

The Acts of the Apostles

May 1, 2022

Introduction: Acts 1:1

Reading: Acts 1:1-11

The First Forty Days

The Gospel Affirmed

Luke, whose name means “light giving” fulfills his name as he dutifully records the continuation of the work and mission of Jesus and the early church. Luke begins the Book of Acts with, [“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”](#) He addresses this writing first and foremost to his friend, Theophilus whose name means “lover of God” and his quest for truth is proof of his name. In the Gospel of Luke, he is referred to as “most excellent” Theophilus, perhaps as his former master, but I think it recognizes his position as a political leader in Antioch. Why do I think this? Because Luke uses the title “most excellent” to address two other men in Acts, one of which I doubt he respected as a person, but showed respect for his position.

The second use of “most excellent” is found in Acts chapter 24, Felix, Roman procurator or governor of Judea from 52–60 A.D. During his oppressive rule, Felix utilized the aid of robbers to have Jonathan, the high priest, murdered. His tyranny has been cited by the historian Josephus as the cause for the Jewish War that broke out 6 years after he was recalled. Felix had 3 wives: one unknown, another the granddaughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and the third the Jewess sister of Agrippa II, whose name was Drusilla. She later bore him a son, Agrippa. Considering the timing of the Book of Acts between 62 and 64 A.D. one understands the oppressive environment in which the church was established.

The third use of “most excellent” is found in Acts chapter 25, Festus, Roman governor of Judea, who succeeded Felix. The only sources mentioning Festus are the Book of Acts and the writings of Josephus, the Jewish historian who lived in Rome in the 1st century A.D. Josephus wrote that Festus ruled wisely and justly in contrast to Felix.

What these uses of “most excellent” indicate is that in all environments - the Gospel must be preached and must be shared with the lost world. Jesus commanded His followers to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Luke wants his readers to see that there is a Gospel to affirm. Luke shares with Theophilus the historical fact in verses 2 and 3 that Jesus lived after His death, “until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” The Gospel is what Jesus taught; it is not whatever we formulate, but it is an ancient message given by Jesus to His disciples. This ancient message of the Bible cannot be toyed with or altered. There is one and only one Gospel of Jesus Christ and we must know it and guard it so to keep it pure.

That is why, as children of the Living God, you should be able to give the basic Gospel in 1 to 2 minutes, maybe starting with John 3:16. You do not know who God will bring into your life today or tomorrow for a brief time and you must be ready.

The Gospel's Objective

All humans are sinners by birth and by deed. We have inherited Adam's sin nature and we also commit our own sins. What are the consequences of this sin? Death. Paul wrote in his letter to the Roman Christians this simple truth, ²² **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:22-23) Left to ourselves, all humans no matter how many good things they do are still sinners and will die an eternal death. Jesus came to earth and lived as a human and did not sin. He died on the cross so that by His death (which He did not earn as a wage for He knew no sin) could be counted or accredited to us. Jesus paid the punishment for all who believe in Him. All who trust in Christ as the means that God uses to save lost sinners will be saved. Jesus came from the Father and perfectly accomplished His mission to seek and save the lost. It is a historical fact Jesus did die according to the Scriptures and on the third day rose from the tomb, alive, defeating death. If one wants to be saved from eternal death, then as John recorded the words of Jesus, **“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”** (John 17:3) This truth is simple but not easy. The reality is that if you know the Gospel, even briefly, you can tell others.

If the Gospel of Christ was to move out beyond the first few hundred Christians, they had to understand the Gospel of the Kingdom. Luke explains that there were many times during the 40 days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension in which He appeared to His people to help them understand. Paul in his letter to the Corinthian believers gave the gospel and then evidence of its truth. **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you**

received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, *simple overview of the Gospel, followed by evidence* ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Corinthians

15:1-8) Luke mirrors Paul, he opens Acts with affirmation that there are many eyewitnesses of these events, all one needed to do was seek out one of the hundreds of witnesses and ask, “Did Jesus really rise from the grave? Did you really see Him walking around and did you really hear Him teach after He was murdered and after He rose?” If the disciples did not believe, if they were not witnesses, they would not have taken the Gospel out to the world, they would not have suffered persecution and death for a falsehood. For them to preach the fullness of the Gospel, like Jesus preached it, they needed to have complete confidence that He is alive.

