



“Introduction to Acts”

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42:48

All right, I feel like we could go home, but otherwise that leaves us in a really weird spot for starting the Book of Acts next week. So I'm going to invite you to grab your Bible and just open up to the Book of Acts.

43:00

So this morning we're going to spend the remainder of our time just kind of laying the foundation for our study in the Book of Acts. Now if you've been with us for kind of an extended period of time, if you were with us a few years ago, you may remember that we studied the gospel of Luke 3, 4, or 5 years ago, something like that. And the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, they're kind of a two-part series, same author really, same story that just stretches from Luke and kind of, to be continued, jumps into the Book of Acts. So Luke, Acts, it's this part one and part two of the same story.

43:34

Luke looks at the ministry of Jesus and then the Book of Acts looks at how that ministry of Jesus, that life and model and ministry of Jesus went out and spread the gospel into all the world, took the good news of salvation into the known world. And so we're going to be picking up a series that we started and awkwardly stopped like five years ago when we looked at the story of Jesus. Now we're picking that up and we're going to continue the story in the Book of Acts. So if you weren't here with us a few years ago as went through Luke, you might want to go back and watch all of those sermons. We've got them on our website before we hit Acts chapter 1, verse 1 next week. So there's about a hundred sermons in that series.

44:15

So if you need to Leave now so that you can get to work and get all those done by next Sunday. Feel free. No. Okay. Everybody was there, so we're good. I will warn you if you go back and watch those. We started that sermon series in the middle of COVID. So trigger warning for anybody that's going to watch that and see me preaching from my bedroom for the first six or eight, and then standing in the parking lot for a while. It's a fun journey and reminder. I went back and just watched a couple of them and it's a fun reminder of all the...well, all of the stuff that we had to deal with a few years ago.

44:47

So anyways, this two-part series in Luke and Acts, the focus of what Luke was trying to accomplish here, he was trying to tell the story of how everything changed when Jesus came into the world, how everything was turned upside down when God stepped into humanity,

when God stepped into history. And when Jesus showed up on the scene as a man wearing flesh and walking among us, it changed everything. Because all the way from the very beginning of the story, from the beginning of the book, at the very beginning of the Bible, we have seen God at work redeeming a people for himself. Ever since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve step out of bounds, they sin, they commit this egregious offense against a holy God and they say our plan is better than your plan from that point forward.

45:35

The message of the Bible is about God redeeming a people for himself, about God stepping in and God rescuing and reconnecting people with himself and who he is. We see that story through the Old Testament with people like Abraham and people like Moses. And we just looked at 1 and 2 Samuel over the last year or two. We saw the covenant that God made with David as he promised that he was going to establish an eternal kingdom that was going to come through David's line. We've seen the prophets, all of these things in the Old Testament. They tell the story of how the nation of Israel was God's chosen people, that God was redeeming for himself in the Old Testament. They were the recipients of his undeserved favor.

46:21

But in Luke and then in the Book of Acts, we see that the circle from the Old Testament that God was redeeming a people for himself, we see that circle get bigger. We see that God's work begins to expand, that there's extension that starts in Israel, but it goes to the ends of the earth. The people of God grows to include the New Testament church, people like us. Good news I think for most of us in the room, there's not a lot of Jews, national Jews, sitting here in the room today. And so for the Gentiles, those of us that aren't part of the national family of Israel, this is good news for us because the people of God started to grow, it started to expand.

47:00

And so we have this sort of a thesis statement right at the beginning of the Book of Acts. We pick up the story and in Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, we see this statement that kind of lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. Acts 1:8. Jesus is looking at his disciples right before he returns to heaven. And he says in verse 8, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. These, these different places, these towns don't mean a whole lot perhaps to you, but these are concentric circles as the message is starting in Jerusalem, starting there, where Jesus was crucified in the city of Jerusalem.

47:42

And it starts to work its way out into the surrounding towns and the surrounding region and ultimately continuing out into other countries and to the ends of the earth. I'm so thankful that the ends of the earth were included in that, as we are thousands and thousands of miles from Jerusalem. We'll be there in February, so make sure you get signed up. If you want to save a little bit of money, do it today. But I'm thankful that this message has gone forth and has gone out into the ends of the earth. In the Book of Acts, we get to witness the spread of the Gospel and the formation of the church. We've been talking about the significance of God's church over the last month as we did that Healthy Church series that we worked our way through.

