

Ascended

Acts 1

You may think **the Gospel** is just about the death and resurrection of Jesus - and the good news of what Jesus accomplished for us is certainly focused right there on the cross and the empty tomb. But the Gospel includes **the whole picture of the person and work of Christ** - so we fill in this portrait with the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the reminder of His imminent return.

Remember how we've seen the last two weeks:

Addressing a Problem:

1. Perspective - The Cross
2. Power - The Resurrection
3. Plan - The Holy Spirit

The cross of Christ gives us perspective on any situation. It reminds us that we don't deserve a happy, healthy, prosperous life. What we all deserve is death and eternal suffering under the just wrath of God. Keeping that in mind should make us much more grateful for the little blessings in life and should keep our little struggles in their proper place.

The resurrection shows the power and victory of Jesus - the same power that is available to us who believe. So for the follower of Jesus there is no "I can't." "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." "With man this is impossible but not with God!" "Remain in me and let my words remain in you and you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing."

And the ascension of Jesus to the Father's right hand proves His glory and authority over all things and reminds us of how **He sent the Holy Spirit to be with us**, to strengthen us and to lead us into the fullness of His will.

To address any problem you first need a clear perspective. Then you need power to face it and move forward. And finally, you need a plan. The Holy Spirit provides that for us as we walk with Him - guiding our steps in line with the Word and with support from one another. Today we will see the plan that Jesus outlined for His disciples.

Our lesson today is summed up in two sentences. The first will give us the key truth to believe from Luke 24 and Acts 1. The second will exhort us to apply that truth to our lives.

Truth	Application
Since the Lord is unbeatable His plan is unstoppable And His grace is irresistible	So trust in the Lord And work His plan By sharing the Gospel

The Ascension of Jesus proves His glory and authority. It is the movement of the One True King to His rightful place of honor at the Father's right hand. Jesus Christ is Lord - the All Sovereign One who reigns over all things and upholds the universe with the Word of His power.

Luke 24 and Acts 1 tie the two books together with the same scene being replayed from slightly different angles. We will study both passages together since they supplement each other nicely. Here was our lesson last week.

1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable

"He was declared to be the Son of God in power... **by his resurrection from the dead**, Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 1:4

- The Resurrection proved Jesus' Identity and Victory

The resurrection was the final and ultimate proof that Jesus was who He said He was. He predicted three times that he would suffer, die and rise again - and then he did. Since Jesus rose from the dead we have reason to believe everything else he said. The resurrection proved Jesus' identity as the Son of God and it proved His victory over sin and death. Jesus walked into the domain of Death itself and walked out victorious. ***The resurrection was like God's PAID IN FULL receipt stamp*** on the death of Jesus - the payment for sin has been made and accepted. Paid in full!

The Resurrection was Jesus' CORONATION - that was the moment He was officially and publicly crowned the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. **The Ascension was Jesus' INSTALLATION** - His induction into His eternal office as Prime Minister of the Universe at the Father's right hand.

Look at Acts 1:9 -

1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable

"When he had said these things... **he was lifted up**, and a cloud took him out of their sight." Acts 1:9

- The Ascension showed Jesus' Glory and Authority

Have you ever wondered why Jesus floated up into heaven as opposed to just disappearing or getting a lift in a chariot of fire or some upgrade of that like a flaming spaceship? Think of the symbolism. Jesus was LIFTED UP and then covered with a cloud. **The lifting up** is obviously a sign of exaltation. And **the cloud** is a symbol of the presence and glory of God. So Jesus, who left the presence and glory of the Father and CAME DOWN to live on earth here is LIFTED UP to resume His rightful place in heaven. And this is exactly how Paul describes it in Philippians 2.

"Jesus... emptied himself... being born in the likeness of men... he humbled himself... to the point of death... **Therefore God has highly exalted him**... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." Philippians 2:6-10

- **The Ascension showed Jesus' Glory and Authority**

Jesus - the long awaited King of Israel came as **the SERVANT to all**. He humbled Himself, living a life of obscurity, humility, service, suffering and sacrifice. What King ever gave up so much - a palace, servants, food, robes, everything? Jesus had NO HOME - literally "no place to lay his head" during his earthly ministry.

But because Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross, God the Father raised Him from the dead and then literally raised Him up into heaven to visually demonstrate the truth of Jesus' total exaltation. **THIS IS THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME**. Every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will one day confess that He is the Lord of Lords.

