

Title: This is a football!  
Text: Acts 1.6-11  
Theme: The mission of the church  
Series: Acts #3  
Prop Stmtnt: Our mission is the glad worship of Jesus by people from all over the world.

#### Video on the gospel

If you are not a follower of Christ or, if you are new around here, this is a good service to be part of since I am addressing a foundational issue for the church. I trust that this will be helpful to you, and helpful for all of us. For us all: How would you complete this statement? The primary mission of the church is \_\_\_\_\_. Some of you may not know exactly. In fact, I am guessing that we may not all agree on what that mission is. But even if we all knew exactly what our mission is, we tend to allow lesser things, many of them good, get in the way of our pursuing it. Our mission is set by the highest ranking person in the organization and that is Jesus. He is our Savior and our King and he established the mission for the church. Let's see what it is.

#### Read Text:

Vince Lombardi is the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers. His leadership of that team resulted in that city being named, Tittletown because they won so many championships. But when he took over the team, they had been terrible. Early on he held a football up in front of the players and says, "This is a football." His point was, if we are going to be successful as a team, we have to know, focus on and pursue the actual goal of the game. The object of the game is to get this ball into your opponents end zone because that is what scores points. It does not matter if you have a beautiful stadium, attractive cheerleaders, a hipster mascot, a kickin' theme song and pre-game hype. None of that will win games. This is a football and we have to get this football into the opponents end zone. The owner of the team may be on a mission to make money. The players on the team may want to pump up their individual stats in order to land a fat contract and sometimes those end up getting in the way of the actual goal of the game. The same thing is true for the church. Our success is not determined by how much money we collect, nor by how many people attend, or how many events we do. We have a mission to get the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. I think that it would be helpful to clarify four things at the outset so that you can see how this fits together.

- 1) Purpose - Our ultimate purpose in all things is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.
- 2) Message - Our message is the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ.
- 3) Mission - Our mission is to get that good news to the ends of the earth (to everyone)
- 4) Means - We accomplish this by establishing churches all over the world from the people who embrace the gospel. The church is a group of people who help each other follow Jesus better by instructing one another, encouraging one another and helping one another put Jesus on display and telling others about the good news of the gospel.

Purpose answers the question of why. Message answers the question of what. Mission answers the question of goal. And means answers the question of how. Put them together and you could say that we glorify God by telling others about Christ and establishing churches all over the

world. Or, perhaps more succinctly: We exist to see the glad the worship of God from people all over the world. Now, I am guessing that most of you were not thinking about that when you prepared to gather today. If you were bringing some food for your class this morning, you had some extra responsibilities and you probably felt the weight of expectation. If you were helping in a children's class, you may have been focused on the lesson you would be teaching, the crafts you would be doing, or the set-up and details of your class. You were concerned with good things, even things that are designed with accomplishing this goal, but those things are not the ultimate goal. I want to remind you of our mission, otherwise we can forget and think that if we have a morning where everyone is here on time, and all of the groups function happily, and the service is not too short, and not too long, not too loud, and not too soft, and the message is not too heavy and not too light, and the ushers come down at the right time to collect the offering, that all is well. But, did we get the football across the goal line? Are we moving the ball?

Hey, if this is easy for us to get a bit fuzzy about, we can only imagine how foggy the disciples of Jesus were. They had no concept of what a church was because there was no church, yet. They also had no concept of what their mission was. They were Jews, who thought that Israel was supposed to be re-established as the focal point of God's glory and kingdom over the world. Therefore, they kept trying to fit Jesus into that picture, and it didn't always make sense to them. Time and time again, Jesus patiently teaches them in order to help them understand. They were slow to get it. Here is an example of that.

### **I. There are things you don't understand.** (6)

*"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

We are tempted to read this and think, "What? Don't you guys get it? The kingdom is so much bigger than Israel?" But this was actually a natural question to ask. These guys were Jews and Jesus was a Jew. And Jesus spent almost all of his ministry in Israel. The disciples thought of the Messiah as a King who would restore the glory of Israel and her place of prominence on the world stage. Jesus does not chastise them or get frustrated with them. They did not know what they didn't know and they asked him about it.

