

# Jesus still leads the way.

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We suffer under the assumption that Jesus, risen and ascended to the Father, has handed over his mission for us to complete. Luke disagrees.

Jesus' resurrection means we do not inherit our task from Christ, we share in his mission. We are not his successors, but his companions.

Jesus is risen and ascended to the Father, but he is not absent and he is not passive.

The book of Acts has one theme—the continuing ministry of the risen Lord Jesus. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of what Jesus began to do and teach. In Acts, Luke tells the story of what Jesus continued to do and teach through his disciples (1:1-2).

Following Jesus' trial and execution Jesus' disciples were a defeated rabble. If it had been left to them to take up the mission of Jesus, the movement he founded would never have survived. Peter and Andrew, for instance, would have spent the rest of their lives rebuilding their fishing business.

Instead, just as the Roman and Jewish authorities were sure the crisis sparked by Jesus was over, it was upon them again, in a new form. The crucified Messiah was among his followers, alive and continuing his ministry.

Over a period of forty days, Jesus drew his disciples together, he picked up the pieces, he resumed leadership, he instructed them. Jesus commanded them to take the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. He promised his presence and power through the Holy Spirit.

What Yahweh was to his people in the OT, Jesus was to his followers in Acts. Luke applies the divine title of "Lord" to Jesus, and when he uses the title on its own, he often does not clarify whether he is referring to the Father or Jesus.

At Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled his promise to pour out the Spirit. The result was the formation of the new people of God who live under his rule. Every day it is the "Lord" who adds to their number, those who are being saved (2:42-47). He is the one who brings people to faith.

When Peter healed the crippled man at the Temple gate, he did so with the authority and power of Jesus (3:6). When a crowd gathered, Peter told them that Jesus had healed this man. Jesus was now speaking through his messengers and whoever did not listen would be cut off from God's people (3:22-23).

In Acts, Jesus himself speaks through his witnesses, and as he does, his word grows and spreads and multiplies. New disciples are made and new churches are formed.

When persecution came and Stephen was facing death by stoning, he lifted his eyes and saw Jesus, standing at the right hand of God, ready to receive his spirit, and ready to answer his prayer of forgiveness for those who murdered him.

Following Stephen's death, Saul sought to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged away both men and women and put them in prison. Then Jesus intervened. He appeared to Saul on the Damascus road. Saul was thrown to the ground a shattered man, blinded and confused. He was overwhelmed, not by a troubled conscience, but by the power and glory of the risen Lord who knew his name.

In Luke's three accounts of Saul's conversion, Jesus is in charge. He shattered Saul's world, he commanded and Saul obeyed. He appointed Saul, the destroyer of the church, to be his servant and his witness. He promised him protection from all his opponents.

Paul's mission was the Lord's, not Paul's. When Paul proclaimed the gospel, the risen Lord would open eyes, and turn both Jews and Gentiles from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Jesus was the one who would grant forgiveness of sins, and a place among God's people (26:17-18).

What was true for Paul is true for all—the risen Lord continues his ministry through his disciples. He is present with them. He calls them, directs them, he protects them, and speaks through them.

Jesus leads them into new missionary challenges (10:13-15; 11:20-21, 24). He confirms their preaching with miracles performed in his name (9:34; 14:3). When they are persecuted, he comes to them personally and encourages and protects them (18:9-10; 23:11; 22:17-21).

His followers, empowered by the Spirit, proclaim his word, and the result is an expanding movement of new disciples and churches.

Jesus rose from the dead and resumed his mission. He gathered his followers and taught them the significance of his death and resurrection. Then he sent them out in the power of the Holy Spirit. Their mission was a continuation of his mission.

The implications are clear, there is only one mission, the mission of the Risen Lord. He invites us to follow him and participate in the fulfillment of his mission. As his word advances, new disciples are made and new churches are formed. The obstacles are immense, yet Jesus' presence and power ensures the gospel's advance throughout the world.

We don't inherit Jesus' ministry. We are not his successors, but his companions. He is still in charge, he is still active. Jesus still calls his disciples to follow him in obedience and take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

**Sources:** T.W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah: A Study of the Public Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge, 1953) 89-99. Robert O'Toole, "The Activity of the Risen Jesus in Luke-Acts." *Biblica* 62 (1981), 471-98. David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Eerdmans, 2009). Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (IVP, 2004) 155-206.