Now notice how Paul applies this to US in Ephesians 2:

1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable

"But God... when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and **raised us up with him** and seated us with him in the heavenly places **in Christ Jesus**."
Ephesians 2:5-6

- The Ascension showed Jesus' Glory and Authority

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus apply DIRECTLY to us as believers in Jesus! At the moment that you put your faith in Jesus - crying out to Him to save you from your sin - at that very instant this took place.

- Your DEAD soul suddenly came to life!
- Your enslaved flesh was suddenly set free from sin.
- Your old, sinful self DIED with Christ on the cross and was buried with Him.
- And you walked out of that tomb with Jesus - you were raised to new life WITH HIM.
- More than that **you were RAISED UP into the heavenly places WITH HIM** and seated with Him there!

The Ascension is a window into the glory and authority of Jesus. And brothers and sisters - this is a glory and authority that IN CHRIST all believers SHARE! There is **a glory already in us** that one day will be fully revealed. There is **an authority already imparted to us** that one day will be unleashed and we will REIGN with Christ FOREVER!

All of this is to proclaim **the Supremacy of Christ**. Jesus Christ is the Unbeatable, All Sovereign, Reigning Champion of the World. This is how he prefaced the Great Commission:

1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable

2. His Plan is Unstoppable

"**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." Matt. 28:18-19

This transitions us to the second truth. ***The basis for Jesus' commission is His authority.*** He directs us, as His servants, from His exalted position on His Throne in heaven. Why do we go and make disciples of all nations? Because our King has sent us out!

This is Jesus' PLAN. Notice that the Great Commission in Acts 1 starts with a question:

2. His Plan is Unstoppable

“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know *times or seasons that the Father has fixed* by his own authority.” Acts 1:6-7

- The timing and fruit are up to God

Don't we all have questions like this?

- Lord, will you at this time heal this condition?
- Lord, will you at this time restore this relationship?
- Lord, will you at this time provide that job?
- Lord, will you at this time open that door?

How often do we need to be reminded of this word from Jesus: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the FATHER HAS FIXED.” That is a wonderful word: **FIXED. Determined. Established. Set. God has His own timetable.** He has His own wonderful plan. In God's economy things are FIXED. In our experience they seem to move all over the place.

So here is the point. Since Jesus is UNBEATABLE His plan is UNSTOPPABLE. And what is that plan? The disciples hoped that after the resurrection the plan would be: **RESTORE ISRAEL!** And by that they meant drive out Rome and set up an independent nation there with Jerusalem as its capital city!

Jesus dodged that question and basically said, “I have a better plan. One day Israel will be restored fully and this plan is what will make that possible.”

Oh brother, sister, friend - hear this. **God has a plan to FULLY RESTORE YOUR WHOLE LIFE!** He does. It is fixed... determined... established. But it is not for YOU to know the times or seasons. We clearly know the END RESULT but we don't know the TIMING. That's where faith comes in. So hold on to this truth - Jesus Christ is the All Sovereign King. Nothing can defeat Him. He has already conquered sin and death and when He comes back He will bring an end to all evil and injustice and pain and sadness and suffering. All of it. He will make All Things New!

God's plan to restore all things in Christ is UNSTOPPABLE. Right now that plan involves building His church all over the world as the Gospel is proclaimed and we make disciples. The plan concludes when Jesus comes back in power and glory to restore all things in Himself. Right now the timing and fruit are entirely up to God. We trust Him for the details of our lives. And we trust Him for the direction of our church. We plant seeds. Other people water the seeds. Only God can give the growth. But the end result is clear:

2. His Plan is Unstoppable

“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.**” Acts 1:8

- The End Result is a Global Church!

The gospel will be proclaimed in all nations before Jesus comes back. In fact, that is the only thing He is waiting for. Feel the force of this truth - YOU WILL BE my witnesses. I find this so encouraging that **it is stated as a PROMISE here**. We will be called to testify - every one of us, in different ways and at different times. And in those moments YOU WILL BE a witness for Jesus.

We learned this from Pastor Colin in the Old Testament. To the non-believer the Ten Commandments are ominous warnings - “You shall not kill... you shall not steal...” **But to the follower of Jesus those commands become PROMISES** - “You shall not steal... you shall not commit adultery... you shall not covet.” Isn’t that a wonderful Gospel transformation? In Christ the commands of God become promises of God. He places those desires INSIDE US and we begin to hunger and thirst for His righteousness.

The same thing is **true of evangelism**. You may feel like a lousy evangelist. But hear this promise from Jesus - “You **WILL BE** my witnesses.” That is a promise directly from the Lord of the harvest. With the Power of the Holy Spirit inside of you and the Power of the Gospel going out from you, you will be a fruitful and effective witness for the Lord! That is His unstoppable plan.

