

# Acts 1:6-11

*"You will be my witnesses"*

**March 24, 2024**

1. In the year 1873, a young woman from Scottsville, Virginia, left everything she had to go and be a foreign missionary in the country of China
  - a. We learned about this woman, Lottie Moon, back in December of last year
    - i. Lottie's story was an incredible one
      1. Through her persistence and zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and through her humble love and service toward the people in the villages of China, Lottie saw thousands come to Christ, surrendering their hearts fully to him as Lord and Savior of their lives
        - a. But Lottie didn't just make an impact on the other side of the globe
    - ii. As we also learned, Lottie was an amazing writer
      1. And so she used her gifts and her passions to write letter after letter back home to the churches in the U.S., encouraging them to turn their hearts toward the nations
        - a. She was instrumental in encouraging more women, and men, to answer the call to give their lives to global missions
        - b. But she was also instrumental in reminding the churches back home that they had a role to play as well
          - i. For ALL missionaries need the support of sending churches
          - ii. In order for them to go and effectively share the Gospel and minister in foreign lands, every missionary needs a home church, or even multiple churches, who will support them with their prayers, as well as with their finances
      - c. This isn't an invention of the church here in America, or of the Southern Baptist Convention
        - i. This is how it has been since the very beginning
        - ii. The Apostle Paul, who was perhaps the greatest missionary in the history of the church, was SENT OUT by the church in Antioch
          1. Throughout the book of Acts, we read of Paul going on his missionary journeys, and then returning to the church in Antioch to share with them all that God had done through their COOPERATIVE efforts
          2. If you remember our Wednesday night study in Philippians, Paul also received support from the church in Philippi, as they provided for him and took care of his needs during his first imprisonment in Rome
    2. ALL missionaries NEED the support of sending churches
      - a. This is one of the things that makes the fellowship within the body of Christ so sweet and unique, as we train and equip disciples, and then we joyfully send them out into the world, with all of our prayers, AND with the money from our wallets
    - iii. Lottie realized that this was an urgent need to remind the church of, so she wrote thousands of letters to the Southern Baptist churches and to the Southern Baptist Convention, and the churches were stirred to action!
      1. As a result of Lottie's passion and efforts, the Women's Missionary Union of the SBC was formed, and in 1888, the first "Christmas offering for missions" was collected

- a. And now, nearly a hundred and forty years later, Southern Baptist Churches raise MILLIONS of dollars every year for global missions, through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
  - i. Lottie Moon was used MIGHTILY by the Lord, as she brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of China, and at the same time, urged the churches back in the US to join her in the fight!
    - 1. But Lottie was not alone in all of her efforts
      - a. For, while she was living and ministering in China, half a world away, there was another young woman here in the states, sounding the very same call
        - i. This young woman was named Annie Armstrong

## 2. Annie Armstrong

- a. Annie Armstrong was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 11, 1850... ten years after Lottie Moon was born
  - i. Annie surrendered her life to the Lord at the age of 19, and, like Elisha when he left his home to follow Elijah, Annie never looked back
    - 1. Annie would never move away from Maryland, but she devoted her entire life to faithfully serving the Lord from there
      - a. As the Women’s Missionary Union website says, “From day one, Annie was a force to be reckoned with!”
      - b. Annie was baptized into the Seventh Baptist Church of Baltimore (that’s not a name you hear often these days, is it?)
        - i. But within a few years, she and 117 others left Seventh Baptist – not as a split like we tend to do around here – but to plant the Eutaw Place Baptist Church, which was also in Baltimore
          - 1. Annie would serve as the teacher of the children’s class at Eutaw for nearly FIFTY years
    - 2. But while she was serving in the children’s church, Annie also became extremely passionate about missions
      - a. In fact, she was instrumental in forming the WMU that I mentioned a moment ago
        - i. She and her sister, Alice, wrote the first constitution and by-laws for the WMU
        - ii. And Annie would be chosen to be its first Executive Director
    - 3. Through Annie’s leadership, the WMU exploded into a phenomenal fundraising organization, as she wrote tens of thousands of letters to Southern Baptist Churches across the US, much like Lottie Moon was doing from her ministry in China
      - a. It has been recorded that, during one ten-year period of her leadership, Annie wrote on average 8000 letters per year... roughly 674 letters per month
        - i. Just let those numbers sink in
          - 1. That is over TWENTY letters, every single day!
          - 2. As a result of Annie’s prolific letter writing, her hand became permanently damaged, and she was no longer able to write on her own
            - a. What an powerful reminder that when the Lord calls us to his work, there is a cost
              - i. And sometimes, that cost could be both physical and painful

