

On the Edge of Their Seats!

Acts 1:1-5

Review of the Book of Acts

What the book of Acts is *not*!

We will begin today with a review of what the book of Acts is *not*!

It is not a complete history of the early church

1. First, it is not a complete history of the early church.

The book of Acts covers the highlights of the first thirty-three years of the church. It gives little information about eleven of the apostles, while focusing on Peter and Paul. One person said that the book of Acts could be entitled, “The Book of Some of the Acts of Some of the Apostles”.

One hundred ten people are introduced in the book of Acts, yet little information is given about them. Nothing is given to fill in the blanks concerning the churches in Galatia and beyond.

Now, Jesus Christ told His disciples in John, chapter 13, verse 35,

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

In other words, the world would know the disciples were His disciples by the love they had one for another.

As the book of Acts introduces the church to the world, the distinguishing mark of the church stands out as love. And yet, in this book, one word that will not be seen is “love”. The word is not written in the

book even once. It becomes obvious though, that love was there.

Remember that while Acts does not provide everything we would like to know about the early church, God provided everything we needed to know.

It is not a comprehensive theology of church doctrine

2. Secondly, the book of Acts is not a comprehensive theology of church doctrine.

Luke, the author, is a historian, not a theologian. He touches on many theological points, but does not pause long enough to explain them.

A classic example of this is in chapter 2 of Acts. Luke records, without context or commentary, the words of Peter, in verse 38,

. . . Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .

Then later, in chapter 16, verse 31, Paul tells a Philippian jailer that all he needs to do is,

. . . Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .

In chapter 16, Luke simply records that Paul had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews, even though, in the previous chapter, the Jerusalem council had decreed that circumcision was not to be required as essential.

Several times in this history, we read that people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit sometime after they believed in Christ, while Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that baptism and conversion are

simultaneous. In fact, it is impossible to be saved today, without experiencing the immediate baptism of the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.

Much of the confusion today, within movements that selectively apply certain passages of Acts to their own ministry, is this simple principle: Acts is not the final word.

The pentecostal, charismatic, vineyard, third wave, second blessing, latter day rains, and other movements view the Holy Spirit as a power that must descend upon the believer. I am going to teach that the Holy Spirit is a person, who already indwells every believer.

The problem is not that we need more of the Holy Spirit, the problem is that the Holy Spirit needs more of us. As believers, we already have all of Him, He just does not have all of us.

Acts must be carefully studied and viewed as a divinely inspired, authoritative, inerrant, infallible book of history, bridging the gap between the ministry of Christ and the doctrine of the church. It is a book in transition, not a comprehensive theology.

It is not a concluding statement for normal Christian living

3. Thirdly, the book of Acts is not a concluding statement for normal Christian living.

If you read the book of Acts and stop without ever studying the Epistles, which were written by the apostles to the early church, you will be deeply confused as to the nature and pursuit of the Christian life. And frankly, that is true with many passages of scripture. Therefore, we are encouraged to compare scripture with scripture. Your interpretation of Acts will determine many of the things that you will pursue and seek to experience as a Christian.

If, for example, the evidence of God's power is manifested through the binding of demons, then I want to do it. I would like to know how long the binding lasts, though. Does it last for an hour; for a week? I would also like to know whether binding a demon in my life will cause him to be bound in someone else's life as well. In fact, since Christ in me is greater than Satan himself, can I not simply bind Satan and be done with temptation? But do not misunderstand, if it is for me, then I want to do it. If speaking in tongues gives evidence of the Spirit's domination for today, then I want it. If the power to heal any and all

diseases gives evidence of faith and Spirit power, do you not think I would want that too?

All of these things happened in the book of Acts. If they are to be happening in this church, then for me to teach otherwise means that not only are we as a church missing the blessing of God today, but also, one day, when I stand before the Lord and give an account, I will be ashamed.

