



Central Peninsula Church

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Acts 1:1-11

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The First Forty Days

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

In the Easter season of 400 A.D. a pastor from Constantinople, named John Chrysostom, who was so eloquent that he was nicknamed “Golden-mouthed,” began a series of sermons with these words: “To many persons this book is so little known, both it and its author, that they are not even aware that there is such a book in existence. For this reason especially I have taken this narrative as my subject that I may draw to it such as do not know it, and let not such a treasure as this remain out of sight.”

I don’t think I could begin a series of messages on the book of Acts with a better recommendation than that. To my knowledge, in the almost 40 years CPC has been in existence no one has ever taught through the book of Acts. I, too, think we should not let such a treasure as this remain out of our sight any longer. So, here we go...

Chrysostom mentioned its little known author, and that would be Luke. He’s not so little known to US because for two years we’ve studied his gospel. But what we may not realize is that Luke wrote not one but two volumes. Remember that he began his gospel with these words: “**Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us...it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught** (Lk. 1:1-4).

Now compare that with the opening words of Acts: “**The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day he was taken up to heaven...**” (Acts 1:1,2a). You can see that in this book we have the same writer, Luke. He’s the one who Paul calls “the beloved physician” who probably came to Christ during Paul’s 2nd missionary journey. We also have the same reader, Theophilus. He was likely a high standing Roman official. We don’t know if he was a Christian but he certainly had an interest in the faith and Luke wanted him to have the facts right. And, finally, we have the same subject, Jesus. That’s right, the subject of Acts is Jesus.

I. The book of Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and teach.

I wonder if that surprises you. I’ve always heard that the Gospel of Luke is all about Jesus and the book of

Acts is about the first 30 years of the early church. That’s why this book is called *The Acts of the Apostles*—it’s all about the stuff the apostles did. But when we read the book we soon discover that, while it says a lot about the Acts of Peter and Paul, it says nothing about guys like Thomas and Andrew and Matthew. They’re gone after the first chapter. Are they chopped liver?

But that title is a classic misnomer. To know what this book is about, and to know why it is such a treasure for us today, we have to highlight one magnificent word in Luke’s introduction. “**The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.**” Underline, highlight, circle the word “began.” If he had just said, “**all that Jesus did and taught,**” the meaning would be entirely different. But in using this word “began” the clear implication is that the book of Acts is about what Jesus *continued* to do and teach. This book really should be called, “*The Acts of Jesus: Part Two.*” Part One was about his virgin birth, his sinless life, his death on the cross for sinners, his victory over the grave three days later and finally how he was taken up to heaven. We tend to think that was the end of the story. But, no, that was only the beginning. He continued to do and to teach right on through Acts, only now he did it through the apostles.

But that’s not even the half of it. Someone has said that the book of Acts really should end not with a period but with a comma, because the story continues right on to today. Someone could write a book today, “*The Continuing Words and Deeds of Jesus through his people.*” I want you to know that that is the secret to all that’s exciting about the Christian life. I want you to know that this is what makes the Christian life such a thrilling adventure. Whether it’s you as an individual or us as a church this is what makes the difference between a boring, stuffy, lifeless religion and a joy-filled, life-giving, world-impacting relationship with the living God. Jesus continues to do and to teach through us.

I’m not talking about the kind of things we do on a day like Martin Luther King Day, as important as that is. On days like that people gather together to remember and honor a dead leader; to recommit themselves to his teaching and his ideals. It’s NOT like that with us. We don’t come today and worship a memory of a beloved but dead leader. We come into the presence of a real, living Lord. We don’t come today in order to recommit ourselves to his teaching and his ideals. We come to hear this

living Lord speak to us. And we don't go out into the world trying to convince people to follow him. We go out confident that he will convince people through us to follow him. That's why in Romans 15:18 Paul could say, **"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done"** (Rom.15:18 NIV). See what I mean? Who is speaking and who is doing? It's Christ through Paul.

The question is, what would the apostles and what will we need to understand for that to take place? What must we know and what must happen for us to become the instruments of the living Lord Jesus? The first 11 verses of Acts answer that question. These are the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension. Jesus spent these days with his disciples, laying a foundation for his continued ministry through us. Let's read the passage from the top.

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but 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.' So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go

into heaven" (Acts. 1:1–11).

II. During his last 40 days, Jesus laid a foundation for his continued ministry in the world.

A. He taught his 11 apostles: The first thing we see him doing here is teaching his apostles. Luke says in v.2 that **"by the Holy Spirit he gave orders to the apostles whom he had chosen."** There is this sense of authority in those words. He didn't just share a few tidbits with them over fish and chips; he gave them orders by the Holy Spirit. And then later Luke tells us that during this time he was **"speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."** Remember the kingdom of God was the main subject of his teaching throughout his life, but now he explained to them how the cross fit into that, and how entering the kingdom meant repenting of sin and trusting in Christ as sin-bearer. So this was a period of time when he solidified all that teaching and we have the results of that in the rest of the New Testament.

