

A Mission that Changes Everything

Series: ROOTS (Acts 1-6)
Brad Bailey – September 11, 2022

Intro

Imagine someone invited you over today to sit back and watch a football game... or perhaps if you're more attune to cooking... a cooking show... or a concert. That may sound nice.

Now imagine that you get a different call... you get a call from the coach of that football team telling you that you are going to be playing... or the cooking show that you will be hosting... or the concert, that you will be singing.

You would be in a **very different state of mind**.

When you are actually going to participate... when you are actually in the game... you feel the **significance** about really being prepared... we awaken out of the theoretical world of ideas to what is going to really matter right in front of us. There is a rush of **challenge and fear** as well as **energy and excitement**.

It is the transforming nature of that call that we are engage today.

> Today we are going to begin a series entitled ROOTS - Rediscovering Our Foundations ... a series based on the Biblical Book of Acts.

- If you sense that you've **lost some of the vitality** of that calling... I believe these next ten weeks will help **restore some vital connections**.
- If you've more recently **begun a relationship with Jesus**... I believe this series will help **guide that experience** towards all that Jesus intended.
- If you are **newer to the Westside Vineyard**, I believe this series will **help you better understand the calling that we seek to follow**.

If you are newer to the Scriptures, the **Book of Acts** is a **unique book** in the Bible. It lies after the four Gospel accounts... and before the letters written to various churches. It provides an accounting of the dramatic spread of the followers of Christ. eyewitness account of the birth and growth of the early church and the spread of the gospel immediately after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was **written by Luke**... who wrote the Gospel of Luke... whom is known to have been a doctor... who had access to all the apostles...and was providing a verified testimony and account.

Because he continued to be amongst the first leaders ... it is not surprising that he then continued with this book testifying to the early acts after the raising of Christ. [1b]

The Book of Acts is the living **testimony of our foundations... our family story as the church**.

Today we **begin with the very first words** of how it all began. I will read and then we can ask God to speak through it.

Luke begins...

Acts 1:1-11 (NIV)

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the

day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Prayer: May we hear what lies in this moment that reaches to us... becomes our moment.

Luke begins by noting his former book (what we now call the Gospel of Luke) in which he explains that he wrote **about all that Jesus BEGAN to do and to teach**. He's referring to his Gospel account of Jesus ministry before the resurrection.

What Jesus did and taught in those days on earth are the **foundation of understanding who he is...**

BUT... Luke uses one word that opens a new reality for everyone... the word **BEGAN**.

These were what Christ BEGAN to do and teach. It's **not over. It's just beginning**.

> And **what is about to be described** could be called **the most pivotal and profound transitions** of all history.

Jesus is focused on giving them instructions... and they ask again 'So is this the time YOU are going to restore the kingdom... and his reply defines something none of them were prepared for... and most of us still haven't fully grasped.

He essentially says... you want to focus on how this finishes... but what matters is what is just beginning. You want to focus on what I'm going to do... **all I have just begun is going to continue through you**. Then he disappears from their sight. In some mysterious way he ascends from their presence.

> **Picture it... they ask how the kingdom / reign of God is going to come... Jesus says... through you... and disappears.**

The next line is almost humorous:

'They were looking intently up into the sky.'

I bet they were ! You can almost imagine them saying: **What did he just say !!!** But before they could, a divine messenger (angel)... snaps them back into what lies before them.

This moment defines their calling and ours.

- The **revolution has begun... and you've been called to join**
- The **king** has just **dubbed knights** and their weapons and armor are coming.
- The **one who came to breakthrough the powers of this world** in his bodily nature is now going to **continue through the bodies** of all who welcome him into their lives.

**There is no Plan B.
It is how God had planned it.**

As Philip Yancey describes [4],

Jesus stayed just long enough to gather around him followers who could carry the message to others. Killing Jesus, says Walter Wink was like trying to destroy a dandelion seed-head by blowing on it.