48:23

But Jesus is of part plan in establishing his kingdom. He set out to teach people about the kingdom. As Jesus was walking around on the earth, he set out to train and to equip disciples to go and to make more disciples like Tom was just talking about with Sonlife. They want to use Jesus' strategy to multiply himself into more people who could go and do the same over and over again. And then ultimately, Jesus empowers the disciples to go and to

spread the word to the ends of the earth. And in Acts, we see, what we see in this book as a whole is we see a few motivated messengers turn into a movement. Jesus, he taught the crowds. And we see in the book of Luke and the other Gospels, we see Jesus address The crowds, right. But those are isolated instances.

49:15

We see Jesus address the 5000 where he addresses this multitude and he multiplies the food and he feeds them with just a young boy's lunch. We see these big crowd moments, but that's not the focus of Jesus ministry. Jesus isn't just marching around setting up harvest crusades and festivals and those big events where he gets a bunch of people in. Jesus wasn't trying to add to the kingdom by addition. Jesus plan to reach the earth with the good news of the gospel was through multiple that he would invest himself into the 12, that he would invest himself into these few followers that he had and then equip them and prepare them to go and to take the message out into the world.

49:58

I threw this is a basic picture of what Jesus' strategy for taking the good news of the gospel out into the world was. And luckily, we're somewhere down here as the pyramid continues to get bigger. But right. Jesus' plan was essentially a pyramid scheme, Right? Pyramid schemes for Jesus is the message of the Book of Acts. Now I use that term jokingly, right? There's some negative connotation that comes along with pyramid schemes. Obviously, there's some key differences between a pyramid scheme that is so focused on all the people at the bottom of the pyramid serving the needs of the one at the top and the model and ministry of Jesus.

50:35

Because in the model and ministry of Jesus, the person at the top gave of themselves, sacrificed to themselves, laid it all on the line to serve those that were down through the pyramid and down at the bottom. In Jesus' kingdom, the message is to invest himself in a few who could go and do likewise. And we see that in Paul's ministry. We see that in the ministry of the church. We see that throughout history that the message of the gospel has gone through forth because this movement of multiplication works where Christianity was rapidly expanding in the Book of Acts. And it was because people didn't just sit with the news. A man named Alan invested himself in a man named Tom. A kid named Tom, 30, 40, 50, however many I'm not going to keep going.

51:24

A few years ago, Tom invested himself and a kid named Drew. 20 or 30 years ago, whatever it was invested in me. And now the story continues. We see that in Paul's investment into Timothy who would invest into qualified men who would go and do likewise. We see this message in Paul's message to Timothy. We see this message in Jesus model that he sent the church out in the Book of Acts. And so our focus in The Book of Acts is going to be to. To watch and to trace that model as it goes forth and as it takes the message out into the world. Just a couple of details that I want to make sure we kind of set the scene appropriately for us. This should be familiar because we just came out of 1 and 2 Samuel.

52:09

But I do want to remind you as we jump into Acts that it is a historical narrative. And so we've got stories of real people, real events that really happened. And so as we read and study these things, it's important for us to remember that this is a description of what happened at a really special time in the church. This is not a canned instruction manual that is instructive for us, that's prescribing actions for us in everything. There's some things that exist in the Book of Acts that don't exist in our church today, and that's okay. We're going to talk about those as we work our way through Acts doesn't teach us that everything that

happened there should be happening here. But it does show us how God was at work and how God can work among us.

52:51

That God can multiply and use the church to do some really incredible things in the power of the Holy Spirit. So Acts as this historical account of a really exciting time in the church, as they saw the hand of God at work, as we see the Holy Spirit introduced into a more prominent role, right? The Holy Spirit has always been. He is free, fully God, and he has always been the person of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit kind of comes into a more prominent position in the Book of Acts. Jesus said, I have to leave so that the helper can come and live among them. And so we see the Holy Spirit go from a few glimpses in the Old Testament to front and center stage in the Book of Acts.

53:33

We see the triumph of the gospel in the face of persecution. It seems like at every turn people are trying to stamp out Christianity and smush these bugs that just keep coming out and causing problems for them in all these different areas and all these different places. And the more people tried to squash the gospel, the more it grew. An old church father made the statement that the blood of the martyrs is the seeds of the church. And so we see that in the Book of Acts. We see the Gospel growing and spreading and going to the ends of the earth. It's amazing to see the bravery of these churches and these people who were empowered by the Holy Spirit. That Jesus promise in Acts, chapter 1, verse 8 we see it come to life.

54:18

He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses. Not telling them to go out in their own power and to do these things because they were strong, but it was because the Holy Spirit had come upon them because they had been with Jesus. That was the thing that changed them. And we're going to see it. One of my favorite sections in the Book of Acts is in Acts, chapter four. And Peter and John, I believe it is, are standing there in front of some unbelievers and they're sharing and they're defending their faith. They're making their case. And these were uneducated men. They were normal fishermen. They were just blue-collar guys, right? But these educated government officials are looking at them temple religious establishment types.

