

Acts Ch 1

“A Continuing Work”

Shall we turn in our bibles to the book that builds the bridge, and spans the space, setting the stage between the gospels and the epistles, the book of Acts ch 1. It seemed only fitting to step out of the gospel of John into the book of Acts (though Acts is tied more directly the gospel of Luke because Luke is the author of the book of Acts). But the book of Acts picks up the pace from the last days of Jesus on the earth after the resurrection just prior to the ascension, to His ascending to the right hand of the Father to now accomplish His plans and purposes via the person of the Holy Spirit through His people. So as to where He *was* walking around in His body *physically* fulfilling the Father’s will, now He will begin to operate through the organism of the church (by the power of the Holy Spirit) who is His body *spiritually*. (1st Cor 12)

So though the title of the book is commonly called, “The Acts of the Apostles” more accurately it’s, “The Acts Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit *through* the apostles.” and Of the apostle’s it’s Peter and Paul who come primarily into focus, and as I was saying the book of Acts serves not only as a sequel to the gospels, but it also makes for a background to the epistles. If it weren’t for the book of Acts we wouldn’t have the record of the birth of the church, any history of the early church, we wouldn’t know who Paul really was, and how he became an apostle. Something like 2/3’s of the NT Epistles were written by Paul and yet if it weren’t for the book of Acts we’d have no clue who he was and by what authority he wrote the letters he wrote. So this book fills the gap between what was recorded about the earthly life of Jesus (in the Gospels) and the work of the risen Lord recorded through the Epistles.

Now even though the book correlates directly with the gospel of Luke it really corresponds wonderfully with what takes place after any of the gospel records. and What I mean by that is that the last recorded fact mentioned in the gospel of Matthew concerning Jesus is the resurrection, which is also recorded in Acts ch 1. In Mark’s gospel the last recorded act of Jesus is the ascension, which is also recorded in Acts ch 1. In Luke, the last promise Jesus uttered was the sending of the Holy Spirit, which is recorded in Acts ch 1. and In the gospel of John, the last thing John mentions is in regards to the 2nd coming of Christ which as you may’ve guessed by now is also in the 1st ch of the book of Acts. and So the Holy Spirit has seen to it that as you’re walking *off of* the pages of any of the gospel accounts, as you walk *into* the book of Acts you’re able pick up the pace right where you left off and carry on from there in the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the church, the fulfillment of Christ’s commission and all the rest.

The key vs in the book of Acts is found in vs 8 of this 1st chapter. *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* Acts 1:8 So with that we understand that the secret of the power of the church is not in the ways and plans of man, in marketing or demographics, but in the person of the Holy Spirit. and Then the rest of the book is the unfolding practically of what’s found in that vs principally.

Vs 8 serves as a basic outline for the entire book, the 1st 7 ch's is the witness to Jesus Christ of the apostles in *Jerusalem*, Ch's 8-9 in *Judea* and *Samaria*, and Ch's 10 and following (some say beginning in ch 12) but with Cornelius in Ch 10 the gospel goes out to the Gentiles and from there on out to the uttermost parts of the known world.

The 1st 8 vs is the *assurance* of Jesus, Vs9-11 is the *ascension* of Jesus, Vs 12-14 is the *prayer* meeting, and Vs 15 thru the remainder of the ch is the *business* meeting whereby Peter seeks to get down to the business of finding another man to assume the office of Judas.

Vs1-3

So vs 1 begins by Luke's drawing attention to his *former account*, which is in regards to the gospel of Luke, and this is now a *continuing* account of what Jesus was doing and teaching through the person of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles. and There are a couple of key words/phrases in this 1st vs that we want to draw attention to. But 1st we notice that this book of chronicled events was actually written specifically to the same individual as was the gospel of Luke. A man by the name of Theophilus, (and of course you know how he got his name, when he was born the doctor looked at him and said, "This is Theophilus looking baby I've ever seen." I know its old but it never dies,) but Luke's gospel begins, "*Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*" Luke 1:1-4 I was joking about his name but in reality it's a great name that means, "Lover of God." So in one sense though these letters were written to an individual *specifically*, they can be received by anyone *generally* who is a lover of God, if you are a *lover* of God, the things of the *word* of God will be of interest to you.

You know when I'm on a missions trip, and in Africa, or Russia, or wherever, I'm all the time taking out the pictures of my family and staring at them. Why? Because I love them, want to be with them, don't want to forget anything about them, and it's kind of a weak analogy because once you've give your heart to Christ, you're always with Christ in that He'll never leave you nor forsake you, but the idea is there. and That is, that the Word of God, paints us a portrait of the Son of God, and if you love God, you're going to constantly be gazing into the Word of God. That you might see who He is, focus on the details of what He's done *for* you, wants to do *in* you, and how He wants to flow *through* you by the power of His Holy Spirit.

If you have a friend of a loved one in the military and you receive a letter from them from over seas; man you read that thing, study its details, look at it again and again. Because you love them, want to hear *from* them and be in touch *with* them. It's the same way with you and Jesus, now Theophilus *loved* God, so he was interested in the works and word *of* God. How about you? How's your devotional life going, how's God moving in your life presently?