They also needed a clear teaching about the Kingdom of God. Luke tells us that during those forty days of Jesus teaching them after the resurrection that He taught them one subject; the Kingdom of God. They needed a crash course on this Kingdom. Jesus tied together all He had taught the disciples during His lifetime, things they just did not get – until Jesus rose from the dead and brought it all into focus. Jesus brought into focus the truths of the Old Testament with the New. For the disciples and for each of us, just having the knowledge of the Scriptures is not enough. They needed and we need the power to go.

The Gospel Commission

The power for them and us to go into the world and share the saving Gospel of Christ is the power receive from the God the Holy Spirit. Luke continues in verse 4, “**And while staying with the disciples, Jesus ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, Jesus said to the disciples, ‘you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’**” Verses 4 and 5 validate what Luke recorded in his gospel account in chapter 24, Jesus spoke of future truth saying, “**behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.**” (v. 49) Without the Holy Spirit’s indwelling one does not have the power or ability to be effective witnesses for the Kingdom of God. So, the first promise of Jesus to His disciples was to stay in Jerusalem to receive the Holy Spirit. There was also a second promise, why the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem, it is found in Galatians chapter 3, “**So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**” (v. 14) What was the blessing of Abraham? For this we go to Genesis chapter 12, “**Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’**” (vs.1-3) Paul shows us exactly what the promised blessing was. The Old Testament prophecy given to Abraham was through the death and resurrection of Jesus those among the Gentile nations who have faith in Christ would be blessed in that they would receive the Holy Spirit as well as believing Jews.

Jesus refers to John the Baptist in verse 5. John's ministry was to get the people ready to hear the amazingly powerful authoritative teaching of Jesus Christ. So, John would preach a very similar message and then he would do what Jesus would do, he would call on people to repent. John would then teach them to live lives in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. Next, John would baptize them.

Jesus' ministry was similar but of course far more powerful. He would preach the same message John preached - calling people to repent - calling them to go and sin no more, but Jesus did not baptize with water like John did. John's water baptism was a prophetic picture of the full Holy Spirit baptism Jesus would administer to His followers. John's baptism was called a baptism of repentance and foreshadow of the real baptism, which would follow, coming from Jesus. We see this laid in Mark's Gospel Account at its beginning, ⁴“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ **I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ ”**

(Mark 1:4-8) Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until this Holy Spirit baptism took place. This happened about ten days after the ascension.

Many believe Jesus' mention of John the Baptist is a marker that when the Holy Spirit is poured out, the New Testament or new covenant era of the church begins. With the beginning of the New Covenant Church, God's promise to Jeremiah was fulfilled. God said through the prophet, “**I will put my law within**

them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)

The Gospel Misunderstood

Both Jesus’ disciples and His followers had a problem in understanding His teachings and what He meant when He spoke of the Kingdom of God. Jesus meant one thing and some of His followers thought He meant something else. Reading at verse 6, “So when they had come together, they asked *Jesus*, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ⁷ *Jesus* said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.’ ⁸ But 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.’ ”

As William Barclay notes in his commentary on verses 6 to 8, “The Jews were always vividly conscious of being God’s chosen people. They took that to mean they were destined for special privilege and for world-wide dominion...so the Jews began to look forward to a day when God would break directly into human history and establish that world sovereignty of which they dreamed.” (Acts of the Apostles, pg. 11)

The Jews thought as God’s chosen people they were meant to rule, they were better than any other race of people. So, they ask Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Their idea was the kingdom of Israel and Jesus was speaking about the Kingdom of God for all people.

Notice in verse 6 they use the verb “restore”. They had it stuck in their minds that God was going to make Israel into as a global political superpower. They thought that God’s plan was restore things back to the way they were during the time of David when Israel was the authority geographically and politically. It would take nothing less than God the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and minds

in the near future for them to overcome this idea. It would take God working through the Gentiles before these Jews could get that straight.

It is interesting they people did **not** ask Jesus, “Are you going to restore the kingdom?” but they asked if He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel or the kingdom of the Jews. If gentiles were going to come, they needed to come through the Jews. These Jews thought the kingdom would ethnically restricted, to the Jews at large and they would have control.