We probably all **feel like we are not very unstoppable**. If you’ve tried to share the gospel recently you might feel like you’re actually quite stoppable. The US is hard, rocky soil right now - not very fruitful. But the times and seasons are up to the Lord. **Our job is to keep praying for revival and keep sowing the seed** of the Gospel - trusting that He will give the increase in His time. Brothers, sisters, if revival comes in our lifetime we will all find evangelism suddenly MUCH EASIER.

- Sinners will seek us out in their conviction.
- Broken people will beg believers to show them where to find hope.
- Lost and hurting rebels will stop resisting God and will flood into churches.

This is why Pat, Mike and I are going to Cuba this week - because we want to bring teams from Oakwood to Cuba for two purposes:

1. To experience the dramatic work of God in reaching many people with the Gospel and building the church rapidly and;
2. To assist in that work as much as we can, with the gifts and resources God has given us.

God is doing something in Cuba that is unlike His work here in the US or most other places in the world. There is no telling how much longer the work in Cuba will be so fruitful. God alone

knows the times and seasons. We pray the Gospel movement in Cuba will spill over here to Tampa!

I love how Jesus says it in Luke 24:

2. His Plan is Unstoppable

“Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and... rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Luke 24:46-47

- The End Result is a Global Church!

This plan is so established, so fixed as a reality of history, that Jesus says **IT IS WRITTEN!** In the same way that Jesus HAD TO suffer and die and rise from the dead so we MUST complete the great commission by preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all nations! That “have to” impulse of ***DIVINE NECESSITY guided everything*** Jesus said and did - and it drives us along as well. We HAVE TO preach the Gospel. We HAVE TO build the church. We HAVE TO advance the Kingdom influence of Jesus - because THIS IS GOD’S PLAN!

So here is our truth to believe today:

1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable

2. His Plan is Unstoppable

3. And His Grace is Irresistible

“Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Luke 24:47

The message we have been commissioned to proclaim is **the good news of God’s Infinite, overwhelming, irresistible grace**. I’ve led a Bible study a dozen times called Christianity Explored that goes through the Gospel of Mark. Pastor Rico Tice of All Souls Church in London is the teacher and early on he says of the Gospel, *“If you hear this message and it doesn’t sound to you like the best news you’ve ever heard you can be absolutely certain you have not yet understood it.”*

3. And His Grace is Irresistible

“Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.” Luke 24:47

- The Gospel is the Best News of All Time

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is tremendously, amazingly GOOD NEWS. So many people think Christianity is just another religion in which you follow rules to fix yourself and make yourself worthy of God or heaven or whatever. That is absolutely NOT what Christianity is. It is not a set of rules to make yourself right with God - it is the GOOD NEWS that JESUS can make you right with God. The gospel is not the road map so you can walk yourself to the top of the

mountain. It is the announcement that **Jesus alone can lift you up to the top of the mountain on His back.**

As Jesus ascended into heaven, look what he was doing:

3. And His Grace is Irresistible

“While *he blessed them* he parted from them... And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*...” Luke 24:51-52

- To Experience the Joy of Relationship with God

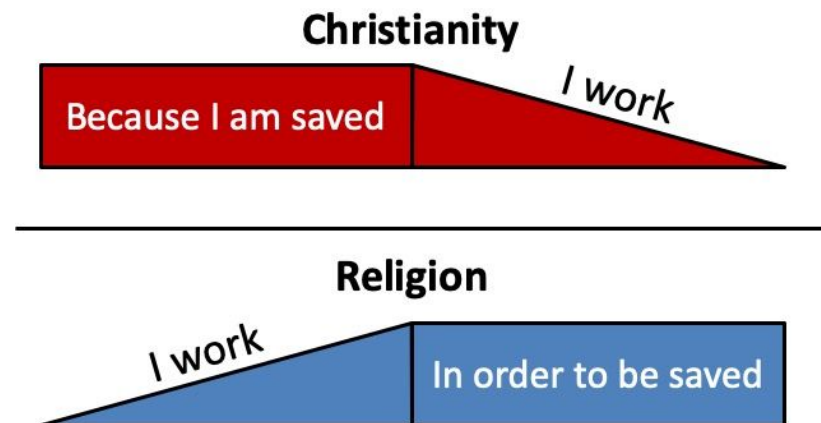
The Gospel is God pouring out His blessing on us in Christ. While he was on earth Jesus literally placed His hands on people and blessed them with His love, acceptance, healing, power and grace. At the end of his time on earth he symbolized his entire ministry by lifting up his hands and blessing the disciples and that was their last image of him before a cloud hid him from their sight. Jesus - the One who gives us the Blessing of God.

