

**NOW WHAT?  
Acts 1**

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We recently completed a sermon series in the Gospel of Luke. Luke is volume 1. The Acts of the Apostles is volume 2.

Turn back to Luke 1:1-4.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me, as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

In his first volume, Luke dedicated his work to someone named Theophilus. The name means “lover of God.” Perhaps Theophilus was the patron who paid for the research and writing of the Gospel of Luke. He is reporting to Theophilus everything from the beginning, as seen by the eyewitnesses. He was telling Theophilus the story of Jesus. He begins with Jesus’ birth and ends with his glorious resurrection and ascension.

Perhaps the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts traveled together, from church to church, as volume 1 and 2 combined together, perhaps even inseparable.

Just as he began the story of Jesus in volume 1, the Gospel of Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles he begins the story of the church. Today we begin a 12-week sermon series in Acts called “Beginnings.” I hope you will commit yourself to being here each week. If for some reason you have to miss, go to [firstamarillo.org](http://firstamarillo.org) and you can read, listen, or actually watch the sermon to catch up and stay with us on our journey through the Acts of the Apostles.

Turn to Acts 1:1. It’s going to sound very familiar to volume 1, to the Gospel of Luke. The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach...

Volume 1 was about the beginning of Jesus’ story. Notice that familiar name, Theophilus – apparently the same individual was also the patron for the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. This lover of God was eager to learn not only about Jesus, but also about the Jesus people, the church.

Luke says in verse 2 that his first volume covered the story of Jesus until He was taken up. Volume 2 picks up right where volume 1 left off. Here we have a second account of the ascension of Jesus.

## **I. Jesus continues His work through the church (vs. 1-3).**

The first volume covered all the things that Jesus began “to do” and “to teach.” That is the gospel, isn’t it – the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God and the miraculous events that occur when the kingdom arrives: healing the sick, casting out demons, and performing miracles – showing kindness.

In this first chapter in Acts, Jesus – like the last in Luke – ascends to heaven. But now Jesus continues “to do” and “to teach” through His church. Jesus now works through His Holy Spirit, which indwells His followers. As He gives these parting words to His apostles, He is commanding them to be bearers of His kingdom’s cause. These powerful words in Acts tell us about the beginning, the birth of the church.

“Boy, you’ve got some big shoes to fill.” We hear those words a lot. The implication is “You’ve taken on a task that was so well done by your predecessor that I would hate to try to do it as well as he did.” *Time Magazine*, in an article entitled “How Do You Take Over For a Legend?”, discusses the difficulty of following someone who has performed so well that there is no way they can be outdone, or even matched for that matter.

It was said that Harry Truman told a group of journalists the day after his assumption to the presidency from a man who had held that role far longer than any in history, “Boys, if you pray, pray for me now. I don’t know if you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me.” In 1934, Truman was a 50-year-old failed farmer, speculator, and haberdasher. Ten years later he had the fate of the planet in the most awful weapon in human history in his hands.

You can think of many examples of men who have struggled to follow in the footsteps of their predecessor. How about Tim Cook taking over for Steve Jobs at Apple? Following Jobs’ death, Harry McCracken of *Time* magazine wrote, “With astonishing regularity, Jobs did something that few people accomplish even once – he reinvented entire industries.” Following that act, Tim Cook had to fill the shoes.

Here’s one everybody over 50 will know. In 1992, Johnny Carson left the Tonight Show as the undisputed “king of late night.” One writer reflected in 1992, “On Monday, May 25, the occupant of that chair will change from Johnny Carson to James Douglas Muir Leno, a man whose jutting jaw has launched a thousand bad metaphors...making the end of a thirty year Carson era.” But Jay Leno certainly did pretty well for himself, didn’t he?

You understand the difficulty, the challenge, the intimidation of following in the footsteps of a legend. The reality is that the early church, in many ways, was called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus is saying, in essence, “Tag – you’re it. I’m no longer going to be here. I’m returning to the Father. And you will continue to do and to teach things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Look at Acts 1:8

You shall be My witnesses....