And we're still reliant on this teaching today. Today it's still this body of truth that has been handed down from the apostles that we believe in and live by. This teaching is the foundation of our lives and of our church and everything we do is built on that. We don't add to it and we don't subtract from it. For us to be instruments of the living Jesus we have to be people who embrace this Holy Spirit inspired truth. We live in a world that says, "there are many foundations for truth, pick one that works for you. No one has the right to say that something is true or false, or even good or bad." We reject that. It's interesting that the word that has always been used for the collection of books in the Bible is *canon*. The word *canon* means *rule*, in the sense of a ruler; the kind that measures things. The idea is that we should measure every idea by this collection of books. On that basis we can say that something is true or false, good or bad. Mind you, we shouldn't do this arrogantly. We have to remember that although we have the infallible truth in this book, we're not always infallible in our grasp of it. So we hold this truth with humility and grace.

B. He proved he was alive: The second thing we see Jesus doing during these 40 days is proving to these same apostles that he was really alive. Luke says **"to these he also presented himself alive, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days."** This was one of the qualifications for being an apostle—you had to be an eyewitness of his resurrection (1:22). And it's clear by what Luke says that they had to be convinced of it against their better judgment. The apostles didn't come to this conviction easily. They had seen his body taken off the cross and then placed in the tomb like a wet piece of spaghetti. Three days later he appeared to them and at first they didn't believe. But over time they touched him; they saw him eat; they heard him speak. This wasn't a ghost. These weren't hallucinations. He convinced

them he was alive.

Don't miss the fact that Christianity is a history-based faith. What I mean by that is that you can't separate the teaching, the morals and the ethics of Jesus from what he did in history. There is no other religion like this. All other religions are based on the teaching of the leader. Islam is dependent on the teaching of Mohammed, but he didn't accomplish anything in history without which Islam would die. It's the same with Buddhism and Hinduism. But if you separate the teaching of Jesus from the historical facts of the cross and resurrection, you take the guts out of the Christian faith and we're left with nice morals but no salvation.

If we don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead in history and is alive today, just as the apostles said, we won't be instruments of the living Jesus. I ask myself, do I really believe this? I say I believe it. But do I live in his constant company? Do I look for Jesus-sightings throughout the day? Far too often for me this is 90% creed and 10% real life.

C. He promised the Holy Spirit: The third thing Jesus did during these 40 days was promise the Holy Spirit. Luke says he gathered them together, perhaps at a meal, and told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised and what they had also heard about from him. And then he reminds them of something John the Baptist said, **"I baptize you with water but One is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"** (Luke 3:16).

Let's be sure that we all understand who this Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit is God. Our God is a Triune God. He's always existed as one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was there at creation. We see him at work in the Old Testament, coming upon prophets and Kings. We even saw that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism. Jesus did what he did in the power of the Spirit. Now Jesus says he will come on you and it will be a kind of baptism. The word baptism means to be immersed, drenched, submerged in water. So Jesus says to wait for the drenching with the Holy Spirit.

This actually took place a few days later at what we call Pentecost, which we'll look at when we come to Acts 2. There in Jerusalem the Spirit fell on the first believers in a very dramatic way. But it didn't stop there. Throughout the book of Acts we see how the Spirit comes on those who put their faith in Christ. Today a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit when they trust in Jesus. In 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul says, **"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."**

It's no mistake that in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus (16:7). This is the way Jesus is at work today in us and through us—through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God in work clothes. It's through the Spirit that Jesus continues to do and teach in the world. It's through the Spirit that you and I have real,

living relationship with Jesus.

Let me use an illustration to describe the difference between having and not having the Holy Spirit. It's like a child walking along side his father. The child knows that his father is there but there's no urge to talk about this or sing about it. Then suddenly the father startles the child by reaching down and sweeping him up into his arms and hugging him tightly and kissing him on the neck and whispering, "I love you so much!" And then holding the stunned child back so that he can look into his face and saying with all his heart, "I'm so glad you're mine." Then hugging him once more with warmth and affection. Then he puts the child down and they continue their walk, hand in hand.

This is what happens when a person is baptized with the Holy Spirit. In Romans 5 Paul describes it in those terms. He says **"hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us"** (Rom. 5:5). A person who might think they know God is swept up into an unspeakable new level of joy, love and assurance that leaves him so certain of the reality of God's love that he's overflowing in praise. The fuses of love are so overloaded they almost blow out. You know that God is real and that Jesus lives and that you're loved, and that to be saved is the greatest thing in the world. As you walk on down the street you can scarcely contain yourself, and you want to cry out, "My father loves me! What a great father I have!"

This is basically what happened at Pentecost. And this is what happens when a person becomes a believer and is baptized in the Spirit. We become overwhelmed with the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ. Our mind is full of a fresh, new vision of God and our mouth overflows with praise. It doesn't mean we never doubt or struggle again, but it is something we can never forget.

D. He gave them their marching orders: Now the Jews had always associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with the end of the age when God would usher in his kingdom. That's why in v. 6 they ask, **"Lord, is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"** There are some assumptions they make here about the kingdom. They assume that this would be a political kingdom. The word "Israel" tells us they assume this would be a kingdom only to do with Israel. And the words "at this time" shows they assume the kingdom would be immediately established.