55:07

They're looking at these men and they said, you know, this doesn't make any sense. The way that they're speaking to us, the influence that they're having over society and over culture. It doesn't make any sense because these are uneducated men. But the thing that was different about them, they said, these are uneducated men, but we can see that they're different because they've been with children, Jesus. That's the message of the Book of Acts, that Jesus changes things, that the Holy Spirit steps in and empowers ordinary people to do extraordinary things. And we see the message that Paul declares in the Book of Romans right at the beginning. He's not the one that wrote Acts, but we can see him a whole bunch in the Book of Acts, right?

55:46

So Paul's attitude In Romans chapter 1, verse 16, he says, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. We see message spreading from Jews in Jerusalem out into the ends of the earth. So my goal this morning was not to preach the whole book. As much as I'm excited and ready to just dive in and start. I just wanted to whet your appetite this week. I wanted to lay out some basic idea of where were heading in this book and what were going to be focusing on. And I wanted to give you an outline of what the book is going to look like.

56:22

But rather than me standing here and doing that, we've got our friends at the Bible Project that put together wonderful videos that we love and appreciate so much. So we're going to use their video to kind of give ourselves an outline of what Acts is going to be focused on. And then I'll come up and I'll close this out in just a minute. So if you would turn your attention to the screens.

*****Bible Project Video – Acts*****

56:44

The Book of Acts. It's the second volume of a unified two-part work that today we call Luke Acts. These were written by the same author, Luke, who was a traveling coworker with Paul. This is clear from the book's introduction where Luke says, I produced my first volume. That's the gospel about all the things that Jesus began to do and to teach. Now Luke's giving a clue here as to what this book of Acts will be about. Volume one was about what Jesus began to do and to teach. Volume two will then be about what Jesus continued to do and teach. Which leads to a really interesting point about the book's traditional but not original name, the Acts of the Apostles.

57:23

While different apostles do appear in most of these stories, the only single character who unifies the whole story from beginning to end is Jesus himself, acting directly or through the Spirit. And so the book would more accurately be named the Acts of Jesus and the Spirit. The book's introduction recounts how the risen Jesus spends some 40 days with the disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God. This connects back to the story of Luke's Gospel where Jesus claimed that he was restoring God's kingdom over the world, beginning with Israel. So he called Israel to live under God's reign by following him. And he was enthroned as king when he gave up his life and then conquered death with his love. And so the Book of Acts begins with the risen king Jesus instructing his disciples about life in his kingdom.

58:13

So he promises that the Spirit will soon come and immerse them in his personal presence. And this fulfills one of the key hopes from the Old Testament prophets, that in the Messianic kingdom, God's presence, his Spirit would come and take up residence among his people in a new temple and transform their hearts. And so Jesus says, when this happens, the Spirit will empower his disciples to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. From here, Jesus is taken up from their sight in a cloud. It's an image drawn from the Book of Daniel, chapter 7. It shows how Jesus is now being enthroned as the Son of man who was vindicated after his suffering and now shares in God's rule over the world. And so he promises that he will return one day.

59:00

And so the main themes and the design of the Book of Acts flow right out of this opening chapter. This is a Story about Jesus leading his people by the Spirit to go out into the world and invite all nations to live under his reign. And so the story will begin with that message spreading in Jerusalem and then into the neighboring regions of Judea and Samaria full of non-Jewish people. And then from there out to all of the nations into the ends of the earth. This video is just going to focus on the first half of the book. So the Jerusalem focused section begins with Jesus followers waiting until the feast of Pentecost, when all of these Jewish pilgrims from all over the ancient world were in the city.

59:40

And the Holy Spirit comes on the disciples as a great wind and something like flames appear over each person's head. And together they start announcing and telling stories of God's mighty deeds. And they're speaking in all of these languages that they didn't know before, but all the people gathered there understand perfectly. Now, in order to see what Luke's

emphasizing in this story, it's crucial to see the Old Testament roots of all of these images. So first, the wind and the fire is a direct allusion to the stories that about God's glorious fiery presence filling the Tabernacle and the temple. And it's also connected to the prophetic promises that God would come and live by his Spirit in the new temple of the Messianic kingdom. And so here in Acts, God's fiery presence comes to dwell not in a building, but in his people.