I'm leaving it in your hands. I will empower you by My spirit. But you'll be My hands and My feet."

*God Has No Hands*

**God has no hands but our hands**

**to do his work today;**

**God has no feet but our feet**

**to lead others in his way;**

**God has no voice but our voice**

**to tell others how he died;**

**And God has no help but our help**

**to lead them to his side.**

**(Annie Johnson Flint)**

In verse 3, we see that Jesus "presented Himself in His resurrected body after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God." Between His resurrection and His ascension, Jesus explained to His disciples the necessity of His death and resurrection for His message concerning the kingdom of God. The message states that Yahweh, the Creator, rules over His people Israel and will one day rule over – in an uncontested and visible manner – the whole world.

In his Gospel, Luke described Jesus' proclaiming both the future coming and present reality of God's kingdom – "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." The new presence of God's sovereign rule is manifested in the forgiveness of sins extended to sinners by Jesus (Luke 9:23-27; 10:9, 11; 13:20-30; 18:18-30).

How important is this idea of the kingdom of God to Luke in the Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles? Well, we begin with the kingdom of God. Jesus, in His resurrected state, wants to talk about one thing: the rule, the reign of the Father, the kingdom of God.

Turn to the end of Acts. Let's take a sneak peek at the very end of the story. Without giving too much detail, I'll set it up. Paul is in prison in Rome, waiting to be released or beheaded. And what is he doing? Look at the end, Acts 28:30. "And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters" – these were prison quarters – "and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

The story ends with Paul in prison, preaching the kingdom of God. Which is, after all, the story of Jesus.

Now, some have formed a list of all those appearances during those forty days. If you take the appearances of the resurrected Jesus in the Gospels and combine them with the appearances of the resurrected Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15. You come up with a list something like this:

1. He appeared to the women at the tomb.
2. He appeared to Mary Magdalene.
3. He appeared to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

4. He appeared to Peter in Jerusalem.
5. He appeared to ten disciples.
6. He appeared then to eleven disciples. (Remember, Thomas was back. Trevor reminded us of that two weeks ago.)
7. Then He appeared to seven disciples fishing in Galilee.
8. Then to eleven disciples.
9. One time he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time.
10. Then He appeared to James, the Lord's brother.

Those are at least the ones that are listed in the New Testament. And surely there were others.

When Jesus first appeared preaching, he brought, ushered in, the beginning of the kingdom of God. His death, resurrection, and pending exultation (just moments away here in Acts) release the power of the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom of God is conceived as coming in the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And the disciples are here to proclaim those facts.

Yes, we start and finish the Acts of the Apostles with the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

## **II. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue His work (vs. 4-5).**

In Luke's first book, Jesus says, "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Don't leave Jerusalem. Don't go on mission yet. First you need the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was their only source of power. John the Baptizer had said the same thing. I baptize you in water; yes, but One who is coming after me shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit."

The Old Testament prophets had said that in the days of the fulfillment of God's promises, there would be a widespread outpouring of the Spirit of God. The very Spirit which the prophets had proclaimed was about to be upon them and empower them to carry forth all that Jesus had done and taught. They could continue His ministry for the kingdom, but only by the power of the Spirit.

## **III. A clear purpose was placed upon the people of God (vs. 6-8).**

The disciples, naturally, think this is the time when the kingdom was about to be restored to Israel. Israel will finally be supreme among the nations. These expectations, of course, would entail the elimination of Roman authority and power and the unification of the ancestral regions of Israel. They are ready to set up an earthly kingdom.

But Jesus responds, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (v. 7-8).

The disciples calling, concern, and mission are not to focus on the timing of the end. Rather, they are to receive the enablement that God will give in the Spirit. The timing of the complete arrival of the kingdom of God is set by God and will not be revealed. It is set by God's sovereign and unquestionable authority. The times (*chronoi*) and seasons (*kairoi*).

