

Message Date: 04-26-20

Sermon Series: To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 1: What Happens Next

Message Title: Two Thousand Years Ago Yesterday

SCENE 1

- ***Good morning! We are in week SEVEN of Trinity in the time of COVID- and two weeks out from Easter. I'm back up on this hill as a reminder that no matter how long this all lasts, and what the future is, THE SUN IS RISING! EVERY DAY!***
- ***Speaking of Easter, let's go back to Thursday, the evening before the crucifixion.***
- ***In Johns Gospel, chapters 13-17- broadest record of what Jesus taught that night***
- ***In JOHN 14, fascinating part of Jesus teaching- includes one of the most famous things he ever said, but right now, focus the bigger point Jesus is making, a point that can be missed.***
- ***AT beginning of chapter 14, Jesus starts to hint that He is going away... going somewhere. He tells the disciples not to be afraid, that he will return to take them there with him, but that they know the way themselves.***
- ***To which they reply, NO WE DON'T! Pick up story in verse 5***
- ***READ 5-8—I AM the way. Philip... show us the father***
- ***THEN, starting in verse 9, Jesus begins to describe a the spiritual reality that would be the foundation of everything to come, everything God would do, after the resurrection***
- ***READ VS 9-11***
 - ***Jesus lived in dependence upon his father.***
 - ***ALL FATHERS WORK THROUGH HIM***
 - ***Jesus is in UNION with his father.***
- ***Then, Jesus says something mind-blowing, but absolutely essential***
- ***READ VS 12-14***
- ***Just as my father has done his work through me, so I am going to do my work through you.***
- ***Just as I have lived in union with my father, so you will live in union with me***
- ***When you ask- act- out of my name- my nature, my spirit, my life at work in you- your desires motivated and led by my desires... Whatever you ask, whatever you are doing, I WILL DO IT.***
- ***MY WORK, which is my fathers work- will be realized, carried out, BY YOU.***
- ***Jesus continued to teach about the holy spirit- that BY THE SPIRIT, Christ life would become our life.***
- ***READ VS 19-20***

- *Friends, this is the invisible and spiritual miracle that would make possible the very visible and physical miracle that was about to explode upon the earth.*
- **MUSIC ANALOGY...**
- *That night, Jesus was arrested. Next day crucified, and he died.*
- *THEN, across three days, creation held its breath, like the gathering in a tremendous music hall awaiting the downbeat, the opening sounds, of a great symphony.*
- *THEN, as the sun rose on the third day, the music begins, its first notes resounding with the resurrection of Christ.*
- *THEN, across 40 days, the opening melody forms, launching into the symphony of God's work in his world that continues to this day. It is the symphony of God's work through His church- His body- made up of YOU and ME and all disciples, everywhere.*
- *And friends, the first movement of this symphony, what happened in the first generation of believers, is recorded for humanity in what history has come to call the BOOK OF ACTS.*
- **AND SO! CHURCH! WE BEGIN our next major biblical study- exegetical...**
- *This isn't just a journey I'm taking for you. I'm a guide, but this is a journey to be taken by all of us together.*
- **SO, if you are with me, let's head down to our homes, and we will get started.**

SCENE 2

- **ALRIGHT! Before we dive INTO the book of acts, we first need to talk ABOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS- background that will give us important perspective and foundation as we go forward.**
- **WHAT IS THE BOOK OF ACTS? Very simply put, it is a purposefully constructed history of the first generation of the church, the new community of Christ disciples who called themselves 'The Way'.**
- **Darrell Bock, author of one of my primary commentary sources, sums Acts up in this- That "ACTS IS THE NARRATION OF GOD'S WORK AS HE ESTABLISHES THE CHURCH THROUGH THE ACTIVITY OF JESUS"**
- **In Acts, Luke describes how this new movement, originating out of Judaism, came to incorporate Gentiles into the community of God, even as the gospel was being rejected by Israel itself.**
- **Another source described how ACTS is Luke's effort to convince THEOPHILUS that no-one is able to hinder the victorious march of Christ's Gospel.**
- **ACTS opens with the Ascension of Christ (AD 33), and ends with Paul under house arrest, around AD 62. So, Acts covers the first 30 years of the church, give or take..**