- ii. But Annie didn't just stop at writing letters
    - 1. At her own expense, Annie traveled thousands of miles, all across the US, visiting churches and spreading the word about the WMU
      - a. As part of her travels, Annie also spent time in Indian Territory, advocating for the education and human treatment of Native Americans in the land which would eventually be known as Oklahoma
      - b. Back home, Annie would mobilize outreaches and mercy ministries, serving the outcasts there in Baltimore
        - i. These ministries focused on serving the Native Americans there, but also the African Americans, the Italian and Jewish immigrants, and the poor in the city
      - c. And as part of her fundraising efforts through the WMU, Annie would end up being a key figure in raising support for Lottie Moon
        - i. The money she raised on behalf of Lottie was enough to send three more women missionaries to China, and to give Lottie her first furlough back home in 11 years!
      - d. It should be noted that during her entire time leading the WMU, and spearheading the spread of the Gospel both in Baltimore and across the world, Annie never took a salary for her work
        - i. It's not too hard for us to draw a parallel between Annie Armstrong and the prophetess we learned about last week, Anna... is it?
          - 1. Like Anna's wholehearted devotion to the Temple of the Lord, Annie was wholeheartedly devoted to her local church
            - a. She realized in her fifty years of teaching in children's church, that it was through the local church that disciples would be made
            - b. She realized in her many different mercy ministries that she started and led, that it was through the local church that these disciples would be the hands and feet of Jesus in their community
            - c. And she realized in her service in the WMU, and her friendship with Lottie Moon, that it was through the local church that these disciples would then be sent out into the world
          - 2. Annie Armstrong was indeed a force to be reckoned with during her 60 years of ministering before the Lord!
            - a. It's no surprise that she was affectionately known by many as "Annie Strong-Arm!"
- iii. And so, in 1934, in recognition of all of Annie's incredible work, the Southern Baptist Convention officially instituted the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions
  - 1. Annie would go home to be with the Lord four years later, in 1938

### 3. The AAEO

- a. So what exactly does the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering go toward?
  - i. Currently there are over 2900 missionaries in North America that are supported by the North American Mission Board
    - 1. These missionaries serve here in the US, but also in Canada, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa
      - a. Since 2010, over 10,000 churches have been planted in North America through the North American Mission Board (or NAMB)

- b. NAMB receives funding through the Southern Baptist Convention throughout the year, but by far the majority of their funds come through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
    - i. Like the Lottie Moon offering at Christmas, 100% of the Annie Armstrong offering goes DIRECTLY to the field, so there's no worry of overhead or administrative costs that come out of this offering
      - 1. Just to break it down for you,
        - a. 85% of the AAEO goes toward planting new churches
        - b. 10% goes toward evangelism and mercy ministries
        - c. 3% goes toward sending and leadership training
        - d. And 2% goes toward missions education in our local churches
  - 2. Like the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is an offering that is WELL worth our investment!
    - a. So here is the challenge...
      - i. Pray about what you would like to give toward this offering
      - ii. When you leave today, grab one of the Annie Armstrong envelopes out of the offering box at the back
        - 1. And then, as the Lord leads you, bring your gift back next Sunday, and we will make our official collection on Easter Sunday
          - a. We certainly want to be a church that is passionate about taking the Gospel to the unreached people groups across the world
            - i. But at the same time, we cannot forget that there are countless numbers of lost people, right here in our own backyard
            - ii. Through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, we as a church can make a tremendous impact here in North America!
4. Now, here's what makes Annie Armstrong DIFFERENT from Lottie Moon
  - a. You all gave SO generously toward the Lottie Moon offering – we well exceeded our goal of \$500, in fact, just in case you missed it, our giving total for Lottie Moon was over \$1200!
    - i. You all gave generously and cheerfully, and I pray that we do the same for the Annie Armstrong offering
      - 1. But the difference between these two offerings is this: no one was specifically called to follow in Lottie Moon's footsteps and actually GO to the nations (at least, not yet!)
      - 2. But as we learn about Annie Armstrong, we are faced with this biblical truth:
        - a. We are ALL called to go to our neighbors
        - b. We are ALL called to be ambassadors of Christ HERE
        - c. We are ALL called to make disciples in our own communities
          - i. There are no exceptions, as much as we may like for there to be one
          - ii. We can certainly look to Annie Armstrong for our challenge and our example in the area of local missions
            - 1. But if she were here today, I think Annie Armstrong would say, "Do not look to me, brothers and sisters... look TO THE SCRIPTURES!"
    - ii. So let's turn to our main passage for this morning, Acts 1:6-11
      - 1. So this of course is after the death and resurrection of Jesus