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Luke is saying that the new temple promised by the prophets is Jesus new covenant family, the people of Jesus. Which connects to the second thing Luke is trying to say here. So the prophets promised that when God came to dwell in his new temple, he would reunify all the tribes of Israel under the Messianic king and that the good news of God's reign would go out and be announced to the nations. Luke describes in detail the international multi tribe makeup of all of the Israelites who were there at Pentecost and who responded to Peter's message. And so the apostles keep calling Israelites to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. And thousands upon thousands respond, forming new communities of generosity and worship and celebration. But not everybody's celebrating from here. Luke shows how Jesus new family quickly faced hostility from the Jerusalem leaders.

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With a really beautiful symmetrical design, Luke tells a tale of two temples. So God's new temple, the community of Jesus followers, they're gathering every day in the temple courts and from house to house. Now in between those notices are two stories about Peter and the other apostles healing people in the temple courts only to get arrested by the temple leaders, followed each time by a speech of Peter claiming that Jesus is the true king of Israel. And at the center of all this is a story about Jesus followers donating property and possessions to a common fund to help the poor. Which is really cool. But it seems kind of random for Luke to mention it here until you realize that this was a practice described in the laws of the Torah and was supposed to be happening through the Jerusalem Temple and its leaders.

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So Luke's point here is clear. The new temple of Jesus community is fulfilling the purpose that God always intended for the Jerusalem Temple to be a place where heaven and earth meet, where people encounter God's generosity and healing presence and this conflict between the two temples. It culminates in Acts chapter 6 and 7. It's the first wave of persecution. So Jesus followers, they continue to multiply, requiring more leaders. And one of these, Stephen, he's a bold witness for Jesus in Jerusalem and he ends up getting arrested and he's accused of speaking against and even threatening the temple. And so Stephen here gives a long speech showing how Israel's leaders have always rejected the messengers God sent them, including Jesus and now his disciples. So the Jerusalem leaders are enraged.

01:03:01

They murder Stephen, and they launch a wave of persecution against Jesus followers that drives most of them from this city. But it has a paradoxical effect. Luke shows how this tragedy actually became the means by which Jesus' people are now sent out into Judea Samaria. Now in this section Luke has collected a diverse group of stories that all show how the mostly Jewish Jerusalem based community of Jesus became a multiethnic international movement. So, first is the mission of Philip into Samaria. It's the land of Israel's hated enemies and many of them come to follow Jesus. Next, we have the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul. He was the sworn enemy and persecutor of Jesus followers until he personally met the risen Jesus. And he then became a passionate advocate on behalf of Jesus.

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Next is the story of Peter having a vision about how God doesn't consider non-Jewish people ritually impure or unworthy of joining Jesus family. And so Peter, he's led by the Spirit into the house of a Roman soldier full of non-Jewish people. And they all respond to the good news about Jesus. In fact, the Spirit shows up powerfully upon them just as he did to the Jewish disciples back in chapter two. These themes all come together in the founding of the church in Antioch, the largest, most cosmopolitan city in that part of the Roman Empire. And Luke, he tells us that Barnabas, a Jewish leader from the Jerusalem church, went along with Paul to help lead this church community. And so, it became the first large, multi-ethnic church in history. It was where Jesus followers were called Christians for the first time.

01:04:41

And it's from here that the first international missionaries were sent out. And so, we see Jesus commission coming true. And this takes us into the rest of Luke's story. But for now, that's the first half of the Book of Acts.

*****End of Video*****

01:04:56

All right, there you go. So that's the first half. If you want to watch the second half, we'll use it in that six month or so. When we get to the second half of the Book of Acts, we'll share it in service. But if you're curious and want to go watch it, you can go on Gospel Project. Just Google it and you'll find it pretty quickly. But we are excited to dive into this book. I'm excited to begin sharing next week. Chapter 1, verse 1. But we're going to see how God's plan for saving the nation starts to go into effect. And the church becomes people for his own possession. And the cause of Christ pushes forward. Now, in a world where so many people desperately want a cause to latch onto, they want something to invest in, to give their life to.

01:05:38

And there's so many different places that we see people do that, right? There's sports teams that people want to invest their time and their energy and their money and their affections into this sports team. But sports teams, they win and they lose, right? Social causes, maybe we can invest ourselves in that. But social causes come and go as well, don't they? We see these different moments. What about political movements, political leaders? But politicians retire and those exciting moments just turn into history as months and years passed. But the cause of Christ marches on. The cause of Christ continues forward. The kingdom of God will not be shaken. And Acts is the story of the church pressing forward in victory.