I spoke briefly in our last discussion, about the problem we are facing among many popular movements today, of selective literal application from the book of Acts. In other words, as I read and listen to the Hagins and Copelands and Hinns and Robertsons, and Wimbers, I hear passages from Acts being translated into the normal Christian's experience. Yet, none of these men or movements apply all of the passages literally. If they did, we would today:

- go to a temple and pray, following the prayer calendar of the Jewish nation, as Peter and Paul did in Acts;
- select spiritual leaders by the casting of lots, as they did in Acts;
- draft missionaries from within our fellowship after fasting and prayer, as they did in Acts;
- expect all liars who deceive the body with their financial contribution to fall over dead, as occurred in Acts;
- expect angels to release all religious prisoners from jail, as they did in Acts;
- expect, if I ever preach for such a long time that someone dies in the service, me to resurrect them from the dead, as Paul did in Acts.

The book of Acts needs to be carefully studied.

What we *will* see in the book of Acts

What will we see in the book of Acts in our careful study? We will see:

- a miraculous age, as the church is created;
- supernatural signs, as the Holy Spirit descends;
- powerful testimonies, as the believers shine for Christ;
- the early church struggle with finances, changes, and prejudice;

- a model for passion, zeal, and faith.

We will be confronted with the commitment of the early church that, without any of the conveniences and technology of our day, took the gospel though all of Asia (chapter 19). Their enemies, with tears of rage, said, “. . . These that have turned the world upside down . . .” (chapter 17, verse 6 KJV). And, early in the history of the church, the high priest said to Peter and the others, “. . . you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching . . .” (chapter 5, verse 28).

Imagine being accused of that! “You have filled this city with the gospel.”

Vance Havner said, “Most churches begin worship at eleven o’ clock sharp and end at twelve o’clock dull.”

When pastor friends and others ask me, “How’s Colonial doing? Man, I hear great things.”

I want you to know that most of the time my answer includes the words, “We haven’t even begun . . .”

The question is not, “How big is your church?” The question is, “How big is your city, and have you filled it with gospel?”

I want our study of Acts to revolutionize us, so that we will be guilty of the same; that we will fill our city with the gospel.

Exposition of the Book of Acts

Now, let us turn our attention to the exposition of the book of Acts, or the book of “Action”. Turn to chapter 1 and look at verses 1 through 2a.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up . . .

It is important to remember that Acts is the sequel to the gospel. Luke refers to it as “the first account”. Theophilus, a Roman politician with great power, is receiving this second volume from his medical friend and missionary doctor, Dr. Luke.

The forceful admonition from Jesus

Now, notice the rather forceful admonition from Jesus. Continue to verse 2b.

. . . after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

What did He order them to do? Notice verse 4a.

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait . . .

Isn’t it interesting that the very first recorded command to the body of disciples was to wait?

Try to understand the need for this command. Jerusalem was the city that had crucified their leader. They were unwanted and unloved. The city fathers hated everything they stood for. Remember as well, that their homes were far away in Galilee. Their families; their wives and children; their businesses were in another region.

The only way to explain the presence of the apostles in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost is that they were obeying the command of Christ to wait.

The firm affirmation from Jesus

This leads us to the question, “What are they waiting for?”

Herein lies the affirmation from Jesus Christ. Look at verses 4b and 5 of chapter 1.

. . . [the apostles are to] wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The apostles waited for ten days, to be exact.

Jesus had promised in John, chapter 16, that after He ascended, the Holy Spirit would descend. Then, in Acts, chapter 2, we are given the historic event called Pentecost.

Two principles about Pentecost

Let me give two key principles about Pentecost.

Pentecost is a non-repeatable event

1. First, Pentecost is a non-repeatable event. It was the fulfillment of a prophetic promise.

Just as the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord are non-repeatable events, so the descent of the Holy Spirit is as well. And, at the descent of the Holy Spirit, the church was birthed into existence.

