

Acts #1 (4.26.20) # 20031
Overview of Acts
God is at Work in the World

I was asked recently, on a TV interview, what in the world God is doing with COVID 19. A unique, world-wide health crisis that has basically paralyzed the globe economically and socially. My answer was that He is doing the same thing he has been doing for 2000 years. He is reminding us that life is fragile and death is inevitable and hope is available in Him. We cannot really save ourselves. We must come to God in Christ and be rescued by Him.

I. Which is why we are starting a series in the book of Acts.

- A. Acts is the true story of the first 30 years of free and faithful eternal life among fallen humanity. The beginning of a new living organism composed of new living humans bearing a new and life-giving message to a dead world.

II. About the book itself

A. It is the second of two books Luke wrote. Luke 1:1-3 & Acts 1:1-3

1. Actually, the book is anonymous, but comparing introductions with Luke & Acts.
 - a) Both written to Theophilus. Both use the same style of literary Greek.
 - b) These two volumes constitute almost 30% of the NT.
 - c) Called "The Acts of the Apostles" since the 2nd century.
2. Luke was Paul's doctor and occasional traveling companion, probably a Gentile. (Col.4:14)
 - a) He joined Paul in Troas and traveled with him to Philippi. Acts 16:10
 - (1) He stayed in Philippi for the next 7-8 years
 - b) He re-joins Paul on the 3rd missionary journey and goes with him back to Jerusalem. 20:6-21:18
 - c) He stays with him after his arrest and travels to Rome with him.
 - (1) The shipwreck, the snake-bite on Malta, imprisonment.
3. *Luke's apostolic authentication comes from Paul.*

B. It is the record of the continuation of Jesus ministry. Jesus said three things:

1. He would create a new Kingdom community around His saving Lordship. Matt. 16:16-18.
 - a) Faith in Him will be the center of it.
 - (1) Built upon the confession of Him as Son of God and Messiah.
 - b) He Himself will build it.
 - (1) It is His project, not ours.
 - c) It would not be defeated by the powers of darkness/death (Gates of Hades).
 - (1) The message of Christ is opposed by the powers of darkness.
2. He would use His people to proclaim His gracious Message. Luke 24:44-53
 - a) Gospel = who Jesus is and what He did for us.
 - b) Repentance and forgiveness come in His name. (His identity and authority)
3. He would send His Spirit into His people to accomplish the mission. Matt.28:20
 - a) He promised this in the upper Room. Jn.14-16

C. Acts is the story of how it began. Acts 1:1-11

1. The inspired record of the first 30 years of the Church's life and mission.

III. Outline of the Book? Acts 1:8

A. Chapter 1-7. Jerusalem and Judea (about 2 years)

1. Peter is key apostle. Along with John

- a) Pentecost in Jerusalem: Initial outpouring of Spirit. Ch.2
 - (1) Peter explains and preaches powerfully. 2:14-16; 32-36
- b) Beginning of the Christian Community -- Church.
 - (1) Great unity and love 2:42-47
- c) A huge impact on Jerusalem. Ch.3-4
 - (1) Peter and John heal the lame man and get in trouble

2. And the Word of the Lord spread. 6:7

- a) *The Word of the Lord = the gospel*
- b) *Even Priests (Sadducees) became obedient to the faith.*

3. But not without opposition. Stephen's death. Ch.7

- a) It becomes clear that the gospel is not simply a form of Judaism, but the fulfillment of it. The old

wineskin begins to burst. (Mk.2:22)

B. Chapters 8-12. *Samaria and Gentiles. 8:1-3 (12 more years)*

1. Peter is still the key apostle. (also, John, Philip, Stephen, James)

- a) Christians spread out into other places.
 - (1) *Like water on an oil fire...it spreads it.*
- b) Philip preaches Christ to the Samaritans. 8:4-7
 - (1) *Pentecost for the Samaritans, but Peter and John oversee. 8:14-17*
 - (2) *Grace to an Ethiopian Eunuch! Gentiles!*
- c) Christ converts Saul of Tarsus personally. 9:5-9
 - (1) *Against All Odds!!! Saul's conversion related 3 times in Acts.*
- d) Jesus convinces Peter to preach to the Gentiles. Ch.10-11
 - (1) The Lord has to practically force him! 3 visions!!
 - (2) *Pentecost for the Gentiles. 10:44*
- e) The gospel in the Lord's hand reaches Antioch. 11:19-26
 - (1) Gentile city with many Greek speaking Jews
- f) Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, persecution. Ch.12
 - (1) Herod Agrippa kills James and imprisons Peter.
 - (2) *Prisons are mentioned at least 11 times in Acts!*