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And so that story that we're going to start in the Book of Acts, as Jesus leaves, returns to heaven, we see the Holy Spirit come. And that story continues through the Book of Acts, gets to the end of the Book of Acts and we have this weird, it kind of just doesn't stop. It's this weird, like, to be continued ending on the book. And there's a reason for that. It's because we are here today as part of the to be continued that continues on day after day, year after year, generation after generation, as the message of the Gospel goes to the ends of the earth. So I hope that this morning, as you're on your way out, you'll grab your scripture journal, right? We like having those little scripture journals that we've got available for you in the bookstore.

01:07:08

We got the Bible text one side. You've got spot space for your notes on the other. I love those because you're able to kind of keep all your notes in one spot and you can go back and reference sermon series and what was it that we were talking about? All those types of things. Better option than loose leaf paper. Make sure you go grab your scripture journal. They're available in our bookstore back here, if you pop in there. And then we've also got printouts, big printouts, because there's a lot of little details on them, but big printouts of the

read Scripture tablet that he was doodling on in our video, kind of creating this outline of the book.

01:07:41

So those are available for you printed and sitting at the hub back there, where you'll also have Tom's prayer cards and a whole bunch of other stuff if you've got questions or different things. So, I'm excited about jumping into this study. I'm excited to see the Holy Spirit's work in establishing the New Testament Church. But as we wrap up our time together this morning, we want to pause and partake of communion together. This is a special time for those of us who belong to Christ, who are Christians, who have placed our faith in him for salvation. We practice an open communion here at the Rock. So, if you're here with us for the first time, but you are a Christian, we want to invite you to come and to partake with us if you are not a Christian.

01:08:23

We are so thankful that you're here, but we would love an opportunity to explain to you why this is significant and share about what this is that we're doing before you just come dive in and start partaking of this. So, if you don't have a relationship with Jesus, let's start there before we jump into communion. But I want to read for us before we come and take the elements. I want to read From Jeremiah, chapter 31, Old Testament passage where the prophet is pointing forward to the work of Jesus, pointing forward to the kingdom of God that we're going to see coming come in the book of Acts and continuing throughout history. But Jeremiah 31 is where God promises to initiate this new covenant with his people.

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It's a beautiful reminder for us of the way that the world and the old covenant and even our own efforts are broken before God. But God made a new covenant. God steps in, and God sent Jesus to pay our sin debt so that we sinners, like me and you could be forgiven, and that our standing before God no longer depends on what we do, but rather depends on what Jesus did. All we have to do is receive his gift of salvation that we're celebrating here in taking communion together. So let me read for us from Jeremiah 31, and then we will pray and take these elements in just a moment. Jeremiah 31, starting in verse 31, says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

01:09:52

Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant that they broke though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, 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. No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Jesus' sacrifice made a way for us to be forgiven.

01:10:33

Jesus' blood was spilt so that the new covenant could enter into effect. And without the sacrifice of Jesus, the book of Acts is irrelevant. The church doesn't exist. We're not here today if it wasn't for the sacrifice of Jesus. And so in just a moment, I'm going to pray. And then after I pray, we've got tables set up here at the front. We've got a table in the back, if you're closer back there. But I would invite you to come to the table and to take these elements and return to your seat and spend a moment with the Lord. Thank him for the sacrifice that made it possible for us to come into his presence. And then when you've prepared yourself, I invite you to partake of those elements there at your seat as we continue in worship.

01:11:13

But would you pray with me now, church? God, we thank you for your work in our lives, for your work in your church, and your work in establishing a method that would take the message of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. God, we thank you for the book of Acts that we're going to be able to step back and see how the plan and the mission of God cannot be thwarted, will not be stopped, will not be stomped out. But God, that the message continues forward. The good news doesn't change.

01:11:43

So God, this morning as we look forward to our study in Acts, as we look at what son life is doing and taking this same mission of making disciples and taking the message of the gospel out into the world, God, that message that we celebrate, that message that we live by, that message that changes everything is the message that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners by his death on the cross. We are so thankful that sinners like us could be forgiven. God, that you would look at someone like me who so clearly deserves your wrath, so clearly deserves punishment for all the things daily that I do where I step out of bounds. But God, you would look at us and because of Jesus, you could look at us and say, no forgiven.

01:12:33

Holy righteous God, we thank you for Jesus and for his sacrifice. We thank you for his broken body and his spilled blood that was given so that the guilty could be declared innocent. So God, this morning, as we take of these elements, we pray that you would fill us with your spirit. God, we pray that you would remind us of what an incredible blessing it is that we can be adopted into the family of God, that we can be called sons and daughters, that we can be declared innocent. God, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you for his cross. It's in his beautiful name we pray. Amen.