The more that I thought about this, the more I realized again, how patient, kind and gentle Christ is. We know, 2,000 years later that the kingdom that Jesus is establishing is being established through his church and that his church are those who are truly his disciples from all over this world. We realize that Israel has a role in all of this, but, the focus of the church is on the entire world. The disciples do not yet have a category for this in their thinking. Jesus knows this. He knows that there are things that they do not understand yet, but they will. And when they do, it will put everything else into its place.

What is true for them is true for you and me. We all have so much yet to learn. Be humble and realize that you are probably slow to learn things too. Now, I am going to get dangerously close to sounding political here for a bit, which means that you have to listen very carefully to what I am saying and not look for hidden messages or innuendo.

The question that the disciples asked was their version of are you going to make Israel great again? The answer that Jesus gives to them is intended for them to realize (or at least begin to realize) that God's plan is so much bigger than that. But, these brothers had a "Israel first" mentality and that created some tension in the early church. Let me ask you something.

- Do you think that Jesus loves America more than any other country?

So, there are two dangers to avoid, aren't there? 1) Do not presume that Jesus loves America more than Brazil, Mexico, China, Canada or France. (ok, maybe more than France) 2) Do not ignore the evidences of God's grace that have been poured out on our country. God has blessed this country, but we are not the only country that God has blessed. This "Israel first" which was more like a "Israel only" thinking was a major obstacle to overcome in the early church and it caused problems in the church and in spite of the fact that Jesus commanded them to go to the ends of the earth as witnesses, for the most part, they did not do this until they were basically forced into doing it.

Beloved, love your country, pray for her leaders, serve her well, be thankful for those who have done that and continue to do that. At the same time realize that this country is one of the nations in Psalm 2 that rages against God. Therefore, love the church more. Your citizenship in heaven is infinitely more important than your citizenship in these United States. Remember, the gates of hell will prevail against this country, but will not prevail against the church.

## **II. There are things you don't need to know. (7)**

If you ask a politician a question, the higher up that person is, the more trained they are, it seems to deflect the question, ignore the question and simply say whatever they want to say. It almost seems like Jesus is doing something similar here, doesn't it? The disciples ask him a question and he doesn't answer it, at least it doesn't initially appear that he did. They were asking him something that they wanted to know and he answered by telling them something that they needed to know. What they wanted to know was not as important as what they needed to know. What they needed to know is what we need to know. What they needed to know and what we need to know is something that is very easy for us to forget and it is this: Our Mission. Before Jesus tells them what they needed to know, he lets them know what they don't need to know. They asked if this was the time that the kingdom would get restored to Israel. Now, personally, I believe that Israel is a factor in the plan that God has for the world, which is one of the reasons why Jesus does not correct them about that here. But, what he does tell them is that they are not to focus on the times or seasons. In fact "it is NOT for you to know the times or seasons." The times or seasons of the restoration of the kingdom, which is part of what happens in the end times, is not for you to obsess or fixate about.

In the history of the church, there have always been and probably will always be people who try to figure out the future by coming up with prophetic schemes that they use in order to set dates about the return of Christ. Don't buy their books, listen to their messages, watch their youtube videos or TV shows. It is not only a waste of time, but it will take your attention off of what really matters.

### **III. There are things that you need to know. (8a)**

But! Instead of focusing on the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, which is not for you to worry about, here is what you need to know. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. They needed to know that they were not ready yet to be witnesses because they had not yet been baptized by the Holy Spirit (v.5), which is what Jesus means by the Holy Spirit has not yet come upon you. They needed the power of the Spirit because the mission that they were being given was colossal. But, it was not just a matter of power in order that their witnessing and preaching would have authority and effectiveness. They needed to know that they had to have the ministry of the Spirit because of what the coming of the Spirit meant.

What happened when the Spirit came in Acts 2? The coming of the Spirit, the baptizing of the Spirit marked the beginning of the church. Acts 2 is the birthday of the church. Back in Matthew 16 Jesus said that he was “going to build his church” and that the gates of hell, that is the strongest concentration of the power of hell itself could not destroy and could not prevail against the church. Jesus was going to build (future tense) the church and he did by sending the Spirit who when he came, came in power and formed the church by baptizing the believers. Therefore, the mission of the disciples is forever linked to and is to be carried out by the church. You need the Spirit who is going to give you power by forming the church. You cannot pursue the mission of Jesus without the church and the church cannot lose sight of the mission and we (the church) cannot accomplish our mission without the Spirit. If we will try we fall on our faces. So, we need to know that we have to have the Spirit’s enabling in order to accomplish what we are commanded to do.