Jesus responds by correcting their assumptions. He says, "It's not for you to know these times and dates." Jesus once said that even he didn't know all the times and dates! And then he goes on and says, **"BUT, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even**

to the remotest part of the earth.” This is the fourth thing Jesus did during these 40 days: he gave them their marching orders. They were to be his Spirit empowered witnesses starting in Jerusalem and then to the communities and nations beyond.

Notice that in giving them their marching orders, he corrects their assumptions about the kingdom. First, he tells them that his kingdom is not political, but rather spiritual. That's seen in the fact that he says the power they will need and have will not be political power but Holy Spirit power. The kingdom of God is God's rule set up in the lives of individual people by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the way, that's why politics and elections are not that big of a deal to me. I never get that elated when my people get elected or my bills get passed, and I never get that bummed out when my people get defeated or my bills don't get passed. I'm not saying those things don't matter, or that we shouldn't be involved, but we need to be very careful NEVER to equate earthly power with spiritual power. God is doing something totally different. His method is to change people's lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then to make them his witnesses. That's how his kingdom spreads; not by soldiers or even by votes, but through witnesses.

Notice also that this kingdom isn't just focused on Israel. These witnesses won't just go to Israel or Judea, but also Samaria and even the remotest parts of the earth. The gospel is like a rock thrown in a pond causing ripples to spread outward in ever increasing circles. And that, of course, is still going on today. That's a good way for us to think about our own calling. We should always start with our own community, our own neighborhoods, our own Jerusalem. What are we doing to establish a witness there? And then we should think of the places in the immediate vicinity beyond, especially where there are people we might not normally want to associate with, like Samaria was to these Jews. And then we think about the remotest parts of the earth.

Finally, he says that the kingdom in its fulness is not immediate but will come at some time in the future when Jesus returns. As Jesus is taken up to heaven, the apostles are staring into the sky wondering what would happen next. The angels say, "Hey, Men of Galilee" (Galilee wasn't exactly known to have the smartest people in the world. Maybe that's why they call them this here). "Why are you staring up at the sky? This same Jesus will come back the same way he left." It's like, "Guys, stop wasting your time looking up into the sky, and get going on this mission. He's coming back and he'll ask you how

you did. Are you faithful to the marching orders he gave you to be his witnesses?"

CONCLUSION

If we're going to really see Jesus continue to do his words and deeds through us, we'll have to take his marching orders seriously. Do you see yourself as a Spirit empowered witness? What is a witness? A witness is someone who tells about what he's seen and heard. He gives a first hand account of what he's experienced. Notice we're HIS witnesses. We talk about him. Jesus says, "You will talk about me, because you've experienced me. You will talk about what I've done for you." So, it's not something that's forced. It's not something we even have to rehearse. It's just being honest and real about what makes us tick; what's really happened in our lives. And as we allow the Spirit each day to fill our lives, as we stay in fellowship with him, he gives us the power we need.

There are two mistakes we make which hinder us as witnesses. Either we're too connected to the world or we're too disconnected from the world. Those that are too connected to the world aren't effective in their witness because they've basically blended in to the point that they're no different at all. Jesus said, "**You're the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again**" (Mt. 5:13)? This is a warning against blending in. Being his witness will cause us to stand out and sometimes even be at odds with those around us. On the other hand, there are those who are too disconnected from the world. We're so caught up in church and our Christian friends that we've lost touch with anyone in the world. How can you be a witness when you don't have any non-Christian friends? How can you be salt when you're at church five nights a week? If that's the case with you, you need to disconnect from church and find some ways to connect with the world. Coach Little League. Join Kiwanis. Make friends at the health club.

In the year he was elected president, Jimmy Carter was one of three men invited to speak to the 17,000 delegates at the Southern Baptist Convention. Each had a five-minute time limit. The first of the three presenters was Billy Graham. The speaker following him was a truck driver. The man wasn't well educated, and seated beside the next U.S. president, the truck driver shared that he had never given a speech in his life. He said to Jimmy, "I don't think I can live through it. I just can't do it." After Billy Graham gave his powerful talk, the truck driver rose to speak and stood silently before the audience. Taking a glass of water handed to him, he mumbled into the microphone. "I was always drunk, and didn't have any friends. The only people I knew were men like me who hung around the bars in the town where I lived."

The truck driver went on to describe how someone told him about Christ. Once becoming a Christian, he wanted to tell others about the Lord. Since he felt comfortable in barrooms, he decided to talk to people there. The bartender wasn't sympathetic, and told him he was bad for business and a nuisance. But the truck driver kept on with his mission, and in time the people at the bar began asking questions. He said, "At first they treated me like a joke, but I kept up with the questions and when I couldn't answer one, I went and got the answer and came back with it. Fourteen of my friends became Christians."

Carter writes, "The truck driver's speech was the highlight of the convention. I don't believe anyone who was there will ever forget that five-minute fumbling statement—or remember what I or even Billy Graham had to say."

It is through ordinary witnesses like him, and like you and me, that Jesus continues to do and teach, even today.

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