Luke was careful to chronicle the events pertaining to the words and works of Christ both in His body *physically* here on this earth, and through His body *spiritually* after the ascension by the power of His Spirit for this man Theophilus. and We're not certain what the relationship between Luke and Theophilus was exactly. Perhaps he supported him in his missionary work and so he stayed accountable, kept him informed, some believe that Luke was at one point the slave of Theophilus. It was common for physicians to be the slave of a wealthy man and that perhaps Theophilus freed him to be about the work of God in his life and Luke was sharing with him what God had done and was doing. But what I want you to glean from this point is that if you're a lover of God, you're going to be a lover of His Word and His works, not only in others, but His work *in you*, and His Word permeating *through you*.

But we note that Luke says the former account was only the things that Jesus *began* both to do and teach. Everything that Jesus did while here on this earth, all the miracles, all the wonders, and works, all the exposition of God's Word, the touching of people's lives was only the *beginning*. It was simply a seedbed from which so much more would spring up and continue to spring up even to this day.

But he wants us to know that the end of Jesus' *time* on this earth physically wasn't the end of Jesus' *ministry* on this earth, be it spiritually or practically. Jesus is still moving, still working, people are still being healed, there are still wonders and works of Christ going on, He's still teaching and touching peoples lives, people are still being changed, they're being saved and sanctified *by* Christ, *through* Christ, and *in* Christ. But instead of ministering to them *in person*, he's ministering to them in *the* person of the Holy Spirit through His people that comprise the church, people like you and me. and Jesus is going to continue to change lives, save souls, and bring healing to the hurting till the day He take's His bride (the church) out of this world unto Himself. But even at that He'll continue to move through the nation of Israel again for 7 more years in His grace. That's the 1st key we want to see in vs 1, that everything that Jesus did on the earth physically, was only the beginning, it did not end with His ascension.

The 2nd thing I want you to see is the phrase, "...to do and teach" Jesus struck the perfect balance of ministering through *works* and *words*. We might say that He walked, the things He talked. He wasn't a man of great principle with nothing practical in His life to show for it. and Let me just say that it doesn't matter what you *say*, if there's nothing in your life that *shows* the reality of the risen Christ in your life than your witness is null and void. Paul spoke of a people of whom he said, "*They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*" Titus 1:16 Like Jesus said, "*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me,*" Matt 15:8-9 Remember James said, "*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*" James 2:18

As you well know it's not that works save us, but faith that saves *does* work. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* Matt 5:16 Jesus was about good works, and if Jesus lives in you He'll be producing good works in you as well. But it's more than the "good ol' boy" type thing. Just doing good works morally doesn't mean anything, I know lots of guys that will give anything to you, sacrifice anything for you if it'll help you out, but that doesn't mean they're saved.

There's a balance, Jesus was a Man of works to be sure, but He was also a Man of the *word*. He embodied the Word, was the *living* Word, and this kinda takes us back to what we were just focusing on. If you love the Lord, you're going to love His Word, not only will you be about good works as the simple natural overflow of Christ in you, but you'll be about His Word as well, spending time *with* Him, getting to *know* Him, that you might well *reflect* Him. That is, share with others that which you've gleaned from the richness of His Word. So see that there. Luke draws attention to two things in regards to the ministry of the Lord, "...*both* to do and teach." Jesus was One who *taught* the Word of God, there are lot's of great *preachers* of God's Word out there, but Jesus was One who was a *teacher* of God's Word. and That's where the body of Christ seems to lack so much today, there are all kinds of wonderful men preaching up a storm, but few by comparison who really take the time to teach the word of God, vs by vs, ch by ch, book by book. and Yet that's the commission, Jesus said, "If you love Me, *feed* My sheep." "Nurture them in My Word." That the saints might be equipped for the work of the ministry that God has called them to, there's no need for a lot of hype, or an organ in the background to keep everyone on the edge emotionally. None of those things will see you through on the day of difficulty, but the solid foundation of the Word of God being laid in your life will. It'll serve as an anchor for your soul in the day of trouble, through trials and tribulations, Jesus was a man of good works, and God's Word.

Notice vs 2, "Until the day in which He was taken up."

What does this mean? It means that Jesus never retired physically from the work of the ministry until the day He went to be with the Father, and even still He's at work via the person of the Holy Spirit. But what I want you to glean from that is that until the day God takes you home to be with Him He wants to use your life for His glory, He's got a plan and a purpose for having you here on this earth. and As long as you're still breathing you do well to search that out and walk in the reality of it. Trust me when I say, when God is finished with your life, you won't be here anymore. He'll just bring you home to be with Him, but until that day ask the Lord to teach you what it means to walk in the reality of His will for you.