To pray for Pentecost to occur today is like praying for America to become independent of England. It has already happened. No one today prays for the revolution. It has already happened and

today, we enjoy the benefits of national freedom because of that historical event.

In the same way, we do not pray for the Holy Spirit to descend or fall upon us or to come from heaven with power, etc., etc. He is standing here tapping His fingers, "Excuse me, I've been down here now for two thousand years. Where have you been?"

The apostles in Acts, chapter 1, were waiting for Him to come. In chapter 2, He came.

The promise of Spirit baptism is not a special privilege for some believers

2. Secondly, the promise of Spirit baptism is not a special privilege for some believers.

The Holy Spirit is not some treat for the spiritually elite. (Did you like that? You actually pay me to come up with stuff like that!)

I tell my kids, "Listen, if you behave for your mother today, and do your chores and treat each other with some semblance of civility, then when I come home, I'll take you out to Goodberrys for ice cream after supper."

Now parenting experts say you are not supposed to bribe your kids. I am not bribing them, I am just telling them, "If you behave, we go to Goodberrys; if you misbehave, you go to bed."

The parenting experts need to learn about the power of ice cream!

Fortunately, God does not do that with His Holy Spirit. He does not say, "Now if you pray long and hard; if you tarry; if you weep; if you're really good, I'll give you a taste of the Holy Spirit."

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the once for all experience of every believer. In fact, Paul writes in Titus, chapter 3, verses 5 and 6,

He [God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior

Everyone who has received Christ, has received the indwelling Spirit.

The final appearances of Jesus

Now any of Christ's promises about the Spirit are obviously dependant upon His resurrection. If He did

not resurrect, He could not ascend; if He did not ascend, the Spirit could not descend. In fact, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity is a religion of broken promises.

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- the world would be without the church;
- the church would be without witnesses.

Historians tell us that in the year our Lord was crucified, thirty thousand others were executed by the Roman government by means of crucifixion.

Death by crucifixion was originally created by the Persians. It was a way to kill someone without having their death experience come into direct contact with their goddess, mother earth. To accomplish this, they suspending the person above the earth. Later, the Romans perfected crucifixion, so that it became the most terrifying and agonizing way a person could die.

In John, chapter 20, the disciples are locked in an upper room. They are terrified that they might also feel the weight of a cross on their back. And, they are defeated with the realization that their leader was in fact, dead and buried.

Wiersbe writes, "If Jesus Christ were dead, the church would be speechless."

In Acts, chapter 5, the apostles are thrown into jail and commanded not to speak of Christ again. Yet, in verse 29b, we read their declaration,

... "We must obey God rather than men."

What moved them from cowardice to courage? They were obeying the commission given to them personally, not by a man headed to His execution, but by the living Lord, having come from His resurrection.

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

- sin would be without forgiveness;
- the church would be without ordinances;
- the Christian would be without hope;
- eternity would be without heaven.

The list could go on and on!

So, at the outset of the book of Acts, Dr. Luke writes of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The personal confirmation of the resurrection by Jesus

Now, in verse 3 of Acts, chapter 1, Luke is going to tell Theophilus that Jesus Christ personally confirmed His resurrection in two different ways.

Visual confirmation

1. First, He confirmed it visually.

Look at verse 3a.

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days . . .

The word “proofs” was used by writers of medical journals in early Greece. Luke is tapping into his medical profession in using this word. It could be translated, “demonstrative evidence”. Luke is writing that this is undeniable proof – you could see Him; you could touch Him.

If you put the clues in the gospels together, you discover that the appearances of Jesus occurred at many different times and places, to many different audiences. He appeared sometimes at night, again at dawn, and once at noon. He appeared sometimes to one person, sometimes to a few, and sometimes to hundreds. He appeared by the sea, in the city, on a mountain side, in a room, and once, on a highway.