- a. Jesus has already shown himself to the disciples
- b. He's already convinced Thomas that he is really alive
- c. He's already restored Peter to ministry
- 2. And now, the disciples, minus Judas, are standing with Jesus on the Mount of Olives
  - a. And just before he ascends to heaven, this is what Luke recounts for us

5. Acts 1:6-11

a. *6So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8But 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." 9And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

i. The disciples were still struggling to get it, weren't they?

1. We can't really blame them for asking the question that they asked

a. They had thought that Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel during his life and ministry before the cross

i. But that didn't happen

ii. The Jewish religious leaders cooked up a fake trial with a bunch of fake accusations, and then the Roman Empire hung him upon a cross where he died

1. But NOW, now that he had been resurrected, now that he had beaten the Pharisees and Sadducees and all of the might of Rome by coming back to life...

a. Surely, NOW, Jesus would restore the kingdom back to Israel???

ii. But that wasn't part of the plan, was it?

1. "It is not for you to know the times or seasons the Father has fixed by His own authority," Jesus says

a. The only thing YOU need to be worried about is the mission

i. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be MY witnesses

1. First in Jerusalem, then in all Judea and Samaria, and then to the end of the earth!

2. Just try to think about how the disciples were feeling in that moment

ii. Again, Jesus had just conquered death!!

1. Surely, with him now alive, nothing could stop HIM

b. But Jesus turned everything back to them in that moment

i. Friends, the Kingdom of the Father will come according to HIS time

1. But IN THE MEANTIME, YOU... you... me... WE have been called to be Christ's witnesses

2. Friends, do you know what the Greek word is that Jesus uses for witnesses?

a. Mar-too-reyes

i. It is the same word that we use to get our word, MARTYRS

iii. When will the Kingdom of God be established on earth?

1. Social media these days will try to tell you it is tied to the eclipse that will happen on April 8<sup>th</sup>
2. Glenn Beck will try to tell you it is tied to the red heifers that Israel is guarding from Hamas
3. Jesus would say, that is none of your concern, Christian
  - a. YOUR concern is to be a martyr for my name
    - i. Your concern is to take your gaze off of the riches and wealth and prosperity of this world, and to focus instead on the true SPIRITUAL riches found IN CHRIST
    - ii. Your concern is to leave behind the petty squabbles of republican vs. democrat, and to focus instead on advancing the Kingdom JESUS has called you into
    - iii. Your concern is to lose your life in this world, and to pick up your cross, and to die to yourself
      1. You are to be Christ's witnesses
      2. You are to be his MARTYRS
        - a. And it begins right here in our own Jerusalem
- b. If you've read through the book of Acts, you might get the impression that, after the Holy Spirit fell upon the believers at Pentecost, they all immediately scattered and took the Gospel out into the nations
  - i. Some certainly did
    1. Phillip took the Gospel to Samaria, and then to Azotus and Caesarea
    2. Starting in Acts 13, we see the journeys of Paul and Barnabus and Silas and Timothy
  - ii. So some left and spread the Gospel through frontier missions work
    1. But many of the disciples STAYED in Jerusalem
      - a. Peter apparently stayed there for many years
      - b. According to Galatians 1, Jesus' brother James, another of the "pillars" of the church, was also still in Jerusalem
        - i. The point is, the work of building the Kingdom DID expand out throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, but there was still MUCH work to do in Jerusalem as well
- c. Friends, this principle still holds fast for us today
  - i. I wholeheartedly believe that we MUST be a church that is passionate about reaching the unreached out in the world, those who live in utter spiritual darkness in many of the most dangerous places on earth
  - ii. But the Scriptures are equally clear...
    1. AT THE SAME TIME, we must be the salt of our community
    2. AT THE SAME TIME, we must be the light upon the hill right here in Sapulpa
      - a. In Acts 17:24-27, Paul says this to the men of Athens
        - i. *<sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup>And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup>that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us...*