It seems obvious he planned this departure from the beginning. **That was his design. The law and the prophets had focused like a beam of light on the One who was to come, and now that light, as if hitting a prism, would fracture and shoot out in a human spectrum of waves and colors.**

The church serves as an extension of the Incarnation, God's primary way of establishing presence in the world. The church is where God lives. What Jesus brought to a few--healing, grace, the good-news message of God's love--the church can now bring to all. That was the challenge, or Great Commission, that Jesus gave just before vanishing from the numbed disciples' sight. "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies," he had explained earlier, "it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Propagation by the dandelion method.

Indeed this was God's plan. And if we step back, we can see not only his purpose...but his provision.

1. We've been given his SIGN of breakthrough

Verse 3 - "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave **many convincing proofs that he was alive**. He appeared to them over a period of forty days.."

When it was time to spread this revolution there was something Jesus had to solidify.. and that was that he was alive... that after his suffering at the hands of the powers that ruled this world... he was alive.

It is so important for us to grasp that what we are called to rises out of something that happened...his resurrection. The great teacher... the great sacrifice... rose from death. He was shown to defeat death as a sign of power over all powers. Jesus had spoken of this being the ultimate defining sign. And when he rose he **showed himself for many days and in many ways.**

Luke describes how he **'gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.'**

The Greek word for "proof" here is a word that includes the idea of being convincing – infallible. He made sure that his resurrection was made certain to those who watched him die.

- The Disciples **Saw** Him – vs 3 - he showed himself to these men ... He appeared to them over a period of forty days....

... and spoke about the kingdom of God

- The Disciples **Heard** Him
"He presented Himself alive ...speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Then in verse 4 it tells us... "On one occasion, while he was eating with them..."

- The Disciples **Ate** with Him

- The Disciples **Touched** Him

We also know that Jesus allowed them to feel Him with their hands. (John 20: 24-29).

Why is this so vital?

It declared a breakthrough of the powers that ruled this earth. He had broken through the powers of sin and death and separation... the powers that ruled over our lives he alone could defeat and had defeated. Spiritual powers still exist but they no longer have ultimate rule. Sin still exists but it no longer has the power to condemn us. Death of these fallen bodies still exists but our beings no longer have to be separated from eternal life with God.

The commander and chief has broken through the forces of evil ...so we can now follow through.

It also reveals what he had promised them earlier, **that ‘he would be with them always.’**

Some may recall that the Gospel account of Matthew closes with Jesus commissioning his followers ...telling them to

Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Later in Acts we read of Peter healing a man who was lame... and he says: “Jesus Christ heals you.” (Acts 9:34) Peter knew Jesus was with him.

We need to realize that...Jesus not only was resurrected but he IS resurrected.

So we’ve been given this sign of breakthrough.

And...

2. We’ve been given his POWER

Jesus says you don’t need to know when everything will culminate... **you need to begin to live out what I have been doing... and to do this...**

Verse 8 – “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

Jesus had lived dependent on the Spirit... and that is what is now at hand for these disciples and all who follow.

One of the problems that we face... is to think of Jesus in his divinity... as operating out of a divine power and prerogative that is entirely different from us. That is exactly the opposite of what his mission represented.

He came in human form to accomplish what only he could do.

What he did he did as one in human form and limitation... given to the will of the Father and dependent on the working of the Spirit. [2b]

How was he able to fulfill such a mission? Because the Spirit was anointing him.

Anoint does not refer simply to being given power but a purpose... of being chosen to a task by divine co-mission.

The Greek word translated ‘anointed’ means ‘to **assign** a person to a task, **appoint** one for a position.’

(χρίω (*chriō*) [3]

It is not simply a power that was upon Jesus... but a **divine purpose** and destiny had been **placed on him**. The power flowed with that purpose and Jesus was dependent upon that flow. It's the **will of heaven infusing earth**. Jesus says that that is what God desires for us to enter.