Paul writes in I Corinthians, chapter 15, that Jesus appeared:

- . . . to Cephas . . . (verse 5);
- . . . then to the twelve (verse 5);
- After that . . . to more than five hundred brethren at one time . . . (verse 6);
- then . . . to James . . . (verse 7);
- . . . then to all the apostles (verse 8);
- and . . . to me [Paul] (verse 8).

It is as if Paul wrote, “Do you want proof that Christ is alive? Just ask one of the most convincing testimonies in any court of law – ask the eyewitnesses!”

Luke says, “Theophilus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead has been undeniably demonstrated – it has been proven visually.”

Verbal confirmation

2. Secondly, Christ confirmed His resurrection verbally.

Notice the last phrase of verse 3 of Acts, chapter 1.

. . . and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

In case someone thought that Jesus was a passing shadow, or a strange apparition, He spoke; He taught.

Never one to lose even one opportunity, the master Teacher continues to provide information to the future teachers of the New Testament church. And you had better believe these students were listening now!

I do not know how many times you have flown, but it is so fascinating. You get on the plane, sit down, and the flight attendant gets up front and begins to go through that spiel, where they say, “The rear exits are over the wings.” She continues and says, “In case of emergency, a little thing will pop out of the ceiling, and it is an oxygen mask. Put it over your face and then, if your child has been good, give some to your child.” She goes through the whole thing and what is everyone on the plane doing? Do you know what I am doing? I am not listening; I am looking out the window.

You can always tell who is flying for the first time. They have the laminated card out and are listening intently to the flight attendant. When she says, “The oxygen masks . . .,” they want to see where it is and are disappointed that they cannot see it pop out once. And, they want to get up and find the rear exits, just in case. When she says, “That little float,” which is the little cushion you are sitting on that will become your life preserver, they want to try it on and make sure it fits.

Well, I can remember flying with my wife on her first flight. I was sitting by the window, which shows how selfish I am that I got the window seat. The flight attendant is going through the whole spiel and I am looking out the window. I say, “Honey, look at that over there,” and I feel a sharp nudge in my ribs. She says, “Shh, listen to the flight attendant.” She made me listen to the whole thing.

I guarantee, however, that if I were looking out the window and saw flames coming out of one of the engines, everyone on the plane would be scrambling for those cards. Why? *Now* we have to know; *now* it makes a difference. I want to know exactly where those emergency doors are. I want to try on that cushion. Why? Because there is an emergency and now, I need to know.

The disciples had spent three years with Jesus Christ. They had heard Him talk of His death and the nation's rejection of Him and the kingdom. They had heard it. So, why did Jesus Christ have to come back and, over forty more days, teach them again concerning the kingdom and all that would take place? Why? Because *now*, they were ready; they were "all ears," because they needed to know. I frankly believe they learned more over those forty days than they learned in the previous three years.

Make no mistake, Peter is not waiting for an opportunity to interrupt. James and John are not dreaming of who will be the greatest. They are on the edge of their seats; they are drinking it all in!

We will study the core of Christ's final words to the disciples in a future discussion.

Two Truths for Today's Christian

Two thoughts came to my mind, as I tried to picture and feel all the emotion of these forty days. Let me give two principles that can be applied to today's Christian.

Be willing to wait

1. First, be willing to wait!

I find it fascinating that one of Christ's final commands to His followers was to wait. They waited for the Spirit, which we no longer have to, giving an example of their obedience.

What if they had not waited?

What if we would only wait for God's promises to us, as we yield our lives to the One whose timing is always perfect?

Expect Jesus to come

2. Secondly, expect Jesus to come.

Can you imagine, during this forty day period, what it must have been like to have Christ suddenly appear, out of nowhere, without advance warning?

Two men are walking down the street and suddenly, He is there. A group of believers are eating together and suddenly, He is in the room. Some men are fishing and suddenly, He is on the shore. They came to live with the expectation that at any moment, they would see Him again.

May we live with the expectation that at any moment, our Lord will return for His church. His coming will end what the book of Acts began – the age of the New Testament church.

Expect Jesus to come!

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