I had the privilege of sharing at Mrs. Earl's funeral a few months ago, many of you know doubt remember her. She was 87yrs old when she went to be with the Lord, and the last few months she lived out her life on this earth in a nursing home here in town. But one thing about her is that she had a profound awareness that as long as the breath of life was flowing through her it was because God still wanted to use her in some way. Consequently she would share the love of Christ and the need to be right with Christ with virtually everyone she came into contact with there in that home, nurses, doctors, various staff members. and Every time I would stop in to see her, one thing that she did with out ceasing was serve in the ministry of intercessory prayer. Which I'm convinced is one of the single most powerful ways God can use anybody's life, and she would share, and remain in prayer, until the day in which she was taken up. You just don't retire from the ministry, its simply life, if God's grabbed a hold of your life, He wants to use your life, until the day He takes your life to be with Him.

We notice that He was taken up, "...after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen," now obviously everything about Jesus' life could be earmarked with the fact that what He did, He did *through* the Holy Spirit. Remember He said that there was nothing that He did or said of Himself but that He always did that which pleased the Father, that it was the Father dwelling in Him doing the work. and Everything He did or said was by the power of the Holy Spirit rather than initiated by His self will, the Spirit was given to Him with out measure. and It's by that same power, the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to lead Christ like lives.

Jesus showed us what a life lived in perfect submission to the Holy Spirit looks like. But Luke is drawing out for us the central position that the Holy Spirit is beginning to take with in the work of the church in the physical absence of Christ. So that already in vs 2 of the 1st ch of the book of Acts we're seeing attention given to the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. and That's the way Christ is going to continue to work in His physical absence, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember directly after His resurrection there in John Ch 19 Jesus spoke to Mary of 3 things, a new relationship, new relatives, and a new responsibility. and It's the new relationship that's in view here, that Jesus isn't going to be physically around anymore to lead them and guide them, protect them and provide for them, she wasn't to cling to Him physically. Now He's directing/protecting, providing and guiding speaking to them, and working through them by the Holy Spirit.

What was it that He did through the Holy Spirit here? Gave commandments to the apostles (now watch this), "...whom *He* had chosen." I want you to note the fact that it's Jesus Christ who calls us and equips us for the work of the ministry. There is no office that man takes unto himself, we don't choose the Pastorate, or the office of an elder or a position of authority in the church as a vocation, or a career choice, its a calling.

You're either called *of* God, anointed *by* God for a particular office, or you're not. and If you're not you do well to prayerfully consider where God *has* called you, and the service for which He *will* anoint you so that He can begin to utilize your life in a much more effective way. But regarding an office of leadership in the church, the bible is clear, "...*no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.*" Heb 5:4 Eph 4 is clear that its God Himself who *gave* some to be apostles and prophets (the foundational layers of the church) and still today evangelists and Pastor teachers as His gift to the church for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. Jesus commanded and equipped the apostles whom *He had chosen*.

Vs3

This would be their agenda, things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, Jesus had been about the things of the Kingdom through out His entire earthly ministry, and He's continuing Kingdom business to this day.

Of course this vs brings us the cornerstone of the Christian faith, the fact that Jesus is alive. What is it that separates Jesus and any other good teacher throughout the ages; Confucius, Muhammad, Buddha? Well, outside of the fact that they were all sinners in need of a Savior and Jesus is the sinless Son of God, its this right here, the resurrection. You can find the grave of all of those men, but you'll never find one for Jesus, because He's alive, its an undeniable, un-debatable, undisputable fact. He presented Himself alive on this earth for over a month after His resurrection by (mark it) *many* infallible proofs, or unquestionable evidence. At one point (Paul said) appearing to over 500 eyewitnesses at one time. He said, "*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once,*" 1 Cor 15:3-6

Now in a court of law it only takes 2 to prove any particular point as a fact, but Jesus was seen by over 500 in one sitting, not too mention the other disciples throughout the 40 day period. But according to the Bible Knowledge Commentary this word for "proofs" points to that which is capable of being demonstrated vs that which is provided even by eye witnesses. Speaking of the fact that He didn't just appear and people waved their hand through Him like a ghost, but that Jesus rose from the dead bodily, remember He told the disciples to touch Him, told Thomas to place his hands in His side, and in the nail prints in His hands, He said "A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as I have." He ate with them, and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. and John wrote regarding those things, "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life*" 1 John 1:1

Jesus is alive, that's not the question; the question is what are you going to do with it? Receive it and walk in it? Or reject it and walk away from it? Open your life fresh to the reality of the resurrected Christ today, let Him do a continuing work in your life, just surrender to Him, let Him accomplish His will, His way, simply leading His life through you today. So that you might say like the apostle Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Gal 2:20

Maybe you're at that place where you've never received Christ, but you know in your heart that its time that you do. Jesus Christ is alive and well and seated at the right hand of the Father just waiting to receive you, if you'll simply receive Him. "Well how does one receive?" You may ask, by simply opening your heart and deciding to from your heart believe that Jesus died on the cross paying the penalty for your sin. and By believing in Him and inviting into your heart and your life, the Word of God promises you forgiveness of sin and everlasting life. Why not trust in Him today?