

Introduction to the Book of Acts

Acts 1:1-11

Pastor Chris Sicks

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Today is our first sermon about one of the most-exciting books of the Bible.

The book is called the Acts of the Apostles.

Some people also call it "The Acts of Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, through the Apostles."

I like that, and I think you will understand why as we study this book together in the months ahead.

Before I read our text, some background will be helpful.

A Gentile man named Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

Luke was not Jewish, and he was not one of the 12 apostles.

He was a medical doctor, an educated man who wrote in the Greek language.

Luke was a careful historian who did a lot of detailed research to write his two books.

At the time that Doctor Luke was alive, books were written on scrolls made of papyrus.

The standard length of a scroll was about 35 feet.

If it was longer, the scroll was too difficult to carry and store.

That's why we have Luke and Acts in two separate books, even though they tell one story.

Listen to how Luke begins his first book, in the Gospel of Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4:

1 "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,

2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

3 With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning,

4 I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Luke says that he received the truth about Jesus from eyewitnesses.

Luke talked to people who knew Jesus in his birth, life, death, and resurrection.

He talked to the disciples of Jesus, and wrote down what they told him.

He probably talked to Mary the mother of Jesus.

Because Luke's Gospel provides many details about the birth of Jesus that we don't find in the other three Gospel accounts.

The two books written by Luke are an incredible gift from God to you and me.

If you read them together, you learn about the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ and his cousin--John the Baptist.

Then Luke tells us about the circumcision and baptism of Jesus, his teaching, and his many miracles.

Luke's Gospel also describes the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

And in his second book, Luke tells us about how the work of Jesus continued through his apostles.

In Jerusalem, hundreds and then thousands of people received the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.

Quickly, the church expanded outside of Jerusalem to Samaria and to Africa.

Next, God converted an enemy of the church and used him to expand the church into Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Europe.

That's just a quick summary of the things that Luke wrote in his two books.

I encourage you to read them for yourself.

And I hope you'll be with us in the months ahead, as we study Luke's second book together.

Let's begin now, with Acts 1:1–11.

1 "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

4 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."

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him:

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

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."

9 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."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth.

Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy and love.

Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God, amen.

Let's look in closer detail at the things we just heard from Luke.

In verse 1 he wrote:

1 "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach"

Luke says that his first book was "about all that Jesus BEGAN to do and to teach."

Luke's second book about all that Jesus CONTINUED to do after he returned to heaven.

How could Jesus continue to do anything, and teach anything, if he wasn't on earth anymore?

He does it through his Body.

We call the church the Body of Christ because it really is.

Jesus continued his ministry through the disciples he trained and sent out into the world.

And any true ministry we do today must be done for Jesus, and by Jesus working through us.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and through the Holy Spirit the life of Jesus flows through us.

Look again at what Jesus said in verse 8:

**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."**

This is the most-important verse in the entire Book of Acts, my friends.

Jesus tells the apostles that they will "receive power."

The implication here is that they need power they don't have.

The apostles required God's power so they can preach and teach and navigate the challenges of creating a new spiritual community called the church.

When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in verse 8, He was keeping the promise he made on the night before he died.

Jesus said in John 14:16–18:

16 "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

When Jesus said that, he knew he would ascend into heaven very soon.

But nevertheless, He said: "I will come to you."

Jesus left physically, but promised to be with the apostles, and with us, spiritually through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the source of power and wisdom and truth.

Before the apostles could begin their global mission Jesus had to give them the Holy Spirit.

Did you hear that in verse 8?

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."

Jesus gave a mission to the apostles, to be witnesses.

Their mission was to tell everyone they met about the Messiah.

He did not tell them to build a church building, or to start a non-profit organization.

Jesus said: "Go!

Go out from Judea into Samaria, and then out to the rest of the world.

And when you go, love people.

Serve them and tell them the good news of the gospel."

The reason I said that verse 8 is the most-important verse in this book is that it describes everything that happens in the next 27 chapters.

Verse 8 also describes HOW those things happen: by the power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

As we study this book in the months ahead, we will see how the church expanded exactly as Jesus said it would.

But before the apostles could go, they needed the Holy Spirit to come.

That's why we read this in verses 4-5:

4 "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.””

Can I just point out quickly that Jesus shared these important commands during a meal?

If you ever wonder why we have dinner every week at One Voice Fellowship, it is because important conversations happen during meals.

Relationships are formed and grow deeper when we eat together.

It's something you see throughout the Bible if you look for it.

During this meal in verses 4-5, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came to them.

We will look closely in two weeks at that event in Acts chapter 2.

For now, let's see how the apostles responded to the command from Jesus, in verses 6-7:

6 "Then they gathered around him and asked him:

“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

Israel had been waiting for Messiah for many years, to come and rescue them from Roman occupation.

The apostles knew Jesus was the Messiah.

But they did not know that his purpose was global, not local.

The work of God often flows in the opposite direction to human ideas.

The disciples were interested in earthly power, but the Holy Spirit poured out spiritual power.

Jesus told them to "GO" but first they had to "WAIT for the gift my Father promised."

I am frequently tempted to trust in my own ideas.

I'm too confident about my own ability to get things done.

I want to go, I don't want to wait.

This passage helps me because it reminds me that whatever we do in the Kingdom of God is not our work.

It is the work of Jesus Christ, building and expanding His kingdom.

Therefore before we go anywhere, before we do anything, we must pray.

If we want to participate in the ongoing work of Jesus, we must seek the will of the Father.

We must pray for the power of the Holy Spirit.

And we must live by the gospel of salvation that Jesus died to accomplish.

Let's look at the last three verses of today's passage, and then I'll finish.

Verses 9-11 say:

9 "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.””

This ascension of Jesus is important because it is like the hinge between the two parts of the ministry of Jesus.

Luke's first book begins with Jesus coming down from heaven, born as a helpless human baby.

Luke's second book begins with Jesus returning to heaven, as the resurrected Messiah.

Luke's first book is about the recruitment and development of the disciples of Jesus.

Luke's second book is about Jesus sending apostles out into the world.

"Disciple" means "follower."

"Apostle" means "someone who is sent, a messenger."

Today, we also have the joy and responsibility of being God's messengers.

2,000 years have passed, but the message we share is the same one the apostles shared.

The message is simple, but it changes lives forever.

Here is the message: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

He came to earth to live a sinless life, and died to pay for our sins.

He was resurrected from the dead and ascended to Heaven.

Anyone who believes these things will receive the Holy Spirit and the gift of eternal life.

That's the message.

It is simple, and it is good news.

Christianity is not a philosophy to learn or an organization to join.

It is a person to receive, someone you can know and trust and follow.

I am excited to study the book of Acts together, my friends.

We will see how Jesus continued to do his ministry through the apostles and the church-planting ministry of Paul.

And we will be encouraged about how Jesus continues to do his ministry today.

Ministry is not our work, my friends, remember that.

True ministry cannot not done by our power.

That's why we need to pray at One Voice Fellowship.

We are doing something very difficult.

But because God has called us build this church of many nations, for his glory, we know he will give us power and direction.

For those things we pray to our Savior in heaven:

Jesus, you are the head of the church.

We depend on you for direction, for power, and for love to unite us as brothers and sisters.

Thank you for giving us those gifts, through the Holy Spirit.

Help us wait for you to lead, and to pray without ceasing.

So that we may do all things for your glory alone.

We pray in Christ's name, amen.