

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #2

### Acts 1:1-5

R. C. Sproul tells an interesting story about a twentieth century scholar by the name of William Mitchell Ramsay who was a skeptic about Christianity. He decided that he would trace the missionary journeys of Paul in the book of Acts to try to prove that there was no evidence that anything in the book was factual and true. He looked for evidence in landscape, ruins, and in titles of local rulers and magistrates. He visited many foreign cities not common to those who lived in Jerusalem. Ramsay became overwhelmed with the evidence that the book of Acts was absolutely true and factual and he actually became a believer. He said every time he turned over a shovel, he found evidence of exactly those things Luke described in Acts (*Acts*, pp. 20-21).

Why would God want us to know the factual historical story of what the apostles did after Christ ascended and how the Church Age began? Why would God go to all of the trouble to give us the book of Acts?

- (Reason #1) - God wants us to know the different ways He works at different times. We are now in the dispensation of grace and God wants us to know how He works.
- (Reason #2) - God wants us to know how things work when His Son is in heaven and His Holy Spirit is working here on earth.
- (Reason #3) - God wants us to know the history of how churches came into existence. Do not miss this point; **our faith is not based on personal feeling but historical fact.**
- (Reason #4) - God wants us to realize that our involvement in church is truly linked to Him and His apostles. Your connection to a local church is no light matter.

God wants us knowing proper Church Age truth. It will give us a sense of eternal value to our church involvement and it will also help to make us effective witnesses. However, as the book of Acts opens there is an initial Church Age truth which seems to have been overlooked:

**GOD WANTS GRACE AGE BELIEVERS TO UNDERSTAND THAT FROM THE TIME JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, IN ORDER FOR HIS PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING, THEY NEED THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

We need to know this; Jesus Christ, the resurrected Savior will clearly make this point right here. Now in this opening of the first five verses, there are four introductory observations we may make that come from the pen of Dr. Luke. Grammatically speaking the first four verses are one long sentence:

**INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATION #1** – Luke mentions his first composition to Theophilus so he may introduce his second composition. **Acts 1:1a**

Acts is the second inspired and inspiring story written by Luke. It opens in a very unique way. At the beginning of this inspired book, Luke in some ways gives Theophilus some information as to why he is taking the time to write him another massive document.

The opening words of the text immediately remind us of Luke's first composition - the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 1:1-4, Luke said that he wanted to carefully investigate everything so he could put down the sequence of events concerning Jesus Christ so Theophilus might know the truth.

**By virtue of the fact that Luke introduces Acts this way, we can immediately think in terms of Acts being a carefully researched sequel to Luke.**

Just as the Gospel of Luke carefully traces God's work through Christ's Words and works while He was here on earth, so the book of Acts carefully traces God's work through the Holy Spirit in regard to Jesus Christ now that Christ isn't here on earth.

I doubt seriously that we even begin to grasp the monumental effort that writing Luke and Acts required. If we want to write a history of anything, we go to a library and use reference works or we go to a computer and do our research and then write it. In Luke's day, he had to personally track down historical data. He had to track down every fact; he had to visit people and places; he had to record specific names and specific times. Luke tackled all of this and God's Spirit inspired both Luke and Acts.

When you go through this book of Acts, you begin to realize that history does have meaning. God has a plan for the Church and He unfolds it and still is unfolding it. That plan right now is a plan in which, as James Montgomery Boice said, God is "reaching down to the mass of fallen humanity and saving some hell-bent men and women, bringing them into a new fellowship, the church, and beginning to work in them in such a way that glory is brought to Jesus Christ" (*Acts*, p. 15).

I again want to stress this critical point. **Our faith is not based on our feelings or experiences. Our faith is based on historical and Biblical facts pertaining to Jesus Christ.**

**INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATION #2 – Luke wrote Acts for “Theophilus.” Acts 1:1b**

The name “Theophilus” is one that means “one who loves God.” Although this was written specifically to a man who had this name, **this book of Acts is for anyone who loves God, particularly any Gentile who loves God.**

It was customary for some wealthy individual to sponsor someone, enabling them to research and write books. A book like Acts was written on a scroll that was approximately 35 feet long. This was actually the longest length of a scroll because anything longer was too bulky to handle. In Luke's day there were no publishing companies or printing machines, and wealthy men typically would supply the finances for a major literary project. It is possible that this is what Theophilus had done.