- i. Every person that lives right here in our community has been placed here according to God's design
      - 1. He has determined that Sapulpa, OK be the "boundaries of their dwelling place"
    - ii. But not only has he determined that Sapulpa, OK be the boundaries of their dwelling place... he has ALSO determined that THIS be the allotted period in which they live
      - 1. They are alive on March 24, 2024, and they live here in Sapulpa, OK, ALL because THAT is the way God has determined things be for them
        - a. And WHY has God determined these things?
          - i. According to Paul, God has determined their allotted times and the boundaries of their dwelling place, SO THAT they would seek Him, and perhaps FIND Him
  - 3. But Paul ALSO tells us in Romans 10 that NO ONE is just going to stumble onto God on their own
    - a. In Romans 10:14-15, Paul says,
      - i. *<sup>14</sup>How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*
- iii. So let's put the pieces of the puzzle together...
  - 1. God has determined that the people here in Sapulpa, OK (and the surrounding communities that some of you live in), are specifically here in this place and this time, that they might find their way to God
    - a. But the Scriptures tells us that they cannot find their way to God, unless someone TELLS them about God
      - i. Which means that YOU, Christian, have also been placed right here, at this exact place, during this exact time, SO THAT you will be the one to preach the good news to those who are here as well!
      - ii. According to His sovereign plan, this is the way God has ordained that it work!!
        - 1. There is no plan B
        - 2. There is no second option
          - a. Christ has purchased us for Himself
          - b. He has commissioned us to be his ambassadors
          - c. He has called us to be his witnesses
- iv. I find it funny that after Jesus tells his disciples these things, and after he ascends into heaven, and disappears from their sight, the disciples are left just standing there looking up at the sky
  - 1. And then all of a sudden two angels show up next to them and say (this is my paraphrase), "Uh, guys, what are you doing? Why are you just standing around looking for Jesus to come back. Didn't he just give you your orders?"
    - a. My friends, I believe we are in need of the same word today
      - i. We are called as the church to fix our gaze upon Christ
      - ii. We are called to set our sights firmly on the City that is to come

- iii. We are called to place our hopes fully upon the better country that Christ will bring upon his return
  - b. But we have also been called to get to work until he comes back
    - i. We need to stop focusing so much on squinting at the sky and looking for his return
      - 1. He IS coming back!
      - 2. God WILL restore the kingdom to Israel!
      - 3. The heavens and the earth WILL be made new, and we will receive gloriously incorruptible bodies and we will worship Christ for all eternity
        - a. These things WILL happen
    - c. But IN THE MEANTIME, we cannot forget our calling
- v. Annie Armstrong is an amazing example of this truth, isn't she?
  - 1. She wasn't in it for the fame
  - 2. She wasn't in it for the physical comfort
  - 3. She certainly wasn't in it for the riches
    - a. From the moment she surrendered her life to the Lord, she did exactly that – she SURRENDERED
      - i. Was there a need to write so many letters to raise money for missions that she would eventually damage her hands in the process?
        - 1. DONE.
      - ii. Was there a need to travel all the way from Baltimore to Oklahoma, on horseback and on foot, because there were Native Americans there who needed to hear the Gospel, as well as education and having their basic needs met?
        - 1. DONE.
      - iii. Was there a need to serve the Italian and Jewish immigrants in her city, and to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the African Americans there as well?
        - 1. DONE.
      - iv. Was there a need to spend over fifty years doing the quiet and humble work of teaching a class in children's church, raising the next generation of disciples who would be witnesses for the name of Jesus?
        - 1. DONE.
- vi. Annie Armstrong faithfully served the Lord for over sixty years, because the Lord Jesus Christ was THE great treasure of her life
  - 1. She didn't just TALK about Jesus in the comforts of her friends there at Eutaw Place Baptist Church
    - a. She took the commands of Jesus literally
      - i. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus said,
        - 1. *<sup>13</sup>You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may*



*see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

- ii. Annie Armstrong lived her life to be the salt of the earth
- iii. She lived her life to be the light of the world
  - 1. She longed for the light of Christ to shine through her, that others may see her good works, and that they would give glory to her Father who is in heaven!

vii. So how will we live our lives, brothers and sisters?

