1:8. He says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The Holy Spirit makes us a powerful family; we are uniquely equipped, and we are to be witnesses. The way that Jesus phrases this in the passage is not a command or a suggestion, but simply a statement - that those empowered by the spirit will be His witness. What does a witness do, simply shares the truth of what happened? Other usages within the Bible and outside of it have legal connotations, and our present legal system uses witnesses in order to understand better what happened. Those who follow Jesus are empowered simply to share what happened in their life. The testimony of the witness through the power of the Holy Spirit will make a difference.

What this means is that the Church has an undeniable purpose.

POINT 3: THE CHURCH HAS AN UNDENIABLE PURPOSE

To what extent does that purpose extend? Jesus uses the phrase, "... in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." He does this to emphasize being witnesses everywhere. Therefore, the audience that Jesus has in mind is all of the world. Again, the Church has an undeniable purpose to be witnesses to all the world regarding what Jesus has done in our lives.

The Church, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, is a **powerful family, uniquely equipped**, for an **undeniable purpose** to which Jesus calls us.

So what do you do with all that?

First, if you are not invested in a local church, you're missing out. You are missing out on an opportunity to be a part of a body where you can be shaped, supported, and supportive. Now, I am going to be completely honest: investing in a local church is hard, inconvenient, and costly - but anything that is worthwhile is not easy, convenient, or cheap. It is through this powerful family that we are made holy and more like Christ. It is through this powerful family that we lean into opportunities that are rewarding and through which we are rewarded.

Second, discover your gifts through doing. One of the most exciting parts about my job is to see people discover the gifts that God has given them. You have gifts because you, through Jesus, have the Holy Spirit and are uniquely equipped. By taking the opportunity to serve, you participate in this powerful family and you gain meaningful connections centered on an eternal purpose.

Third, be a part of God's calling. Being a part of God's calling is possible every day, for anyone, wherever you are. Not only does the Holy Spirit uniquely equip you, but He also strategically positions you within God's undeniable purpose.

Valley, as a powerful family uniquely equipped to an undeniable purpose, is a local expression of the Church. In light of that purpose, we seek to honor God and grow in Christ through worship, equipping, serving, and sharing Jesus. We, as a group of Jesus's disciples, get to join in this grand story that started at the beginning with creation. God, through Jesus, gets to heal the brokenness in our world through His people; you and I together are that hope. We get to come alongside people to share about what Jesus has done in our own life and, as we do that the Holy Spirit will work and we'll see our towns, community, and counties transformed. We get to be a part this amazing reality; we get to be God's family and the hope for this world.