2. But the word of the Lord continued to spread. 12:24

C. Chapters. 13-28. *To the End of the Earth (ESV). (15-18 more years)*

1. Paul is the key apostle from here on. 13:1-3

- a) Converted in chapter 9. (c.31 AD?)
 - b) Called from Syria/Cilicia to Antioch in Ch.11:25 (Gal.1:11-24)
 - (1) Antioch, Gentile center north of Israel (300 mi. N of Jeru)
 - c) Sent on mission to Asia Minor and Europe in Ch.13-14.
 - (1) **1st missionary Journey:** to Galatia by way of Cyprus.
 - d) Embroided in controversy over saving Gentiles. Jerusalem Council. Ch.15
 - (1) Between the 1st and 2nd journeys, the Jerusalem Council.
 - (a) Peter, James, Paul all agree: Faith in Christ alone. Rom.3:28
 - (2) *You don't convert Gentiles to Judaism, you convert them to Jesus. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not "Judaism" of the Old Covenant.*
 - e) Continuing in Mission. Ch.16-20
 - (1) **2nd missionary journey:** Antioch to Cilicia, Galatia, Asia. Ch.16-18:22
 - (a) But without John Mark this time. 15:36-40
 - (2) **3rd missionary journey:** Retraces much of the second journey, then back to Jerusalem. 18:23-20:38
 - f) All the way to Rome. 21-28
 - (1) Arrives in Jerusalem and is arrested. Ch.21-28
 - (2) Riots, trials, threats, imprisonment, Caesarea. 21-26
 - (3) Journey to Rome under arrest. Shipwreck, Trauma, Mission! 27
 - (4) House arrest in Rome and fruitful outreach. 28
- 2. Boldly and without hindrance he preached and taught about the Kingdom. 28:31**
- a) The mission continues...

D. Interestingly, the most important thing happening in the world is not COVID 19—it is the gospel.

IV. Acts tells the true beginning story of gospel life in a dying world. We are part of this story...

A. God, through the Gospel of Christ, makes Christians. Acts 2; John 3; Titus 3:5-7

1. *Christianity is supernatural. But it is not "supernaturalistic" powerful, but not magic*
 - a) This is not a human philosophy designed to structure human organization,
 - b) Nor a form of spiritism where our enlightenment is all.
2. *Only the Spirit can make a Christian. You can make yourself a lot of things. But you cannot make yourself a Christian.*

B. Christ, through the Spirit, creates and forms the Church—a living, eternal organism alive with God. 1 Cor.12:12-13 (1 Pet.2:9-10)

1. Like God breathed into Adam and he came alive. Gen.2:7
 - a) The New Adam breathes eternal life into our dead nostrils.
2. We are baptized into one Body by one Spirit.
3. We share the same Spiritual life and are really, metaphysically related to each other.
4. *Even when we are "socially distanced" and can't meet in the same place.*

C. The Spirit, through the Church, spreads the gospel to the dying world. Acts 26:16-18

1. Rom. 1:16-17. It is the power of God for salvation to anybody who believes.
2. The mission is the message of Christ—not moralism, utopianism, ritualism, or spiritism.

V. What is God doing in the world? The same thing he has been doing for 2000 years—drawing people out of darkness and death and into light and life through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts 26:16-18

A. If you are a Christian, do not despair. Let the current world crisis draw you deeper into the mission.

1. Praying and pitching in wherever you can to promote the gospel and bring people to Christ.

B. If you are not yet a Christian, come to the Lord today and become part of the ultimate solution to death itself.

1. The cure for COVID 19 must ultimately be the cure for death itself—the gospel.
2. Jesus said that nobody comes to the Father except through him (Jn.14:6), *but anybody can come to Jesus.*