

Acts – the church on a mission

The adventure begins

We are commissioned

We start today a new series going through the book of Acts, the early history of the first Christians. As we come to study the history of the early church, we're not just looking at what God used to do, way back then, but what God still wants to do, now and tomorrow?

As we read the story of the early church, I want you to recognise that it's not just the 12 disciples that were gathered awaiting the instructions of the Holy Spirit, **we were all gathered**, and are all invited to be part of the most important mission in the history of the world.

God has gathered us together. He's chosen us to be born when we were born, to live where we live, and he has called us together to be on a great mission with him.

And the big story of the Bible is that God is on a mission, and peoples hearts have been hardened, their eyes closed, and their life destined toward eternal separation from God. And we have this great news, this good news, to tell: Jesus Christ conquers sin, Jesus Christ conquers death, Jesus Christ is alive and well. And we are commissioned—we are sent on mission into the world—to tell others about that Jesus is the way the truth and the life.

The adventure begins

And so the adventure begins right here in Acts 1. If you've ever wondered, "How Christianity started? How did churches come into existence? Why is Otumoetai Baptist Church even here?" We read it right here in the book of Acts. Today is Pentecost, the birth of the church, but Acts starts just a few days before Pentecost.

Here's how it begins:

In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways

that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

The writer talks about the first book. He's talking about the book of Luke. Luke is the writer and the book of Luke was the prequel; Acts is the sequel. In the book of Luke, it tells us that Jesus came to earth and gave his life. In Acts, it shows us how Jesus left the earth and gave us his power through the Holy Spirit. And so we have the same author writing to tell us firstly the history of Jesus and then the history of Jesus' people, the first Christians in the church.

The conclusion of Jesus on earth.

And so Luke tells us here that Jesus appeared for forty days after his death and resurrection and he says he offered many convincing proofs. This includes having breakfast with people, that's pretty convincing proof.

Imagine you are there 2000 year ago, your friend dies, you go to his grave site to pay your respects or to leave flowers, you realize that he's not there. Where is he? What happened? And then you hear he's in town having breakfast. You go to the café and say, "Were you the guy that got crucified?" "Yes, here are the scars." I'd say that is convincing proof? Very convincing proof. You don't even have to go to theological college to work that one out.

So, there are the kinds of convincing proofs that Jesus offered. He hung around for forty days. He had breakfast with people, People came up and gave him a hug to see that he was actually, physically, literally resurrected from death. Guys like Thomas came up to him and said, "I won't believe unless I see it for myself." He sees the crucifixion scars in Jesus' hands and side, falls down, proclaims, "This is my Lord; this is my God."

And then after forty days, he's going to tell us what will happen. Now, before we get into that, let me tell you a little bit about our author.

Reporting on Jesus' life

Dr. Luke is an amazing man. He was not an eye witness to the life, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus. He was more like an investigative reporter. He was more like a historian, an Indiana Jones type of bloke! He was a guy who would go out, and he would investigate, he would talk to those who knew Jesus, family members who were still alive. He would go to the places that Paul preached and that Peter preached and where churches were assembled, and he would do the work of an investigative reporter: he would talk to the eye

witnesses, he would gather the oral traditions, he would look at any evidence that was there, and he would collect all the stories of Jesus and put them in the book of Luke and the stories of His followers in the book of Acts.

Jesus' power

Let's carry on reading

Acts 1:4–5,

⁴Once when he (Jesus) was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then, down in Acts 1:8, he was very clear. He says,

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

Jesus' life and his power are not just to be admired; they're also to be experienced. Anyone can look at Jesus' life and power and admire it. The following Jesus is not about admiration it is a way of life, you have to live it out.

Anyone can look at Jesus' life and think, "What an amazing life."

- He said no to sin; he said yes to God.
- He never took advantage of anyone.
- He never stole anything.
- He never was inappropriate with any woman as a single man in his thirties.
- He was always generous.
- He always told the truth.
- He suffered nobly.

Many have looked at the life of Jesus and admired it, and that's good, but that's not enough. Jesus doesn't want you to just admire his life, he wants you to experience his life through the person, the presence, the power of the third member of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

So, after Jesus rises from death, everybody's excited. "What do we do now? We wait... because Jesus knows that Christian life cannot be lived apart from The Holy Spirit.

You will often hear people say if you want to learn about the Holy Spirit read Acts! And while that is not wrong, it is only the half of it, the second half of it. Luke tells us where should we start our study? “In his former book.” If you want to understand the person of the Holy Spirit, you don’t start in Acts; you start in Luke, which sets up Acts. They’re actually one book in two parts, and Luke starts Acts by saying, “Don’t forget my former book. These go together. Read that one first.”

Let’s keep moving. So Jesus tells us to wait and then in verse 8, “*You will receive power.*”

We need to be careful with this, because apart from Jesus, we can misunderstand this power. We can misuse this power.

So, we go back to Luke’s first book and we ask, not “How should we use this power of the Holy Spirit?” but “**How did Jesus use this power from the Holy Spirit?**”

Jesus lived a perfect life—no sin of any sort or kind. The question is, how did he do that? It’s easy to say “Well, of course he didn’t sin. He’s God.” It was easy for him, and it kind of looks like he’s cheating?

No; Jesus never cheated. This is very important.

Yes while on the earth, Jesus remained fully God and had full access to all of his divine attributes, but he did not tap into the continual use of those divine attributes. He didn’t cheat.