- 1. How will Forest Hills Baptist Church be a “city on a hill” for all in Sapulpa who do not know the name of Jesus?
- 2. How will OUR light shine before them, that they might see OUR good works, and give glory to our Father in heaven?

6. This is not a rhetorical question!

a. Over the next few months, I want us to SERIOUSLY be praying for how we as a church will be a light for Christ in this city

i. We have been in the revitalization process here at Forest Hills for almost 10 months now

- 1. God has been faithfully knitting us together as a family, and He has been faithfully adding to our numbers
- 2. But what will WE do?

a. How will we strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus in OUR community, as Annie Armstrong was in hers?

b. Be in prayer for what God has for us to do

i. Maybe you have a certain gift, or certain life experiences, or a certain burden that God has placed on your heart

- 1. How can we put that to work for the Kingdom right here?
- 2. Pray that God would begin to give us direction, and let’s begin the conversation for how we will be the salt and the light in our community

ii. But as you pray, and as we seek the will of God together, I want us to do so under some very clear parameters

1. The temptation in many of our churches today is to immediately start filling up our church calendar with events and activities and outreaches

a. I have seen this play out in church after church, both big and small

i. And we have seen how this approach absolutely wears out the people of the church, and really produces little fruit

1. So, as we begin to talk about ideas of how we will do local missions, we need to ask three questions of every idea

iii. The first question is, “Can a non-Christian do this same task and be completely comfortable doing it?”

1. Can the Mormon church down the road go to the foodbank and fill up grocery sacks full of food?

a. Yep. Great. Let’s let them do that.

2. Can the Lion’s Club go sweep the streets after the Route 66 Car show, and pick up all the trash everyone left behind?

a. Absolutely. Awesome. Let’s let them do that

3. Can the city of Sapulpa put together a really fun food truck festival, or 5K run, or a big street party with inflatables and hot dogs?

a. They can, and they’ll do a much better job at it than us. So let’s let them do all that.

4. The good works that we are looking for are good works in which we clearly and boldly proclaim the name of Jesus
  - a. So we don't want to burn up all our time and resources doing something your average non-Christian can do
- iv. The second question we need to ask is, "Has God gifted me specifically in this area as a toll for making disciples?"
  1. Maybe you're really good with computers, or you have great business skills, or you're good at accounting or knitting
    - a. What if you took your skills, and we began to use all of our empty classrooms to start teaching different life skills to teen moms, or underprivileged high school students
    - b. And as part of these classes we also taught them the Scriptures, and what it looks like to live your life wholly for the Lord
      - i. Ephesians 2:10 says that God has crafted all of us together in individual skills and personalities and gifts, all so we can do the good works He has prepared for us
        1. So let's start thinking in that direction!
- v. And finally, the third question we need to ask is, "Does this activity open the door for making disciples of Jesus?"
  1. Will this event introduce people to the Scriptures?
  2. Will it include opportunities to proclaim the good news about Jesus?
  3. Will it set the foundations for long-term relationships?
    - a. If we can say "Yes!" to these questions regarding making disciples, then it is an activity or an event that is worth investing our time and energy into
- vi. God is going to build this church, as He sees fit, according to His time and His purpose
  1. I'm not worried about doing a bunch of events and activities so we can increase our numbers
    - a. But I DO want us to be FAITHFUL
      - i. So, we have a lot to pray about, don't we?
        1. Pray about what the Lord would have you give next Sunday for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
        2. But ALSO pray for the Lord to begin to show us how we as a church can be the salt and the light we have been called to be
    - b. We'll close with this quote from Annie Armstrong... I pray that it challenges and encourages us all!
      - i. "The future lies all before us... shall it only be a slight advance upon what we usually do? Ought it not to be a bound, a leap forward, to altitudes of endeavor and success undreamed of before?"