

"The Acts of Jesus Christ"

Sermon 1

"The Risen Christ Prepares His Church for the Holy Spirit"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Text: Acts 1:1-8

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IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

What did the Church look like after Jesus ascended into heaven? Who were the leaders of the early Church? How did the Church develop and organize? Did the early Church have problems like the Church does today? Were there divisions in the early church like there are today? Were their nasty issues that the Church fought about like there are today?

What was the emphasis of the early church? Did they focus on the teachings we focus on today? What was their worship like? Is there any historically accurate document that can give us this information? The answer is YES. There is in fact one book in the New Testament that records the birth, growth, spread, and development of the Church. That book is call 'The Acts of the Apostles' or just simply 'Acts'.

We're going to be studying this book of Acts for the next number of months. Besides answering the questions I've just listed – my hope and prayer is that a number of things happen as we listen and learn. First, I pray we see that God leads, God guides, and God grows his church. Second, I pray that where we see that our lives and our church doesn't match up with the early church, we examine ourselves and ask if we need to repent and change. Finally, I pray that we as individuals and as a church are empowered by God's Holy Spirit to embrace the mission that is so clearly proclaimed in Acts.

A couple of things that might surprise you about Acts. It was written by the same fellow who wrote the Gospel of Luke – namely Luke. Listen to how Luke begins his Gospel Luke 1:1-4, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." Here Luke tells us that he has spoken to eyewitnesses and has decided to write down all he has learned for a fellow by the name of Theophilus in order to bless his faith. Now listen to how Acts begins... (1:1-2) "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." So Luke

wrote his Gospel first and then followed it up with Acts. Now before we get into the narrative itself just let me note to you that Luke is the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament. Luke was a medical doctor who most likely lived in Antioch and was converted to Christianity from paganism.

Now allow me to give you a timeline... Jesus undergoes his crucifixion, death, and burial, and then rises from the grave.

Luke ends his Gospel with this account of the resurrection... 24: 36-53 "While they (the disciples) were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God." So Jesus rises from the grave, returns to his disciples and tells them the following... First – I've risen in the flesh – touch me and see – give me something to eat. Second – I told you this would happen – it was all done to fulfill with the Old Testament Prophets had foretold. They clearly said that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead – and that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. Third – You are eyewitnesses of this fulfillment! - You have seen me touched me and heard me. Forth – I'm about to send you a gift from my Father – but wait in Jerusalem until you receive this gift of great power from God. Fifth – Jesus leads them out of the city – blesses them – and then is taken up into heaven. That's how Luke's Gospel ends... and we're left saying, "Wait a minute... what about that gift from God... what about the preaching of Jesus' name to all nations... what happened next???"

That's where Acts begins... "(1: 1-5) In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men 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. 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. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Brothers and sisters I think the first thing we want to note about this is that the risen Lord Jesus is still leading his church. After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God. So he's told them to wait for the powerful gift from the Father, and he begins teaching them about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts of people who follow Jesus. Jesus is teaching his disciples about this rule – this reign – this kingdom over the next 40 days after his resurrection.

Can you imagine that? Being taught personally by the risen Jesus. You watched him get arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, die, and be buried. You mourned for him 3 days. Now this same Jesus, in the flesh is alive and is teaching you about God's Kingdom and how God's Kingdom relates to his death and resurrection. And he appears to you over a period of 40 days.

During this period of 40 days Jesus is reminding them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the gift from his Father. He then tells them what the gift is... Acts 1:5, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." God's Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them from heaven and they would be empowered by God for a mission. All too often I hear people talking about the church as though it were some human invention. Brothers and sisters – look who is in charge. But still, people will say that after Jesus died the disciples changed his teachings or lost them or did their own thing and organized the church. Look for yourselves – THE RISEN LORD JESUS IS ORGANIZING THE CHURCH, JESUS HIMSELF IS TELLING HIS DISCIPLES WHAT TO DO.

But listen to what happened next... (acts 1:6-8) "So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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." The disciples still don't understand completely – they are still thinking about an earthly political state of Israel and then ousting of their Roman overlords. And they want to know when it's going to happen. We might expect Jesus to jump down their throats and say, "Haven't you heard a word I've been saying!!!" But instead he equips them – God will worry about the times and the dates – that's not your concern. You have a mission to complete and God will give you 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."

What a lesson we can get from this...all too often I hear people tell me that they don't think they are ready to share their faith. They feel they don't know enough, don't understand enough, and can't answer all the questions they feel they need to be able to answer. Well, Jesus' first disciples didn't understand everything either. And calmly and patiently Jesus simply focus' them on their mission. Let God worry

about the details – you are my witnesses and you’re going to be empowered by God to spread my Kingdom starting in Jerusalem and going out into the entire world.

Just tell people what God has done for you – how he sent his Son to pay for your sins on the cross and rise from the dead to defeat your enemies of sin, death and the devil. Jesus has a message for the everyday church member today. “I sent my first apostles out to the world – and 2000 years later the Gospel is all over the Globe, in every country on the earth.” “If I can accomplish this through them, think of what I can do if you share my Gospel with your family and friends.” Friends we need to repent of worries about what we know and don’t know – and we need to focus on God’s mission.