The whole Book of Acts captures how the Spirit came upon them and began to work through them. This dependency on the Spirit is what can keep us from focusing on our own strength... or fearing our own limits.

And it's with these provisions that....

3. We've been given his **MISSION** (vv. 3, 8)

What was the **focus for life** that he gave them?

Verse 3 – “He appeared to them over a period of forty days and ***spoke about the kingdom of God.***”

The kingdom of God refers to **God's rule and reign being restored**.

He has come for the purpose of reclaiming and restoring life with God.

This is what he **announced** at the start of his ministry.

This is what he **inaugurated** through his life and death and resurrection.

This is what he **impacted** to all who follow. To the 12, 70, and all who would enter.

It is **about God regaining his rule and reign** in the hearts of men and women... and the whole of creation.

It is what is declared in the **Lord's Prayer**... ‘**let your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**’

This is the mission and mandate that defines everything.

Verse 8 – ‘**you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**’

In other words... ‘What happens in Jerusalem... DOESN'T STAY in Jerusalem... nor anywhere.’

To this he says... we are now ‘witnesses’... in word and deed... we announce and embody.

His ministry... what they have come to see and know... they will further.

This is what lies **central to our calling as a Vineyard**... our number one value is the theology and practice of the kingdom of God.

John Wimber – “Doin’ the stuff.”

He intends for every one of us in this room to share in that calling.

What we must grasp is that **what Christ began was not centered** in a **meeting** but a **mission**.

Some will dismiss the value of meeting... which completely forsakes the way of Jesus... as he set forth a mission that was rooted in his gathering together 12 lives and committing himself to them... and such a committed camaraderie was essential to how they grew in their maturity and lived out the mission.

What's vital to grasp is that the **meeting was in support of a mission**. This is why I like the term ‘**missional community.**’

The church is a “missional community”... those who are “together on mission.”

Naturally that may feel overwhelming... or some burden we have been given to fulfill on our own. That is not how it worked in Jesus life. It was something that flowed out from inside him. That is what he told them to wait... because this same mission needed the same power.

Many of us may wonder.

- We may feel that the **culture has become more hostile.**

The church has always faced hostility and prevailed.

In the midst of Roman pagan empire...the early church spread from a few thousand Christ-followers in the first century to over 33 million followers by the year 350 A.D. The Christian movement spread to become more than fifty percent of the global population in just 300 years. It went viral... whenever it offered the rescuing power of God’s grace.

> We need to hear God ask us: Why are you just staring into the sky. Stop looking up and start looking around.

- We may wonder because **God has allowed such a long period of human history** to continue.

If we wonder why Jesus has not returned... not fulfilled all that we have given our hearts to... we can learn a lot from looking at God’s promises throughout the history we are a part of. Every single aspect of what God has revealed He is doing... every promise made... has been a longstanding promise and process... and **every promise has come to fulfillment.**

> We need to hear God ask us: Why are you just staring into the sky. Stop looking up and start looking around.

- We may feel the **human nature of the church** cannot carry out the divine purposes.

Naturally at times we become quite aware of the human side of the church... and we may tend to feel disillusioned... wonder if it’s a force that can really win out in this world. Most of us are aware of our human flaws and failures... and if not, at least we’re aware of other peoples. So we may be concerned about the church as a human institution.

If we stand back and look clearly we discover what is truly amazing -

> The whole of God’s work in our midst is a blending of two dimensions... of the eternal being worked out in the temporal.

- It’s the very **dynamic of Scripture** (human authors inspired by God and His actions);
 - the **incarnation of God in Christ** (human flesh and emotions infused by the Spirit of God).
- > That’s what at hand here...** the Divine infused once again into the human dimension.

Jesus said “I WILL build..”... because it wouldn’t be truly birthed until the day of Pentecost... **when the Holy Spirit would be imparted** into their lives and empower them... then a **mysterious infusion would once again take place**.... and an alternative missional community would be birthed and empowered. “The new reality which he introduced into history was to be continued through history in the form of a community, not in the form of a book.” (Lesslie Newbigin)

> God is able to work with humanity without ultimately losing the purpose at hand.

