

Bible Stories for Adults

The Great Commission and Ascension

Acts 1:1-11

Opening

Gathering: Why are so many Christians so hesitant to share their faith when given the opportunity?

Today's Focus: Before ascending into heaven, Jesus commanded all of His followers to be His witnesses and He gave His Spirit and power to enable us to do so.

Key Verses: *He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*
Acts 1:3

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. Acts 1:8

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Understanding (*John 14-16*)

After Jesus rose, did He spend as much time as possible with His disciples for final preparations?

John 20:19, 26; 21:1, 14 = No, He appeared sporadically, three times over a few weeks

Did He not need to spend more time because they were well trained and understood everything?

John 14:8-11 = Even the night before He died they didn't understand who He was

Did they not understand because they were too dense?

John 16:25 = No, Jesus had been speaking figuratively, they didn't understand

Why hadn't Jesus explained the things He said?

John 12:49-50 = He said things exactly as the Father told Him

Why would Jesus waste His effort saying things that couldn't be understood?

John 14:24b-26 = *The Counselor, the Holy Spirit*, would come and explain everything

Did the things Jesus say have any purpose until the Spirit came and explained them?

John 16:33 = It gave His disciples peace

Did Jesus say everything that needed to be said so that the Spirit could then explain it?

John 16:12 = No, He had much more to say, more than they could bear

So are all the things Jesus didn't get around to saying lost?

John 16:13-15 = No, the Spirit would also reveal them

How long would this Counselor be around to explain things?

John 14:16 = Forever

Grief to Joy (*John 16:19-22*)

How did the disciples feel about trading Jesus for the Holy Spirit?

John 16:5-7 = They were grieved about losing Jesus

How long would they feel this way?

John 16:19-22 = Only until they saw Jesus again

Were they filled with joy as Jesus had promised when they saw Jesus?

John 20:20, 28; 21:7 = Yes, they were ecstatic to see Him – once they saw it was Him

Was it only the apostles that Jesus appeared to?

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 = No, He appeared to many

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Prophesy Fulfilled (*Luke 24:44-49*)

What reason other than giving proof of His resurrection did Jesus appear to people?

Luke 24:44-45 = To fulfill the promises of the Messiah prophesied in the Scriptures

How did His return to life help complete this fulfillment?

Luke 24:46 = Scripture said the Messiah would suffer, die and rise on the third day

How would the coming weeks and years further show this fulfillment? = Begin in Jerusalem

Luke 24:47-48 = Jesus' witnesses would take His good news (gospel) to the world

Would the fulfillment of taking the Good News to the world depend on these witnesses?

Luke 24:49 = No, the Spirit would fulfill this prophesy through them

New Beginnings (*Acts 1:3*)

How long did Jesus go around showing Himself?

Acts 1:1-3 = He showed Himself to His apostles and disciples for 40 days

What is meaningful about this length of time between the ministries of Jesus and the disciples?

Matthew 4:1-2 = Jesus took 40 days to transition into His ministry

Where do we first see the use of the number 40 representing a new beginning?

Genesis 7:4 = God flooded the earth for 40 days to give His creation a new beginning

How did God make a new beginning with His people when they didn't trust Him?

Numbers 14:27, 29, 33-34 = He kept them in the wilderness 40 years

Was He just punishing them or was He really making a new beginning?

Deuteronomy 8:2-5 = He worked on them over the 40 years to forge a new beginning

Moses' New Beginnings (*Acts 7:17-43*)

How was Moses' life filled with examples of these new beginnings?

Acts 7:21-24, 29 = 40 yrs in Pharaoh's house to learn to lead a nation

Acts 7:30, 33-34 = 40 yrs with priest of Midian to learn faithfulness to God

Deuteronomy 34:7 = 40 yrs fulfilling his calling as faithful leader of God's people

Deuteronomy 9:9 = Moses spent 40 days/nights on Mt Sinai getting God's commands

Deuteronomy 9:16, 25 = Moses lay before God 40 days/nights after golden calf

Deuteronomy 10:10-11 = Moses spent another 40 days/nights getting second set

Other New Beginnings = Ask for examples of 40, then review these

What other significant new beginnings do we find in His Story?

Joshua 14:7 = Caleb began his ministry as a spy at 40

Judges 3:11-12 = Israel had 40 years of peace after conquest, before evil (Jdg5:31)

Judges 13:1 = Israel experienced 40 years of Philistine rule before Samson

1 Samuel 4:18 = Eli led Israel 40 years before Samuel took over

2 Samuel 5:4 = David, the greatest king of Israel, reigned 40 years

1 Kings 11:42 = Solomon, last king of united kingdom, reigned 40 years

1 Kings 19:2-3, 8, 15 = God renewed Elijah's call after 40 day/night journey running away

2 Kings 12:1 = Joash, the king who rededicated Judah to God, reigned 40 years

Jonah 3:4-5 = Ninevah was given 40 days to repent, they did

To what New Beginning have we been called? = A glorious new ministry of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3:6-8 = *Ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter [of law] but of the Spirit*

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Wait For the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)

- Were the apostles to start this New Beginning immediately after Jesus left?
Acts 1:4 = No, they were to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit (Spirit witnesses through us)
- How long would they have to wait and how would they know it was time?
Acts 1:5 = A few days; They'd be baptized, not with water, but filled with the Spirit
- Why was it important for the apostles to wait for the Spirit instead of beginning on their own?
Acts 1:6 = Without the Spirit they had no understanding of the Good News
- How did Jesus show that He understood why they could still ask such a stupid question?
Acts 1:7 = The Father had not yet revealed His secrets
- When would they ever understand the answer to this and their many other "dumb" questions?
Acts 1:8 = When the Holy Spirit comes to them; They'll then reveal to others