Google "When will Jesus return?" and you will see a myriad of results. I found several on YouTube that declare 2028 is the year.

Go to amazon.com under books and pose the question, "When will Jesus return?" Here are some of the top titles.

*When Will Jesus Come: Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* by Dave Hunt.

Raymond J. Moore writes *Decoding the Mystery of When Jesus Will Return*.

You see, church, none other than our Lord and Savior said, "That's not your worry. God has set the time. It's not for you to know." Look at verse 7, "It is not for you to know times or epochs...."

So, then, what are we to be doing if we're not to be speculating concerning the return of Christ? We are to receive power from the Holy Spirit, and we are to be witnesses. Don't look for the times of political power, ambition, place, or position. Rather, you are to be busy as witnesses.

The Old Testament prophet had called Israel to be God's witness to the world (Isaiah 43:10; 44:8). The task, which Israel as a nation has not fulfilled, was taken up by Jesus, as a perfect servant of the Lord, and passed on by Him to His disciples. The close relation between the call to Israel contained in Isaiah, "You are my witnesses," and Christ's words to His apostles, "You shall be my witnesses" is seen so clearly. Start in Jerusalem – that's where they were. Then Judea – environs a little broader than Jerusalem. Then Samaria. Then ultimately all over the Roman Empire, even the capital city of Rome itself. They were to be witnesses.

A witness is a person who testifies in legal matters, someone who affirms or attests something. The apostles are confirmed in their task to attest to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. They are to go all the way to the "end of the earth," which means there is no geographic or ethnic boundary beyond which the kingdom of God will not go.

A mission is a very fragile thing. We must constantly remind ourselves why we are here at First Baptist Church of Amarillo. We must constantly test every ministry, every program that we do by this criteria: Will it make the kingdom of God broader and deeper? If not, let's not waste our time and our finances doing it. Will this ministry continue to do and to teach the things of Jesus and His kingdom?

Every person who sets foot on this property, for whatever program, for whatever cause, ought to, at some point, be confronted – however forthright or subtle – with the gospel of Christ Jesus. They ought to be invited to come and follow Him in whatever tone or manner is appropriate for the context.

**Calvin Miller, in his book *A View from the Fields*, tells of a little old lady who, during a tour of Westminster Abbey, ignored the famous tombs, the spectacular architecture, and the**

**lovely flowers to demand of the guide, “Has anybody been saved around here lately?” Her question was generally considered in poor taste, possibly because the answer was no.”**

The church doesn't have to ask why are we here. We are here to continue the ministry of the kingdom of God begun by Jesus. We are “to do” and “to teach” the things concerning the kingdom.

Congregation, the church is the only institution appointed and undergirded by Christ to carry forth His words and His work. He has empowered us, and us alone, by His Spirit, to begin in Jerusalem and go to the uttermost of the earth.

#### **IV. It's time to stop gazing and get going on mission for Christ (vs. 9-11).**

After Jesus completes His commission, and as they are still looking, Jesus is lifted up and a cloud takes Him out of their sight. Two divine beings, dressed in white, ask them the question, “Why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

His departure means that we, now, have work to do. Stop gazing, and get going.

**An executive hirer, a “head-hunter” who goes out and hires corporation executives for other firms, once shared that when he got an executive he was trying to hire for someone else, he tried to disarm that executive. “I offer him a drink, take my coat off, then my vest, undo my tie, throw up my feet and talk about baseball, football, family, whatever, until he's all relaxed. Then, when I think I've got him relaxed, I lean over, look him square in the eye, and say, ‘What's your purpose in life?’ It's amazing how top executives fall apart at that question.**

**“Well, I was interviewing this fellow the other day, had him all disarmed, with my feet up on his desk, talking about football. Then I leaned up and said, ‘What's your purpose in life, Bob?’ And he said, without blinking an eye, ‘To go to heaven and take as many people with me as I can.’” The head-hunter said for the first time in his career he was speechless at the answer to his question. (Josh McDowell, “Head Hunter,” *Stories for the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray, p. 112)**