Their question to Jesus also showed, in their mind, the kingdom would be geographically restricted to or at least centered on Israel. If gentiles wanted into the kingdom of Israel; they would have to come to Israel. Interestingly, Jesus does not answer their question the way I think they thought He would. ⁷ *Jesus* “**said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.’**” If I paraphrase, Jesus said, “*Really, really guys, have we come to this point in time and you still do not understand? Do you really not know the Kingdom of God that I have been teaching you about?*” Jesus did not deny an earthly kingdom; there will someday be an earthly kingdom when the Lord returns. However, for the believers in the first century, for all the saints who have lived prior to the present and for those of us living today until Christ returns, God’s Kingdom is a spiritual one. Earlier Jesus had this exchange, ²⁰ “*Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,* ²¹ *nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’*” (Luke 17:20-21) Some of their speculation is understandable. They, no doubt, understood Ezekiel 36 and Joel 2 to be connected with the coming Kingdom. Those texts talk about and connect the coming Kingdom with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so their question is not completely out of place. My beloved, with the

ascension of Christ and the birth of His Church “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” There will be a time when God sets up a literal earthly Kingdom at the return of Christ. So, for now, Jesus had to steer them away from thinking that it was going to take place immediately. He wanted to recognize the kingdom of God during the Church Age would be spiritual.

If you think about it, they were now in the presence of the risen Christ, which would have been amazing and with their misunderstanding of the kingdom as a physical kingdom like David’s only more powerful, then now is the time for Israel to be the superpower. This is what the word “retore” means in verse 6. They were still thinking Israel - while God is thinking all tribes and tongues and nations.

Their misunderstanding had to do with the fact that the kingdom of Israel during the reign of King David and Solomon as glorious as it was, still was not God’s ultimate goal for His people. God is going to restore His Kingdom and it is going to be far greater than any kingdom this world has ever known. His purpose for sending Jesus Christ and His purpose in continuing Christ’s work through these Jewish disciples is to begin a new people, a people not made up of Jew or Gentile but a new Israel - the Israel of God is not national Israel but a global kingdom. To restore this God’s Kingdom is to restore things back to pre-fall status; the world as Eden. They thought that meant to restore the kingdom of Israel, God intends something much greater. He intends things to be back the way they were on planet earth prior to the fall.

My beloved, here is what is coming, let your mind open and see God’s glory, here is what John saw as revealed by God, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven

from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ ” (Revelation 21:1-4) Each day we live we are not getting closer to death, but we are getting closer to life with God!

God wanted His kingdom revealed to the world; first His spiritual kingdom during the Church Age bringing untold numbers of people into His kingdom through Christ and then His earthly and eternal kingdom for all who come to Christ. He chose to use a small group of Jews to begin the mission. For these Jews to be successful they needed help. They needed to see things the way God saw them. This would still take a little time. What they needed was power to go and complete their mission. Reading verse 8, Jesus said to His followers and He is saying to us, “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.” Jesus’ response was to His followers and to us this day is, do not worry about things that are forbidden for you to know such as timing and seasons of God’s realized earthly Kingdom. You have work to do. So, get busy with what you know to be true and what you know to be your task.

John Calvin calls being caught up in the timing of these events “A damnable curiosity”. When people get so caught up in thinking about the intricate details of eschatology, they automatically lose focus on what they should be doing. There is a sinful desire man has to search into things that are only for God to know. Man’s desire is to know some deep secret of God’s that no one else knows. Men want to be special. Men’s fallen desire is to be like God. This always leads to heresy and a

loss of the Gospel. Study end-times as it is clearly revealed in Scripture but be very cautious not to spend an overly amount of time speculating about the things we are not intended to know.

Jesus' job is to know all the Father has intended and we are to put our trust in Him, not in ourselves and our speculations. This takes us to the last verses of 9 to 11.

The Gospel Lived Out

Jesus ascends, ⁹ “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Even after they could no longer see Him, they continue to look up. As everyone is standing there looking up, Luke records the words of two men, ¹⁰ “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and 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.’ ”

These two are angels as we can see from their shining white robes. Perhaps these are the same angels the women saw in the tomb. Jesus was announced to the world at His birth by angels and angels were there as He departed to God back to heaven.

Both Jesus and the angels remind the disciples that they have work to do. Christianity is not a religion of theory and speculation. We do not need to overly concern ourselves with events that will take place in the future. We need to redeem the present. We need to be Christ's ambassadors to the world. It is us, you and me, just like all Christians of every generation beginning with the disciples, who are to take the Gospel to the lost world. The Gospel in a nutshell, given by Jesus, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Brothers and sisters do not get caught up in endless end-times speculation. We must be concerned with the present. Are you presently being a solid Gospel witness to your family and friends? Are you obeying all the Bible tells you? Do not get caught gazing up into the sky daydreaming when are to get busy and do the work God has for you. All of God's plans will come to pass just as He has determined.

Luke is telling his readers, which is for all generations, understand the Gospel and get busy proclaiming the true Gospel while guarding ourselves from distractions of religious speculations and those of the world. Jesus is alive and brings salvation – live it and tell it! Amen!