Jesus is the One who opens the door into the eternal blessing and joy of a reconciled relationship with God. Once a sinner understands how Good this Good News is, the grace of God becomes irresistible.

When I flew back from Chicago I sat next to a young man who asked what I was reading. It was a book from the conference I had attended so I told him that and he asked about it. We got into a conversation that pretty much right away was about spiritual things. So I used my go to transition and asked if he grew up going to church.

Like many people he went to church a little as a kid but wasn't really raised with a strong faith foundation. At one point he even asked me, **“What is the difference between the Catholic and Protestant church?”**

I said, ‘Let me draw you a picture.’ And this is what I showed him.



Religion is like climbing a hill by yourself: you work IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. It is hard, tiring work and you hope at the end of the day it's enough - but you can never be sure.

Christianity is totally different. You don't work to be saved because you realize that nothing you do could ever be enough to earn God's acceptance - and that is precisely why Jesus came! **He did the work** so we could be forgiven and made right with God. That's what His death and resurrection were all about - that was the work that had to be done!

So now, **for the Christian SINCE WE ARE SAVED - we work.** For the follower of Jesus we go to church and read the Bible and serve others not IN ORDER TO BE SAVED, but out of gratitude and joy for the fact that we ARE SAVED. And so it feels more like a downhill walk.

As I shared this with him I pointed out - "This is why we call it **GOOD NEWS!** It's not about what we have to do, it's about **what Jesus has already done!** Do you see how freeing that is?" I keep waiting for this young man to show up here at Oakwood - as he told me he would... And I believe he will one day because that is what God's grace DOES - it **DRAWS YOU IN.**

Once the Holy Spirit starts working on someone's heart and mind - once the gospel seed takes root in the soil of a humble, responsive heart - **it's only a matter of time.** Again, the times and seasons are in God's hands not ours. **Not for us to know.** Keep that in mind with your friends and loved ones who are far from Jesus right now. Keep praying. Keep reaching out.

Jesus is unbeatable. His plan is unstoppable. His grace is irresistible. We are all here because we have experienced this truth. Now, let's apply each of these truths. First, since we know Jesus is the All Sovereign, Unbeatable King:

A. Trust in the Lord

"Then they returned to Jerusalem... All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer." Acts 1:12,14

Jesus explicitly told the disciples to **WAIT.** "Stay in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high." Only when the Holy Spirit comes on you will you "receive power" to be His witnesses. So they obeyed the Lord Jesus and stayed together, devoting themselves to worshipful, faith-filled PRAYER.

That is a wonderful example for us. **When God is not acting on your timetable, don't fret.** Don't stress out. Don't take matters into your own hands. PRAY. Commit it all to the Lord. WAIT. Stay there. Don't panic. Don't run around like a crazy person.

Jesus is still on His throne. He is still wearing His crown. The Prime Minister who rules the Universe is not on vacation or asleep at His desk. He is right there seated at the right hand of the Father. He is patiently waiting for the culmination of all things. So our job in the meantime is to **WAIT and TRUST and PRAY.**

A. Trust in the Lord

- Whatever is going on in your life is God's plan to make you a better disciple and witness. "All things work together for good... **to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.**" Romans 8:28-29

Since the Lord is the Unbeatable, Sovereign King - Trust Him. He is at work in your life. Romans 8:28 is one of the most ***misunderstood verses in the Bible***. It is misunderstood because people forget that it comes right before Romans 8:29. This is advanced seminary level stuff. Whoa. Romans 8:28 comes before Romans 8:29.

What is the GOOD toward which all things work together? Does this mean that everything will work out GOOD - **the way I WANT THEM TO?** Or Good in terms of my material health and prosperity? Not necessarily and most of the time not at all.

The primary GOOD is that God is shaping us to be more and more like Jesus. So when you go through suffering don't ask "Why is this happening to me?" Instead ask, "**How is this making me more like Jesus?**"

This is God's purpose for our entire lives - to mold us and shape us more and more into the glorious image of Jesus Christ. And as we become more like Jesus we become ***more effective witnesses for Jesus***.

Whatever is going on in your life is part of God's plan to make you a better disciple and witness.

- How is this making me more like Jesus?
- How is this better preparing me to point people to Jesus?

