YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:1-11

Key Verse: 1:8

“But 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.”

Thank God for granting us a new year 2021! 2020 was a totally unexpected year due to corona virus that affected the whole world so terribly. To us another unexpected thing was the study of Revelation. It was like a counter punch toward the worst with God’s absolute goodness. It was an eye-opening opportunity to see what is coming in the world. The word seems to be more and more depressing and ominous amid the powerful work of evil spirits. But the word of God makes us clear about the world situation and our position in it. As we enter this new year of 2021, we want to study God’s words on Acts 1:1-11, which is one of the great passages in the Bible, including Jesus’ suffering, resurrection, the kingdom of God, Jesus’ last word on earth, and the promise of his coming again. Particularly, we want to ponder on the last word of Jesus and thus his last will in his promise: He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses…” May we have a clear direction based on this word for this new year.

**First, the hope of the kingdom of God (1-3).** Verses 1 and 2 say, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” The words “Jesus began to do and to teach” indicate that Jesus has being doing his work even after his ascension, certainly through his disciples. It is written in Mark 16:19-20, “After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat down at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” Thank God that even now Jesus is doing his work and his teaching.

Then in verse 3, “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.” Jesus’ death and resurrection is the foundation of Christian faith. His resurrection from the dead opened the door to the kingdom of God. So Jesus gave many convincing proofs that he was alive, showing his hands and feet and eating in their presence.

Verse 3 continues, “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” This draws our attention. It indicates that the kingdom of God is the main concern after his resurrection and before his ascension. Actually, the kingdom of God was his foremost concern from the beginning of his ministry on the earth. He started his earthly messianic ministry by proclaiming, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near, Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15). While doing his ministry, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the news of the kingdom of God (Lk. 8:1). He sent out his disciples to preach the kingdom of God (9:1). He told his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Lk. 11:2). He said, “If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk. 11:20). While hanging on the cross, he invited one repentant sinner to the kingdom of God (Lk. 23:43). After his resurrection, he appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Interestingly, he did not show the kingdom of God to his disciples and it was shown to John in Revelation. He spoke about the kingdom of God. For hearing about the kingdom of God would be good enough at this time.

Christians are those who have the hope of the kingdom of God. Being born again can be defined in several ways. Yet, Apostle Peter expressed it excellently in 1 Peter 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.” In Ephesians 1:18, Apostle Paul prayed for the faithful believers, “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” This world is visible, but there is the invisible kingdom of God. Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Christians are those who have an unambiguous heavenly hope with an eternal perspective of life, though living on the earth. Paul also said that our faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for us in heaven (Col. 1:5). That means that we cannot sustain our faith and love without this hope. And according to the author of Hebrews, this hope is an anchor of the soul, firm and secure (Heb. 6:19).

In Revelation, we see the vivid picture of the kingdom of God. As we studied there was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders, which represent the church. In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures. Day and night, they never stop saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” In response, the twenty-four elders worship God, laying their crowns before the throne (4:1-11). Also, tribulation saints were there and the Lamb at the centre of the throne would be their shepherd; he would lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (7:17). John further described the kingdom of God in Revelation 21:1-4, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away…I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” And there was a loud voice from throne, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the older order of things has passed away.” John wrote more, “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Then the Holy City was described. “It shown with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the name of the twelve tribes of Israel. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” In implies that the Old Testament saints and the New Testaments live together there in the glorious and brilliant city. The Holy City is further described: “The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone…The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.” The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, is a real city in a new heaven and a new earth. The final description is that the water of life, as clear as crystal, was flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” What an amazing description of the kingdom God the human language could ever express! May the hope of the kingdom of God fill our hearts!

**Second, witnesses of Jesus in the Holy Spirit’s power (4-11).** Now verses 4 and 5 say, “On one occasion, while he was eating with then, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” While we eat, we speak casually. Jesus spoke about the promise of the Holy Spirit in a casual talk so that his disciples might understand better and accept it. And it might be an essential part of their lives like eating.

In our Christmas worship service, God helped us to realize anew that the meaning of Christmas is God’s giving his own Son. This is God’s indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15), which we are to really cherish and forever be thankful for. Here Jesus talked about another gift God promised, which Jesus had spoken about before. We are to know that as his gift of the Son is precious, so is this gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus called him another Counsellor (Jn. 14:15), meaning he himself is a Counsellor, according to Isaiah 9:6, a Wonderful Counselor. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17), and he will guide God’s people into all truth, and bring glory to Jesus (Jn. 16:13-14). The Holy Spirit is a person, one of God in three persons. Jesus promised that his disciples would be baptized by the Holy Spirit. For this they were to stay in Jerusalem.

How did the disciples respond to this great promise? Verse 6 says, “So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’” We see that the restoration of the kingdom to Israel occupied their hearts. The restoration of the kingdom of Israel is promised in the Old Testament. This was the hope of all the Israelites. God has kept the hope of Israel’s restoration based on his promise. The birth of the baby Jesus was a part of this process, as Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, “…my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk. 2:30-31). Jesus’ life and death and resurrection were all in this process with the ultimate purpose of the eternal kingdom of God. But the disciples did not realize this great work of God. The hope of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel became Judaism to them, that blinded their eyes to see the work of God going on through Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection.

How did Jesus help them? In verse 7 he said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” Jesus did not frustrate their hope of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He wanted them to entrust the matter to God, who will accomplish such hope in his sovereign time schedule.