Witnesses (Ephesians 3:4-11)

- Of what were the disciples were to be witnesses?
Ephesians 3:4-6 = God's mysteries that had been hidden, now revealed by the Spirit
- Was Paul able to understand these mysteries because he was a studied Pharisee?
Ephesians 3:2-3 = No, he knew them because they were revealed to him
- Did Paul receive this revelation because he had been prepared through his studies?
Ephesians 3:7-9 = No, he was chosen entirely by the grace of God, totally undeserving
- Did anyone besides Paul receive this calling?
Ephesians 3:10-11 = Yes, the whole church, all Christians are to be witnesses

Being a Witness (Acts 4:20)

- How are we to know what to say when we witness?
Luke 21:13-15 = *I will give you words and wisdom*
- Is that how the great witness, Paul, knew what to say?
Acts 26:15-16 = *A witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you*
- What about the other apostles? Did they try to become wise to explain the gospel?
Acts 4:19-20 = No, they just spoke about what they saw and heard
- Is a witness expected to perform with a slick, well-rehearsed speech?
Proverbs 12:17 = No, witnesses are to give honest testimony of the truth - in own words
- Wiersbe:* A witness is someone who tells what he has seen and heard. When you're on the witness stand in court, the judge is not interested in your ideas or opinions; he only wants to know what you know.
- Funk & Wagnalls:* A person who has seen or knows something, and is therefore competent to give evidence

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18)

- How many people need to hear this good news before we can stop witnessing?
Mark 16:15 = *All the world ... to all creation*
- How can we even begin with such a large goal? = Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, ends of earth
Acts 1:8b = Start at home, neighbors, family, friends, community, city, etc.
- What specific instructions did Jesus give us to accomplish this witnessing?
Matthew 28:19-20a = Go, make disciples, baptize them, teach them
- Why is this so important?
Mark 16:16 = It is the only way people will be saved
- How did Jesus promise to help us with this large and important effort?
Matthew 28:18, 20b = He will be with us with all of the power in heaven and on earth
- Will this power be available to us or will He just be there to tell us what to say?
Mark 16:17-18 = He will give us His power to accomplish this mission

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Jesus Leaves (*Acts 1:9*)

What did Jesus do after giving these instructions?

Acts 1:9 = He ascended into heaven

What do some find significant about the cloud hiding Him from their sight?

Exodus 24:15-17 = The glory of the Lord was with the Israelites in a dense cloud

Where was Jesus when He did this?

Luke 24:50-51 = In the vicinity of Bethany

Where in the vicinity of Bethany?

Acts 1:12 = The Mount of Olives, the place where He frequently prayed

Witnesses in Waiting (*Acts 1:10-14*)

What did the disciples do when Jesus left?

Acts 1:10-11 = Stood staring at where Jesus had risen, angels said He'd return

What did the disciples do after hearing the angels?

Luke 24:52-53 = They worshipped Him, returned to Jerusalem, praised God

Did they immediately begin witnessing of the Good News of Jesus?

Acts 1:13-14 = No, they waited in an upper room and prayed

Without telling next week's story, did the disciples witness with Jesus' power as promised?

Mark 16:19-20 = Yes, *the Lord worked with them and confirmed His Word by signs*

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I been a witness to others of what Jesus has done for me?
(*Acts 1:8; 4:19-20; 22:14-15; 26:15-16; Prov 14:25; Is 6:8; 43:10-12; Luke 21:13-15; 1 Peter 3:15*)
2. Who needs Christ's love in my Jerusalem (family, close friends, confidants)?
(*Acts 1:8; 10:24, 27, 44-48; John 1:40-41; 1 Corinthians 7:16; 1 Peter 3:1*)
3. Who needs Christ's love in my Judea (regular acquaintances – coworkers, neighbors, associates)?
(*Acts 1:8; Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 2:13-15; John 1:45-46*)
4. Who needs Christ's love in my Samaria (regular contacts – little in common, may even dislike)?
(*Acts 1:8; 6:8-10; John 4:4-10, 28-30, 39-42; 9:13-17, 24-33; 1 Cor 9:19-23; Colossians 3:11-17*)
5. Who needs Christ's love in my ends of the earth (encounters – may or may not know)?
(*Acts 1:8; 22:21; 26:28-29; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Colossians 4:3-6*)

God's Plan

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angel Gabriel came to Him and commented, "Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there."

"I did", He said.

Gabriel asked, "Do they know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?"

"Oh, no," said Jesus, "not yet. Right now only a handful of people in Palestine know."

Gabriel was perplexed. "Then what have you done to let everyone know about your love for them?"

Jesus said, "I've asked Peter, James, John and a few more friends to tell other people about Me. Those who are told will in turn tell other people about Me, and My story will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe. Ultimately, all of mankind will hear about My life and what I have done."

Gabriel frowned and looked rather skeptical. He knew well the sinfulness and irresponsibility of people. "Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? What if way down in the 21st century people just don't tell others about You? Haven't You made any other plans?"

Jesus answered, "I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them."

Twenty centuries later ... He still has no other plan. He's counting on you and me. His early disciples adopted His priorities and devoted themselves to reaching their world. Christ counted on them and they delivered. Have we done as well?