- **IMPORTANTLY, Acts isn't just history of what the Apostles did during this first generation... At its very core, it is the history of what GOD DID through them.**
- **Even though most translations name this book "The Acts of the Apostles", (title originating from first-second century, not original to writing), THE CENTRAL CHARACTER, the PROTAGONIST, is GOD- Continuing the work of Jesus Christ, through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.**
- **In fact, F.F. Bruce, one of 20th centuries most respected Christian theologians, suggested that the book should be called "The Acts of the Risen Jesus", or "The Acts of the Holy Spirit"**
- **NOW... As we journey through Acts, we will be presented with many theological issues, and questions, which we will explore. For example**
 - **What is the essential purpose and identity of the church?**
 - **What is the purpose and role of physical, supernatural, miracles, as we see here**
 - **Events that speak to Sovereignty of God**
 - **Meaning and purpose of baptism, communion**
 - **The nature of salvation itself.**
 - **THROUGHOUT, Acts is a proclamation of the GOSPEL.**
- **ALSO, manifestly, Acts is a HISTORY. Ancient Historical narrative, through the lens of Luke the historian. As such, it raises some important interpretive questions we will consider**
 - **How much does Luke's own perspective influence how these events are recorded?**
 - **As a history, is it trustworthy in the details? YES- undoubtedly colored by Lukes purpose in writing, and it has historical detractors, but there is strong critical agreement and evidence that Luke's history stands up to critical examination.**
 - **Details missing! But as with resurrection narratives, this doesn't detract from authenticity, it speaks to authenticity**
 - **As a history, we will be examining the difference between what is DESCRIPTION and what is PRESCRIPTIVE.**
 - **What events are NORMATIVE for all believers, church, all time**
 - **What events are things that happened, unique to this specific people and historic setting.**
- **Finally, these 30 odd years recorded here- what we could call 'proto-christianity' or 'Christianity 1.0'... it was a time of TRANSITION. This is KEY in not missing some of the very important parts of this story**
 - **From the Gospel being for the Jews, moving to the Gentiles. Primary theme**
 - **From Jerusalem to Mediterranean world- 1st century roman Empire**
 - **From Gospel being primary focused on forgiveness, to the full message of God's Grace**
 - **CRUCIALLY, the transition from the OLD COVENANT to the NEW COVENANT. Luke goes to pains to demonstrate that this new movement was ROOTED in the prophets and work of God in ISRAEL, and yet was fulfilled, and given new birth to all the world, IN CHRIST.**
- **LAST- For now, some data, some facts.**
- **AUTHOR- Luke! Of course. What is often missed is that LUKE-ACTS is one work in two parts, and the two are inseparably related.**

- *Acts is third longest book of NT, clocking in at 18,374 words, 1003 verses. If joined with Gospel/Luke, would be longest writing in NT by almost double.*
- *TIME OF WRITING- Debate on this, but I'm going with BOCK, who puts this in mid to late 60's, immediately prior to fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.*
- *SETTING- Mediterranean world, including Syria/Damascus to the east and all the way to Rome in the west. INTERESTING... Luke opens with Jesus telling his disciples that they would be his witnesses... in JERUSALEM, SAMARIA, and ends of the earth... and then goes on through his book to describe how God worked through the apostles to take the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Samaria, and the first steps of going to the ends of the earth*
- *AUDIENCE. Who did Luke write his history FOR?*
- *THIS TAKES US TO THE SCRIPTURE, read for us by ETTA McCarthy.*

SCENE 3

- *OK! Thank you Etta. Here we go*
- *Luke begins by tying everything he is about to write back to his Gospel, and he begins by addressing his writing (as he does in gospel) to a person named THEOPHILUS.*
- *WHO IS THIS... "Theophilus" literally means "Lover of God", or "loved by God", and some speculate that Luke may be addressing book to "all those who love God", that THEO represents the Christian community.*
- *HOWEVER, "Theophilus" was actually a common Jewish name, and it's more likely that this was a literal person, possibly a patron- supporter- of Luke's work.*
- *NOW- as inspired scripture, ACTS is written to the church, to each one of us. But we receive- and interpret- this scripture through the lens of its original audience...*
- *A first century person of some influence, likely a gentile believer who may have been struggling in his faith because of the pressure being put on the new church, and Luke is writing to his friend to reassure and convince him of the truth and power of what God was doing- ultimately, of the truth and power of the Gospel.*
- *Interestingly, Luke says "I'm writing about all that Jesus BEGAN to do and teach until he was taken up into heaven"... inferring that Jesus was STILL doing and teaching these things, now through the church.*
- *"Jesus gave instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen".... FIRST mention of HOLY SPIRIT- that from the first breath of the church, the SPIRIT was at work- Through Jesus in his choosing, instruction, and equipping of the apostles.*
- *VS 3: "After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive"*