Perhaps Luke had at one time been the medical doctor of Theophilus and as a result was commissioned by him to research and write historical facts of things pertaining to Jesus Christ. Theophilus was apparently a very important man who was obviously very interested in things pertaining to Jesus Christ. So it is probable he commissioned Luke to carefully research and write this book of Acts.

**Now the difference between the way Luke identifies Theophilus here in Acts and the way he did in the Gospel of Luke is the elimination of the prefixed words “most excellent” prior to the name Theophilus (Luke 1:3).**

The words “most excellent” are words that refer to some high position of responsibility in the Roman world. These words do not so much refer to one’s character but one’s position of leadership (Acts 23:26 - Felix; 24:3 - Felix; 26:25 - Festus). By eliminating the prefixed words “most excellent” from Theophilus in **Acts 1:1**, it would appear that something had changed. Many believe that Luke’s first Gospel had worked and Theophilus had either become a believer or a more stable believer.

It is possible that either:

- 1) Theophilus had become a Christian and as a result Rome had removed him from leadership, so he was no longer in the “most excellent” position; or
- 2) Theophilus had become a Christian and no longer wanted to be addressed as “most excellent” by other Christians. He saw himself as being just one of them. The more one understands the grace and greatness of God, the less one is impressed with one’s own self or titles.

In either case, it would appear that Theophilus was a serious believer interested in pure truth. **If this conclusion is accurate, then we may observe that the thing that brought this man to faith was careful, systematic research and presentation of the written Word of God.**

Dr. Luke was no gullible simpleton and neither was Theophilus. Luke carefully researched and investigated everything (Luke 1:3). **Power to transform hearts and minds comes from a careful analysis of the written Word which is thoroughly and accurately researched and communicated.**

**INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATION #3** – Luke’s first writing and second writing both focus on Jesus . **1:1c-2a**

In Greek, the noun Jesus contains the article “the.” So Luke wants us to know “all” that “the Jesus” did and taught. In the case of Luke’s first writing, the Gospel of Luke, Luke researched and wrote it to instruct Theophilus concerning all that Jesus began to do and teach from the time He was physically born until the time He was taken up into Glory. In the case of this second writing, Acts, Luke continues the story of all that Jesus Christ was doing by power of the Holy Spirit (**1:2**) through His apostles now that He was physically gone. The name Jesus emphasized He is Savior not Jewish Messiah. This is a book about the Church Age.

**I want us to observe the close connection between what Jesus was doing and what Jesus was teaching.** Most people are infatuated with the miracles, but Jesus performed the miracles as Divine credentials for His powerful preaching. Christ did things so He could teach things. There is an interesting principle here - **sometimes we will have to do things so we can teach things. Powerful, impacting preaching and teaching often stems from doing things.**

The thing that is so staggering here is that God's work concerning Jesus Christ goes on by using sinful humans who are empowered by the Holy Spirit. This work is truly connected to the same work that Christ was involved in when He was actually here on earth. As J. Vernon McGee said, "Today He is still at it" (doing and teaching).

God classifies what is happening now through His people by power of the Holy Spirit in the same context as He classified the work of His own Son while He was physically here on earth. Believers on earth are involved in something big and special and supernatural.

**INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATION #4** – Luke develops the Holy Spirit's work in regard to Jesus Christ and the apostles. **1:2b-5**

There are six specific facts brought out about the apostles:

**(Fact #1)** - Jesus Christ gave orders to the apostles by the Holy Spirit. **1:2b**

The specific orders or commandments Luke is probably referring to are those of Luke 24:45-49 in which Christ opened their minds to understand the O.T. Scriptures, including the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms as it related to His death, burial, and resurrection and the entire Grace Age Gospel so they could take that Gospel to the whole world.