- When it says in Luke 2 that as a young man he grew in wisdom, stature, and favour with men and God, it means that he actually had to memorize Scripture like we have to memorize Scripture. He didn’t just get to go, “Oh, I know it because I wrote it!” He had to memorize it like we do.
- It means that as Jesus was preaching and teaching, he had to learn how to use his abilities like we would have to learn to use our abilities.
- It means when he was tempted, he did not lean on his divinity to cheat, he lived out of his humanity, and yes he was tempted, the Bible says, in every way as we are, yet without sin.

This isn’t necessarily easy to get our minds around but he’s one person, two natures, fully God, fully man—but he didn’t cheat.

As I read the Bible, the only time I see Jesus leaning into his divinity, into his deity, is never for his own benefit, but for the benefit of others.

- So, when someone needs their sin forgiven, he forgives them as God, but that's for their benefit.
- Any time that he is being tempted, any time that he is being tested, any time that he is being opposed, he doesn't lean into his divinity. He lives out of his humanity.
- Jesus gets hungry like we get hungry. Jesus gets tempted like we get tempted. Jesus gets exhausted like we get exhausted. Jesus has to learn like we have to learn. Jesus has to labour like we have to labour.

So how did he do it? If he didn't cheat and lean into his divinity, how did he do it? Just like us - by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus shows us what it's like to live a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-led life.

The key is, you cannot understand the power of the Holy Spirit apart from the life of Jesus. There's no example of what it means to live a Spirit-empowered life unless we look at the life of Jesus.

And that's what Luke is telling us. He says, Jesus lived by the power of the Holy Spirit and he tells his people, "Wait. Don't go do ministry yet. Wait. You need power. The Holy Spirit's coming to help you to be like me."

The book of Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit." You know what being full of the Holy Spirit looks like? Jesus. That's why we have "live like Jesus" as one of our church statements. Any time we hear someone say, "Well, there's the Spirit-filled person, be like them," wrong person. None of us sinners are perfectly, continually full of the Holy Spirit. We grieve, we quench, we resist the Holy Spirit at times. But Jesus was, "full of the Holy Spirit" — continually, perfectly.

And take note; to be Spirit-filled is not to avoid suffering, Jesus didn't avoid suffering, but to suffer well. That was how Jesus lived.

JESUS' MISSION

And we need to remember that being filled with the Spirit is all about mission. It's not just so that you can be a better person. This is not modified self-help. This is not so that you can have spectacular church services that entertain the masses. This is exclusively for the mission of Jesus.

And we read of this in Acts 1:6–8.

⁶So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

⁷He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

There is our mission - The Holy Spirit comes so that we would be witnesses on Jesus’ mission—“in Jerusalem”—where they were—“Judea”—the region—“Samaria”—extended area—“and to the ends of the earth”.

The story continues.

⁹After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

The disciples are standing there looking up maybe similar to when your kid lets go their much love helium balloon “What do we do now?” when two angels show up, “Men of Galilee, Don’t panic! He’ll be back, but it’s going to be a while.”

4 things about Jesus’ mission

1. It’s under his sovereign rule

I’m not in charge; Jesus is. You’re not in charge; Jesus is.

2. It’s all about kingdom expansion, and kingdom is about relationship or community

The Old Testament says this a lot: “God was seeking a people for his own possession, his own community.”

In the New Testament, the language is, “to make disciples”. The goal is always people meeting Jesus. That’s the goal. To know Jesus and to grow to become more like him. So, we’re talking more Christians and better Christians and

more churches and better churches, and I am not talking about buildings, I am talking about Christian communities—that's the mission.

The Holy Spirit wants you and me to become like Jesus and to continue the ministry of Jesus. He's glad to empower us, he's glad to show up, he's glad to help—but not to help people who are on their own mission.

3. It's for all nations

Jesus' mission is for all nations. "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth." And at this point, they couldn't grab a map. There wasn't a map. Most of these guys had never travelled more than thirty, forty, fifty km from their home. They don't know what's going on in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, or any of the other 'stan' countries. They've got no clue. There is a hundred and twenty of them. And Jesus says is, "OK, the earth— that's the mission." That's kind of a big ask.

4. It's a marathon

And for the fourth point we go back to verse 6, where the question is, *'how long till your kingdom comes?* That was their first question. And he says, *"Don't worry about it. It's not for you to know the time that I'm coming back."* Jesus wants us to be less concerned with his coming and more concerned with our going. It's been two thousand years, and some would say, "He is slow." The Bible says, "He is not slow; he is patient, wanting everyone to come to repentance." It's a marathon.

I long for the day that the Lord Jesus returns, so that we don't have any more famines, or earthquakes or wars; it's just Jesus and his people together forever. But I'm also excited that there remains mission to be completed. There are people to be reached, there are churches to be planted; there are nations to be served. It means that we've not yet finished all the things that Jesus has appointed for us to do.

So we need to have a marathoner's mentality. Don't just show up and sign up and then give up. It's about perseverance? The Holy Spirit wants to empower us to persevere like Jesus persevered. It's about continuing forward with the mission of Jesus, not just giving, but giving for the rest of your life; not just serving, but serving for the rest of your life; not just praying, but praying for the rest of your life.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you so much that what we read about in Acts and the beginning of the church and what we enjoy here in OBC, that you have done wonderful things in our midst. We see our children maturing in you, our youth growing in number, our impact in the community deepening, it's exciting. Jesus, you are alive. You have sent the Holy Spirit. Empower us!

Help us to be good witnesses. Help us to have courage so that more people might meet you. amen.