The Church reveals God's ability to blend human flaws and Divine force.

> **No "woops" here...** God didn't stop and suddenly realize that we are too flawed to work with. From the very start **God knew** that there would be an **impetuous personality** like Peter's who would end up prevailing in his brokenness and humility... **a greedy tax collector** who would make restitution...and yes... **each of us**.

The Scriptures clarify that Christ is the ultimate rock on which this new kingdom of God is built... **he is the cornerstone. Yet we are described as 'living stones'** (1 Cor. 3:9) built upon the work of prophets and apostles.'

Moment that changed everything

Religious dropouts **thought a religious leader was calling** them.... Dropped everything....but **it was God** The call of the king and kingdom

12 years old... the news of God coming to humanity... resonated with my young soul. I recall one classmate...called me "Jesus freak."

Sensed a type of call. Wrestled over the years... what became clear...

This is worth giving my whole life to.

This is the redemption of all of the created realm.

It may strike you in a moment of realization... or brew a bit as you let yourself assess life... But it is the most defining call you will ever know.

Settle it... and it will settle everything else.

BTW – That kids who called me a Jesus Freak... would one day be sitting in this congregation. What had grown clear...is that what may have initially been deemed fanatical...was now that of being more settled.

Not long ago... morning of the national elections...in the midst of all the conflict...I felt compelled by the need to declare that Christ was my king. I decided I would post this on FB... and realized I should include a few words to old friends who may not share my faith... and a couple days later...I was surprised to see... the most positive responses...were from those friends. People see the power of Jesus to be worthy of being centered in. They can understand... he his mission changes everything.

> Now is not the time to stand around looking... it is the time to go take your part.

Resources: John Hamby (A Study of the Book of Acts),

Notes:

1. "Radical" comes from Middle English, *of a root*, from Late Latin *rādīcālis*, *having roots*, The first dictionary definition of the word 'radical' is: **1. Arising from or going to a root or source.** <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/radical>

1b. Many have noted that **the title often given to this book** seems to be misguided. It has most traditionally been given the title **The Acts of the Apostles**. Many have noted that what

really unfolds is the acts of the **Holy Spirit** who comes upon those first gathered and moves through them. Others note that ultimately it is the continuation of **the now risen Christ in them**.
> I believe that **the truth for us to grasp**...is that it is **all of these at work together**... the ministry of Christ empowered by the Spirit... working through the lives of people just like you and I.

2. John Hamby notes:

He appeared to them during forty days. In fact Luke is the only writer of Scripture who tells us that Christ's post-resurrection ministry covered forty days. The word here is one from which we get our word, ophthalmia, i.e., the word for the eye, or literally, the eyeball. If we were to use the modern vernacular, what Dr. Luke says is, these disciples "eyeballed" him for forty days. They saw him again and again, not merely once, but many times during this period. Each time he looked exactly the same.

In fact on ten different occasions Jesus appeared to the disciples, history leaves no doubt about his resurrection. The first five sightings took place on the first day when he He arose again, the other five took place from time to time during the forty days that followed.

He appeared to Mary in the Garden (Jn 20:11-18)

Women by the Wayside (Matt 28:9-10)

Disciples on the Emmaus Road (Lk 24:13-32)

Simon Peter in the late afternoon (Lk 24:34)

Disciples in the Upper Room (Jn. 20:19-23)

Again to the Disciple so the Thomas might see and believe (Jn. 20: 24-29)

Seven on the shore of Galilee (Jn 21:1-14)

To some 500 gathered on a hillside (1 Cor. 15:7)

To James (1 Cor. 15:7)

To the disciples on the Mount of Olives as he ascended (Acts 1:9-12)

2b. He explained it very clearly. He began his ministry... his mission... with these words.

Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

3. Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

4. Philip Yancey, "The Jesus I Never Knew"