These apostles were taught by Jesus Christ that forgiveness of sins could be found by faith in Him and they were shown how the O.T. pointed to that. Their job would be to be witnesses of these things all over the world. They were to start in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) and they were then to take this message out to the whole world. However, they were not to do this until "they were clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

This is critical for us to see. Just because Jesus has ascended into heaven doesn't mean He has lost His concern for us. Just because Jesus is in heaven does not mean we are potentially less powerful than if He was physically here. We have responsibilities and we are to carry out those responsibilities by supernatural power that comes from on high.

Just because Jesus has ascended into heaven does not mean it lessens our responsibility. He has given us His orders in the Scriptures, and by the power of the Holy Spirit the ability to grasp them.

**(Fact #2)** - Jesus Christ personally and specifically chose the apostles. **1:2c**

You cannot quibble about the doctrine of election because Luke believed it and taught it to Theophilus right here. It is interesting that Luke, himself, was not an apostle but he certainly recognized the doctrine of election involved in becoming one. He is not jealous or envious; he just reveals the fact that those apostles were chosen by Jesus Christ. They were not self-appointed; they were not appointed by a committee, a synod or a church; they were personally chosen and elected by Jesus Christ.

Now, if you want to begin your Church Age experience with proper theology, you start with the fact that “you too have been elected to salvation.” You are not elected to be an apostle, but God has chosen you just like He chose them.

**(Fact #3)** - Jesus Christ specifically presented Himself alive to the apostles for 40 days after His suffering and resurrection. **1:3a**

Here is a very important point. Biblical Christianity is an historical religion that is based on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a religion based on a philosophy or an idea. It is based on historical fact. Every false religion can exist without their founder. Mormonism goes on without Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. Buddhism goes on without Buddha. Islam goes on without Mohammed. But not so with Biblical Christianity. Without a risen Savior, Biblical Christianity crumbles; and that is why it is so important that we understand the historical fact that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead and He is alive.

It was critical that Jesus spend time after His suffering and resurrection with His apostles, because He was about to leave and launch them off into the Church Age. It would become their responsibility to inform the world of this reality. He apparently gave them many convincing proofs during this time. It is interesting that Luke does not use the word “signs” (σημειον), but “proofs” (τεκμηριον). There is a difference. **Signs are things you see or observe, but convincing proofs are sure decisive signs that you see by positive tests and proofs.**

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson says that this is interesting because this comes from Luke, and these words are used as medical terms in the medical world (*Acts 1:1-5*, p. 6). If you go to a doctor with a real problem, typically the doctor will ask a series of questions looking for **signs** or **symptoms** of something. If on the other hand the doctor suspects something based on symptoms, he will run tests to determine whether the signs or symptoms are in fact reality. He will run tests that will give him “convincing proof.”

What this tells us is that Jesus actually did many physical things showing and proving that He was really, truly, and physically alive. Luke is the only writer who reveals that Christ’s post-resurrection, convincing proof appearances lasted 40 days. What this tells us is that there is no evidence that can be offered or will ever be offered that will be able to deny that Jesus Christ did really arise from the dead. The faith of the early church and the faith of our church is based on this critical fact. Again, please notice **our faith is not based on our feelings or our experiences; it is based on historical fact and evidence of our resurrected Savior.**

Now what I find so intriguing about this and also Paul’s account of post-resurrection appearances in I Corinthians 15 is that you would naturally think, if the goal of the Grace Age is to take the Gospel to the whole world, then the best thing Jesus could have done would have been to show Himself and these “convincing proofs” to the unbelieving world. If He really wanted to save the whole world, you would naturally think that if He started appearing as the resurrected Savior to the emperor of Rome or to the governor of Judea or Samaria. Most would think that the end would justify the means and Jesus could have made a real evangelistic impact. What would be more impacting than to have Jesus Christ show up all over the world and show unbelievers the nail scars in His hands and feet?