- Church staked EVERYTHING on the resurrection of Christ. Luke makes the point that apart from Jesus and his work, you can't explain or make sense of the church's existence or what it did.
- “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God”
 - Jesus taught them about What God was doing, would be doing, here on earth just as in heaven... Luke emphasizes that this Kingdom work had already begun in Christ, and would now continue to be done By Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who would work through the apostles and believers.
- 4-5... “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”
 - “Wait for Gift”.. Jesus is referring to Holy Spirit... which he had already taught them about, as we saw in John 14.
 - THINK OF THIS... First ACT of the church, first commandment from Jesus... was to WAIT. Don't get ahead of me, but WAIT for what God is going to do!
 - FOR US, HS has already come. But church, there are times when it is an act of great obedience to WAIT for God, to listen, to trust, to be at peace, and be ready to follow when God leads. WAITING CAN BE HARD.. we are in such a time right now... but it is an act of faith to which God calls us.
- Luke then contrasts the baptism of John the Baptist, with coming baptism of holy spirit. What is this about?
 - First, word ‘baptize’ means ‘immerse’... John immersed people in water, but as believers, we would be- and now are- immersed- in union with- God through the holy spirit.
 - ALSO, a powerful picture of what had now changed because of Christ's resurrection!
 - The baptism of JTB was one of preparation- if you go back to the gospel accounts, we see that people were baptized by John so that they would be READY for God to come.
 - NOW, the gift of the spirit was a sign that God- the messiah HAD COME, and the new era, the new life, had ALREADY BEGUN.
- VS 6 “ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”
 - Disciples expressing Israel's hope, expectation, that when messiah came, he would fully liberate Israel and restore them to a place of great blessing- a place where they were not dominated by Rome, but a kingdom unto themselves- THE KINGDOM on earth, with God, as the Messiah, as their king.
 - TODAY, we express this hope as the second coming of Christ, but for the people of Israel, lens of OT, their hope was that this would all happen with the FIRST COMING of the messiah
- NOW, Jesus didn't say this wouldn't happen. He essentially said, “NOT YET” ...
- 7 “He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

- *Right now, it's not your concern- this is up to the father. In the MEANTIME, (Which is also OUR TIME), you have a MISSION- a calling to pursue!*
- *This leads us to verse 8- probably most famous verse in all of Acts, and where we get our title to this entire study...*
- *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.”*
 - *Third reference to HOLY SPIRIT. THIS IS KEY! Jesus says that the task about to be given would be IMPOSSIBLE on their own! It was not a task they would go and do FOR GOD, but a mission they would LIVE OUT BY GOD, and WITH GOD, by the POWER OF GOD, continually present to them by the HOLY SPIRIT.*
- *CHURCH! This is true of us TODAY. Christian culture likes to talk about “living for God”, and doing things “for God”. BUT HEAR! The hope of this world is not what WE CAN DO, but what GOD CAN DO. God's kingdom is not dependent on what WE can do FOR HIM.*
- *Rather, God's kingdom plan- that we see throughout this book of Acts- is that God will accomplish his purposes- that he will bring about His Kingdom- THROUGH US, as we are HIS WITNESSES.*
- *“and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*
 - *For the apostles, and for us- God's CALLING is that the reality of Christ- His hope, his nature, goodness- the truth and hope of the Gospel- will be SEEN, authenticated, expressed, and HEARD, THROUGH US. The church, HIS BODY, NOW.*
- *9-10... After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “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.”*
- *AMAZING... Two things!*
- *First, promise that Jesus will return. This is often what we focus on the most. BUT BIGGER POINT HERE- that we can easily minimize- is that God has given us a calling for our lives TODAY.*
- *The ascension of Jesus, and this entire opening sequence of Acts, stands before the church as a COMMAND.*
 - *Don't spend your time looking UP, just waiting for Christ's return! That is not to be our focus! Rather, GO AND SHARE- live out- TELL- What this new life in Jesus is all about.*
 - *INSTEAD of worrying, fixating, on when Christ will return, go out into the world with the GOOD NEWS that GOD'S HOPE- that Salvation- has ALREADY COME.*

That's our first step. Many more to come! PRAY.