

Acts, Sermon #1

MCBC 11/30/08

Acts 1

The Acts or actions, deeds of the Apostles, vs. 13.

- They were not the husbands of the Epistles.
- They were disciples that were sent out by Jesus, a group of specially commissioned men.

This book is authored by Luke, the beloved physician, who accompanied the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys.

This 5th book of the New Testament is of a different character than the previous 4 books. Each of those 4 books begins with “the gospel according to...”

This book is different.

- It has over 100 geographical places named in it, over 100 people named in it.
- Those people are going to places founding something called churches.
- The word church is used in this book more than all the gospels combined.

It is obvious therefore that the Book of Acts is a book of church history.

I’ve entitled today’s message: **The Beginning of Church History**

Acts 1:1

Let us stand for the reading of God’s Holy Word.

Acts 1:1-12

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

The Beginning of Church History

The length of church history is interesting because when you come to the last chapter of this book, the Apostle Paul is in the city of Rome.

The book has taken us all the way from Jerusalem in chapter 1 to Rome, in chapter 28.

The book ends with Paul preaching and teaching in Rome.

- You say, how many years does that encompass? About 30 years.
- So the only book in the New Testament that could be deemed church history covers only the first 30 years of the Christian church.
- That is one generation of people.

God has given to us the first generation and what they accomplished.

- They fulfilled the commission of Acts.
- They took the gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, Acts 28.
- The gospel was taken in all directions.

Even though they spread it to the then known world, with every new generation of believers there is also a new generation of what?

Unbelievers who have to be reached just as the first generation was. Our present work should model their work, reaching our generation for Christ, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria – to the ends of the world, local to international.

There are some differences between us and first generation Christians. There are some striking similarities. We have something in common with them.

1. We have the same message, the Gospel
Do you know it and are you sharing it?
2. We have the same mission, to get it to everybody
3. We have the same means, the empowering of the Holy Spirit
4. We have the same Master, the ascended Christ

Those things we have in common.

One thing **they had** that we do not: the ability on the part of a few in that generation to actually work miracles.

In Acts you have a little over 30 miracles.

- Six were done by angels, 17 were done by Apostles, and 9 were done by direct intervention of God.
- The Apostles had that ability and we do not have that type of capacity today.

Four things in common, one ability that we do not have; but we have two things they did not have.

We have the completed Bible.

At the end of Acts 28, at the very most, only 14 books were written--so hardly half of the N.T.

Secondly, we have 20 centuries of church history to look back upon to see the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Word of God universally.

Those two things **we have** that they did not have.

This book is given to us to teach us about church history and in turn we have an example for us.

I have a great burden about this and quite honestly many of the churches that I have been in lately have asked me to help build biblical and vibrant churches. We need N.T. churches; churches that resemble the Bible, not resemble the world.

- Churches today have become faddish, copycats of success. Churches today have become irrelevant.
- They don't matter; there is no impact on their community.
- Pressure of people. Philosophies that are out there that have a voice.

There has to be something more foundational than men's schemes and devices. There has to be something scriptural that is non-negotiable in every land for every man.

Often times as a church we need to recover something that is foundational because churches have a tendency to drift.

I believe the book of Acts is intended by God to give us a picture of what church is supposed to be like.

So today I am beginning a study on the Book of Acts.

- Our purpose as we go through these verses is that we have our thinking and practices adjusted by God and not men; by what the scripture is teaching.
- We need to let the Lord Himself give us His own thinking about this generation and what we ought to accomplish for Him.

This book is the headwaters of the whole stream of the Christian church. We are coming right here to the springs, the fount out of which the whole thing flows.

In the hills of Virginia, creeks can often times be traced back to where they come out of the ground. Silver dipper – We are going to take a drink. We live down stream from the fount where the water has been muddied and polluted.

The Beginning of Church History

The first question we must ask is what is the connection between the gospels and this book?

- Are we disjointed or is there a connection?
- This is what Luke answers first; the connection between church history and the Gospels.

In **Vs. 1**, Luke refers to a former treatise which is obviously which book? Book of Luke

- The gospel of Luke which is the longest book in the N.T.
- Acts is the second longest and he says:

Vs. 1e, ...pause...That tells us the content of the Gospels.

- The Gospels have one subject, Jesus and they reveal two things about Him, what He did and what He taught, His works and His words, His public ministry.

Luke says my former letter is about Jesus and what He began to do and what He began to teach.

- So we have the content of the gospels that helps us in connecting up.
- We have to at least know what the gospels are all about.

Then notice the first part of **verse 2**. “until.....He was taken up.” That is a conclusion to the Gospels. Now turn to the last pages of Luke’s gospel.

Luke 24:49-51 – Is that the end? The end of Jesus Christ words and works?

No. Just the beginning.

Acts 2:47 – who is this?

Acts 2:36 –Who is this Lord that is working in the book of Acts? It is the ascended Christ.

If we worked our way through the book of Acts, looking for the actions not of the apostles but of the Lord Jesus, you would find two dozen specific verses referring to His work (Acts 3:6; 4 :10; 9:5).

In Acts you find what Jesus Christ continues to do since His ascension.

- He literally is doing everything in the Book and the apostles keep saying, we are not doing it.
- In fact, people actually try to worship these men when they work their miracles and they say, why are you looking at us if by our power or by our holiness this has come about? We did not do this. Christ did.

So the connection between the Gospels and church history is sequential. There is not a break there.