We need to understand some things here about God. God does not do anything or speak to those who mock Him and to those who do not believe in Him. God does not reveal anything to a God-mocking, Christ-rejecting world. **God will only do great things and show great things to those who are close to Him.**

Churches today are making a fatal theological mistake when they think it is their job to create an environment that will impress and reach the lost world. God offers salvation to a lost world. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and any sinner may be saved. However, until one gets serious about believing in Christ and knowing God through His Word, God will not reveal anything. Many people own Bibles, but very few will actually see and understand deep marvelous things from those Bibles. Furthermore, Christ's assignment was to suffer and die, and our assignment is to tell people about it. The work of the church is a continuation of the work of Jesus Christ.

**(Fact #4)** - Jesus Christ specifically taught the apostles of things pertaining to God's Kingdom. **1:3b**

It is clear that during these 40 days, Jesus Christ gave His apostles instruction that would enable them to lead the early church. This teaching was about "the Kingdom of God," the Kingdom work that will become so critical to the book of Acts.

There are two Kingdom titles that we need to understand if we are to properly understand what Luke reveals here:

- 1) There is the Kingdom of heaven often referred to by Matthew - God's physical Kingdom work
- 2) There is the Kingdom of God often referred to by Luke - God's spiritual Kingdom work

Some assume that the two Kingdoms are one and the same, but they are not. There are major differences between the two:

- 1) Entrance into the Kingdom of God is determined by being born again from above - John 3:3. Entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is determined by being born a Jew.
- 2) The children of the Kingdom of heaven may be cast out - Matthew 8:12; 24:50-51; 25:28-30. The children of the Kingdom of God cannot ever be cast out - John 3:18; 6:37.

What we learn here is that Jesus Christ spent time teaching these apostles for 40 days about the spiritual ramifications of the Grace Age Kingdom of God. This Age is about to kick off in the book of Acts.

**(Fact #5)** - Jesus Christ specifically gathered the apostles together and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem. **1:4a**

Any church, including ours, has its historical roots in Jerusalem. We will consider the specifics of this city next time. What we may observe is that God's work does occur in specific cities.

**(Fact #6)** - Jesus Christ specifically gathered the apostles together and commanded them to wait for the promise of God to them, which was the baptism of the Holy Spirit.  
**1:4b-5**

You cannot just immediately launch off into some ministry. Sometimes the best thing we can do is to stay put and wait and learn. We need to be taught and we need to truly come to understand that anything we will ever do for God will not come from our flesh but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kent Hughes told the story of a man he knew who had been a leader in a church. The man said, "I have been in my church for years; built a church building, raised money, served on committees." But he said he never once had the power of the Holy Spirit that made "life exciting" (*Acts*, p. 13).

Frankly, never in history have there been as many churches spiritually speaking that don't accomplish much of anything. Never have churches been bigger and yet have less power. The real source of power to accomplish the will of God is the Holy Spirit; and the fact is, as one old Bible teacher used to say, "Never has the church had more wires stretched out with less power in it."

The apostles could do nothing in and of themselves and neither can we. They needed God's Spirit and we have God's Spirit. They had to wait for God's Spirit; we received Him the moment we believed on Jesus Christ.

- A. Spirit Baptism was something they heard about from Jesus, Himself. **1:4b**  
Christ taught them that the Holy Spirit, who had been with them, would be in them forever - John 14:16-17
- B. Spirit Baptism was in contrast to John's water baptism. **1:5a**  
It has always amazed me as to how many churches place such a high priority on water baptism, when in fact the baptism that Jesus really stresses is Spirit baptism. There is a place for water baptism, but that is not what will give you power. Power to accomplish anything for God will come by the Holy Spirit. The baptism of John is an active verb meaning the people were involved in the action, but the baptism of the Spirit is a passive verb meaning people are the recipients of the action. We have nothing to do with this baptism - we do not beg or plead for it; God gives it.
- C. Spirit Baptism would occur not too many days from the time Jesus said this. **1:5b**  
There are obviously some things Jesus told them about that would not happen instantly, but Spirit Baptism was not one of them. It would soon happen.

The Holy Spirit was about to launch these apostles into the Church Age and what an Age it is to this very day.

**The key to us as individuals and as a church accomplishing powerful things in this new Grace Age dispensation is our relationship to the Holy Spirit.**