Jesus continued, “But 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.” These are Jesus’ last words and his will before leaving this world to ascend into heaven. When Jesus called them, he appointed them apostles. Luke made it very clear in verse 2, “…after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.” Apostle means to be sent out. Jesus has been their Saviour and Lord and their whole life. Their relationship with Jesus was inseparable in this world and would be so forever. Now Jesus’ last will for them was to be his witnesses, “You will be my witnesses.” This is a “you and I” relationship. How others may live does not matter. How the disciples live in the “between you and me” relationship matters. “You will be my witnesses.” Witness contains the meaning of martyrdom. The world would be hostile to them, Yet, they are to live as witnesses of Jesus, because of his grace for them and their love for Jesus. And it is because testifying to Jesus determines the eternal destiny of all people of the earth. It is as Simeon taking the baby Jesus in his arms said to Mary, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed” (Lk. 34-35). Jesus himself clearly said, “Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk. 16:16).

“You will be my witnesses” can be inclusive of Jesus’ last command in each gospel: in Matthew, “Make disciples of all nation” (Mt. 28:19), “Preach the good news of all creation” (Mk. 16:15), “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Lk. 24:47), and “Do you love me?...Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:17). We also remember Apostle Paul’s command to his spiritual son Timothy in his last testimonial prison epistle, 2 Timothy, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom I give you this charge: Preach the Word” (4:1-2). Apostle Peter said to the scattered persecuted Christians, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). “You will be my witnesses” includes all these.

When we testify to Jesus, speaking the word of God as it is, the people of the world do not like it, for it exposes their sin. This is as Jesus said in John 15:22, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.” Yet, despite the displeasure and animosity of the people, it can be a process for their salvation. So how precious the life to live as a witness of Jesus is!

In Revelation, Jesus is depicted as the faithful witness in 1:5 and again the faithful and true witness in 3:14 and is called Faithful and True (19:11). He lived in this world as the faithful and true witness of God. His name is the Word of God (19:13). According to Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 6:13, Jesus, while testifying before Pontius Pilate, made the good confession. Jesus said before Pilate in John 18:36-37, “My kingdom is not of this world…my kingdom is from another place... You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

To be a witness of Jesus is to testify to the truth, for Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6). Jesus is the truth, the ultimate truth. Testifying to Jesus is testifying to the truth, which has been a great battle since man’s fall. The battle between the truth and the lie began from the garden of Eden. The truth of God was “You must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Ge. 2:17). But Satan’s lie was “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Ge. 3:4-5). And when Jesus rose again from the dead, the lie that his disciple came and stole the body of Jesus was spread right away. We can say that human history has been the battle between the truth and the lie. Jesus said of the devil in John 8:44, “He is a liar and the father of lies.” As we studied in Revelation (12:9), he leads the whole world astray. He deceives the whole world (in KJV); he is the deceiver of the whole world (in ESV). Now the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine are of serious concern of the whole world. Yet, the more serious matter is the battle between the truth and the lie. The devil works hard to make people away from God through all kinds of deceptions and lies but God wants the people of the world to listen to the truth of God turn to Him in Christ Jesus through all the difficult life situations.

Thank God for raising M. Moses, S. Ian, S. Jemmie, M. Sara Ryu and Joshua and Paulina Park as messenger of God’s word last year. Thank God for our coworkers who engaged in 1:1 Bible teaching. Thank God that Bamidele prays to be a missionary to Toronto, Canada. Thank God that Sophie wants to be a Bible teacher. These are all testifying to Jesus as witnesses of Jesus. Sharing our testimony with others can be also witnessing to Jesus. In the last days the times become more and more evil and hostile toward Christians. In such a situation, there can be two kinds of believers, one withdrawing from testifying to Jesus in fear or compromise, but another taking a more positive step to testifying to Christ Jesus out of undying love for Jesus. May we have a clear life direction to live as witnesses of Jesus in our time wherever we are and particularly for U of T students.

Listen to Acts 1:8 again. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses…” We see that being witnesses of Jesus is beyond our own strength and human power. It requires the power of the Holy Spirit. For again being witnessing to Jesus is a spiritual battle between God and Satan. Jesus wanted his disciples to be equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit for this spiritual battle. This is the reason Jesus gave his disciples the command, “Do not leave Jerusalem…you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

At the time of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Apostle Peter said quoting the word of Joel, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all peoples. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). Here prophesying surely includes testifying to Jesus, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy according to Revelation 19:10. We need to believe this promise of God firmly. Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Prophet Micah in the Old Testament said, “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD” (Micah 3:8). While many religious leaders were powerless, he made this confession. God wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in Luke 11:13, “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” May we pray until we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

And it is good to know that being filled with the Holy Spirit is directly related to “letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly”, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and Jesus said, “the words I speak to you are Spirit and they are life.” Being filled with the Holy Spirit may we be faithful and true and powerful witnesses of Jesus in our time of powerful evil spirits’ work and serve his world mission.

**Third, the promise of Jesus’ coming again (9-11).** Now verses 9-11 say, “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” What a powerful visual promise of Jesus’ coming again! His first coming as a baby born in Bethlehem lying in a manger was the fulfillment of God’s promise of long years of several thousands. So his first coming assures his second coming. In the Old Testament in many cases his first coming and second coming were viewed as one event. While on earth, Jesus spoke of his coming again many times in many occasions. Revelation ends, so the Bible ends with Jesus’ repeated promise of his coming, “Behold! I am coming soon” (22:7), “Behold! I am coming soon” (22:12) and “Yes, I am coming soon” and the author’s response, “Come, Lord Jesus.” (22:20). Here is two angels’ powerful audio visual promise of Jesus’ coming again, “Jesus will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Thank God for his precious words. With the promise of Jesus’ coming again and the eternal kingdom of God may we be faithful and true witnesses of Jesus in the power of the Holy spirit in the last days. May God richly bless this direction of our Toronto UBF in the year of 2021.