- The Gospels are the beginning, verse 1, of what Jesus did and taught.
- Acts and church history is the continuation of what Jesus is doing and teaching.

There is this one difference:

- In the Gospels – Jesus did it in a physical body.
- In church history – He does it in a spiritual body.
- The physical body is at the Fathers right hand. His spiritual body walks this earth.

What is that spiritual body?

- Ephesians 1:22-23 identifies it.
- The spiritual body of the Lord Jesus is the church – and who is the head of the spiritual body, Jesus Christ.

Matt. 16:18 – I will build my church

In Acts 2:47, it's happening. He's doing it.

What is it that He is building? It's the body.

What's a body? It is the visible expression of a Spirit.

- Men don't see Jesus Christ today.
- They see His body, talking, walking, and working.

Church history then is simply the continuation of the acts of Christ.

Turn back to Acts 1

The Lord Jesus Himself made careful preparation for His continuation.

The preparation, those things that will make it possible for Jesus Christ to continue ministering in the world but through a new vehicle, The Church. Luke gives us a summation of these preparations.

In verses 2 and 3 – 3 things:

1. **Commandments** – what are those commandments?

Every S.S. child knows what they are.

Matt. 28:18-20 *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [18] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:[19] Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” [20]*

Mark 16:15 *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

Luke 24:46-48 *“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:[46] And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [47] And ye are witnesses of these things.”[48]*

John 20:21 *“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”*

There were those corporate commandments and there were some individual commandments too. He told Peter, Feed my sheep.

II. **Second**

Vs. 3 – Resurrection. It was a bodily resurrection. This was not just a spirit.

We believe in a bodily resurrection from the grave, infallible proofs, convincing and decisive evidence. What were some of those proofs? Name one!

- What did He do with fish and honey? He ate it, Luke 24:41-43.
- What did He do with His hands and side? He showed His scars. "Touch me" Jesus said.
- He demonstrated irrefutably the reality of the physical resurrection; infallible proofs of a bodily resurrection.

The disciples needed that.

- They were electrified because of that and they wouldn't shut up about Christ.
- They would literally take the gospel, the good news that Jesus died, was buried and rose again to the ends of the earth and they would die before they would deny it.
- No one could talk them out of it, scare them out of it or torture them into denying it.

They saw Him, they touched Him, they ate with Him, they heard Him speak; infallible proofs.

III. The third thing He did in preparation is at the end of verse 3.

- **Acts 28:31**, the book ends with the Apostle Paul preaching what?

What the Lord Jesus is doing on the earth is advancing His Kingdom – ruler, those ruled.

- How is that done today? It is done individually wherever a man or woman will submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and let the Lord rule.
- We take the gospel, preach it, men submit themselves to that gospel and Jesus Christ begins to reign in them.

So today, the Kingdom is being extended one individual at a time.

In Matthew 6, the first thing we seek is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, getting things right under the reign of Jesus Christ.

Matt. 28:18 – *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”*

So the Lord Jesus made preparations in 3 ways:

1. Commandments
2. Showing Himself alive
3. Speaking of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God

Acts 1

Now, in verses 4-8 – Jesus specifies two particular types of conversation during those days of preparation.

The first one is in verse 4.

Vs. 4

He gave them a strict commandment and He backed it up with an explanation in verse 5 that included both comparison and contrast; not an immersion of the body but of the inner man; not with water but with the Holy Ghost.

What that meant they did not know. But as we go through Acts, that will make itself known. Jesus gave special attention to the baptism of the Holy Spirit – being in the body of Christ.

The second thing that Jesus was concerned with: verses 6-8. it came out of a question they asked.

Vs. 6

Vs. 7 – implication is that there will be such a time when the Kingdom will be restored to Israel. Don't be concerned with that.

But **vs. 8** – Here is your focus, a new task to perform.

- They were to be Christ's witnesses after the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
- They were to testify to the person of Jesus Christ, His teachings, His sacrificial death and His resurrection.

No one could witness like the disciples could for they had been with Him from the beginning, (John 15:26-27).

Vs. 8 – power

This is the first revelation of what it will be like to be baptized in the Spirit of God; effect of this: empowerment.

Gave them three things:

1. Promise – you are going to receive – you have never had before, (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

- to be able, ability, especially strong – So the promise is you will receive an ability with special strength and the prediction is when that happens, you will be witnesses (2nd)

That is not a command but a natural result of being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

A witness is not an advocate.

- An advocate is a professional usually hired but an advocate needs witnesses. The witnesses may not be educated. They may not be able to speak well.
- The one thing they have that an advocate does not is that they were there and saw it and they are willing to talk about it.
- A witness is speaking due to his experience. He is telling about it.

The Spirit would help them to remember what they had heard from His lips, (John 14:26; 16:13-15).

Third, universal witness of the church.

Vs. 9-10 – Luke takes us back now to the conclusion of the gospels – The Ascension

And tells us of a second conclusion, vs. 11 – He will return again.

Right now, we are between the ascension and the coming and this my dear people is the church age.

Let us stand for closing invitation.

I think the same question needs to be asked many Christians today.

Why stand ye gazing?

- People come to church, sit in a pew, take in spiritual food but never do anything beyond that.
- We need to stop standing and gazing and start going and serving.

We need to continue the work of Christ. Witness, Teach, Baptize, Go, Proclaim the Gospel

Have you received Jesus Christ – The Death, The Burial, The Bodily Resurrection?

Believe and confess those things and you can be saved

Is He the ruler of our life? Submitted our will?