This is what **enduring faith** looks like. Instead of fussing and asking "Why me?" we need to exercise the muscle of faith and ask "How is this making me more like Jesus?" or "How COULD THIS make me more holy, more loving, more righteous and good?" We should ask, "How is this preparing me to be more effective at pointing others to Jesus?"

Sometimes your most effective outreach will come from your most painful suffering. John Piper has helpfully observed that God is not very much glorified in our LUXURY. If everything is good and happy and comfortable and we praise God it's really not that impressive. But if we are really struggling, really suffering, making real substantial sacrifices for the kingdom and we STILL praise and worship Jesus - THAT is how we can really glorify God. Because that is when it becomes clear that **Jesus is enough**. He truly is our greatest treasure. We don't need health and wealth and comfort and luxury to be happy. All we need is Jesus.

A. Trust in the Lord

B. Work His Plan

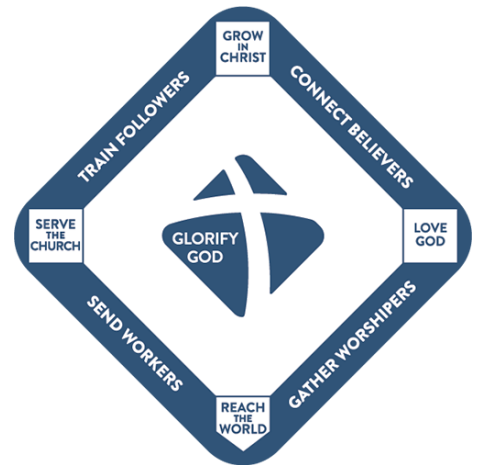
“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

So let’s trust in the Lord - the Unbeatable King. **And let’s work His unstoppable plan!** What plan? The plan **to make disciples of all nations** - to be witnesses for the glory and grace of Jesus - to proclaim the good news and teach people what it means to trust in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we make disciples here at Oakwood? We use a baseball diamond to keep it simple:

B. Work His Plan [Please include the diamond image w/ this text]

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

This is God’s plan - that we would gather together for worship in our LOVE for Him; that believers would connect with one another so we continually GROW in Christ (being increasingly conformed to His image); that we would train Jesus-followers to SERVE the church and that we would all live as those sent out on a mission to REACH the world with the Gospel.



That is the plan. Other churches use slightly different words - but all Bible-based, Gospel-preaching churches have **the same mission and that is to make disciples of all nations**. This is how we are living that out right here, right now.

We use baseball because it conveys that idea of being a follower **NOT A FAN**. Jesus doesn’t just want enthusiastic admirers who sit in the stands and sing a few songs for him every Sunday. **He wants FOLLOWERS** who will devote themselves to His mission. Don’t say Jesus is your Lord if you aren’t committed to His work.

So here is how it all fits together today:

Truth	Application
1. Since the Lord is Unbeatable	A. Trust in the Lord
2. His Plan is Unstoppable	B. And Work His Plan
3. And His Grace is Irresistible	C. By Sharing the Gospel

- If we truly believe that Jesus is the All Sovereign, Supreme King of all Kings, then it automatically follows we should TRUST Him.

- If we truly believe that Jesus' plan is unstoppable then we should be fully devoted to WORKING that plan. Making disciples should be the essence of what all of us are about.
- And if we have experienced the truth and been transformed by the irresistible grace of God then we should be all about SHARING the Good News of Jesus Christ!

We start RIGHT HERE in our Jerusalem. You start right where God has placed you - with your family, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers. Don't sign up to be a missionary to the nations if you are not a missionary NOW to your neighbors. Missions starts right here, right now. This is the plan - let's work the plan.

Trust in the Lord and Work His plan by sharing the Gospel

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

- Start where you are

Jesus has sent us to be His witnesses in Carrollwood, and every part of Tampa Bay - both the parts we feel comfortable in and the parts that we don't. That's our ***"ALL Judea and Samaria."*** Where has God positioned you in this season and this life stage? How is He at work in your life experiences to make you more like Jesus and a more effective witness for Jesus? How is God already at work in your life? How can you join Him in that work?

Trust in the Lord and Work His plan by sharing the Gospel

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

- In every part of Tampa Bay and to every people group on earth!

This is our calling as we work the plan by bringing the love and grace of Jesus to every part of Tampa Bay and every people group on earth. ***There is work still to be done because there are people still to be reached.***

Come back next week to hear from our Pastor friend, Steven Barr, of Cast Member Church at Disney World. He will challenge us to PRAY with eyes to see how the Lord is working!

Let's pray together now as we bow before the Lord who is seated on His throne!