### **IV. There are things that you have to do. (8b)**

What and where. Jesus tells them what they are to do and where they are to do it. This is the mission. This is what you are to do - you are to be my witnesses. And this is where you are to do it - Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. Now we realize why Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the Spirit because that is not only a big mission, that is humanly impossible. Let’s talk about the what. You will be my witnesses. You will witness to others of what you have seen, what you have learned and what you have experienced. This is another way of saying that you are to make disciples by going, baptizing and teaching (Matt. 28.19-20). The disciples were charged with proclaiming the gospel and they were told to start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Think about that for a second. Jerusalem, are you kidding me? Things didn’t work out too well there for Jesus, did they? And now, we’re supposed to start there. Judea, ok, but Galilee would be better. But Samaria? But, this is the story of the book of Acts. We are going to trace the story of the church starting in Jerusalem, spreading to Judea, Samaria and then to Rome. Eleven guys, plus Jesus. But, wait....

### **V. So... Let’s Go! (9-11)**

Then as soon as he had said these things, a cloud gathered at his feet, lifted him, and carried him up right out of their sight and he was gone. The eleven were stunned. He had said that he was going, but was this it? Maybe he will come back. Maybe this was a head fake. This is like facing

Alabama in football, and your entire defensive line and offensive line are in the hospital from food poisoning. What are we going to do? We had a chance with Jesus. He could walk on water, raise the dead, and come back from the dead himself. But, he just kind of patted these guys on the back and said “you got it, I’ll see you later.” And got beamed up. (tile story)

They are staring so intently into the sky that two angels appeared among them and they didn’t even seem to notice until the two asked them what they were doing. And their point was that Jesus is gone. He will come back, but you have a mission to accomplish, so...let’s go. Now! And the mission has not changed. Here is the point. We anticipate the return of Christ not in retreating, but in advancing. We (you and me) have a mission to witness the gospel to people all over the world. It is easy to imagine that those two angels were shaking their heads on their way back to heaven because these eleven didn’t inspire a great deal of confidence, did they? What are the chances of success? Take over for Jesus and do it all over the world. Do you realize who and where we are this morning? We are disciples of Jesus. And where are we? We are the ends of the earth that Jesus was talking about. We are in a land that the disciples did not even know existed and yet, we believe the gospel because these men were faithful witnesses of Jesus and faithful to go. They carried on the mission that Jesus gave them and it has now come to us. The gospel - to the ends of the earth. This is the football.

- 1) Do you know the gospel and have you trusted in Jesus?
- 2) If you have, do you understand and accept that this is your mission?

This is what it means to follow Jesus.

- 3) How are you pursuing this?

This is your mission! All other activities in life are a means to accomplish this mission. Did you think about that, at all this week? What did you think about? I know that I am about to get under the skin of some of you. I not only know that, I need to. I need to wake some of you up. How did you use your time this week to accomplish this mission? Some of you are just filling time with pleasure until you die. That is not the mission! You are going to die and stand before your Commander, your King, your Savior and show him selfies of all of the cool restaurants you went to, the golf courses you played, the concerts you attended, the new shoes and shirts you bought and if that is is, you will have failed to do your part in carrying out the mission. And my mission is to warn you about that. Did you pray this week for gospel progress? Did you speak to others about the gospel? How do you use your money? Do you know why Jesus talked a lot about money? Do you know why when I bring this subject up the room gets really quiet? I need to tell you the truth. What you do with your money tells you whether this mission means anything to you or not. Some of you need to take this to heart.

If we are not praying about the gospel, if we are not witnessing to others, and if we are not financially committed to getting the gospel to the ends of the earth, then we really should not claim to be a follower of Christ because a follower of Christ follows Christ. And following Christ means that we are committed to this mission.

I know that I will not always be your pastor. But, by God's grace I will never stop pursuing this mission and by God's grace will take everyone with me, so that together, we don't waste our lives. This is the football.

Pray for the effective spread of the gospel

Pray about and look for opportunities to speak about your hope in Christ

Evaluate what you are actually doing with your life. What are you pursuing? Is it really the mission?