

Acts 1

Well once again good evening. Would you please turn in your bibles to the NT book of Acts, chapter 1.

We're only going to look at the 1st 8 verses tonight as we go thru an introduction into this incredible book.

The title of tonight's message is An Introduction to Acts.

Before we begin let's go before the Lord.

LETS PRAY

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gathered His disciples and commanded them to make disciples of all nations. The book of Acts explains how they did it.

It's crucial we study this book as there's never been a more successful period in church history than that of the 1st church. In a single generation the gospel travelled across the world. All without FB, email, iPhones, cars or airplanes. There were no computers-the only media they had was pen and parchment.

This group of men and women in the book of Acts didn't possess any of the so-called necessities that so often the church mistakenly believes is required for a movement of God.

How did this small group of believers, whom to the natural eye were so ill equipped to be soldiers of Christ, how did they spread the gospel around the world?

And we have to remember-this 1st church began in a very hostile environment in Jerusalem, and even worse in Rome! Yet despite the cultural hostilities and obstacles, this small, seemingly

insignificant group of believers touches the known world going from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria. How did they do it?

Acts tells us how.

God loves to use mightily that which we think is insignificant. Just look at the nation of Israel.

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

God uses people who are ill equipped to do mighty works so that HE gets all the glory. God uses people who recognize they can't do anything for God on their own, that it must be a mighty work of His Holy Spirit. God uses people like you, God uses people like me, and God uses churches like this because to the naked eye we have nothing to offer, other than our obedience to whatever He calls us to do.

As we go through this book we'll discover how the HS enabled the 1st church to influence their neighborhoods, governments and impact their culture. And what gets me really excited every time I study Acts is the SAME HS desires to use us to influence OUR neighborhoods, governments and culture.

That's one of my favorite things about the Bible. It doesn't just tell us what to do, but it tells us HOW to do it!

Now the author of the book of Acts is Luke, the same man who penned the gospel of Luke.

Luke was a doctor that Paul met in Troas, we know this from Colossians 4:14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

Luke cared for Paul during the illnesses he suffered while on his missionary endeavors. Paul's references to Luke in 2 Timothy and Philemon describe Luke as Paul's faithful travelling companion. After the 2 met in Troas, Luke included himself with the missionary team recorded in Acts, starting in chapter 16 (also known as the "we" sections of the book").

Luke's faithful friendship to Paul continued until Paul's death in Rome, for Luke was one of the few people who did not desert Paul. 2 Tim 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. Luke was a faithful friend.

Now trying to pin down the exact date this book was written can be a bit challenging. The book of Acts doesn't record Paul's death, but rather it ends abruptly during Paul's residence in Rome. Paul's house arrest in Rome occurred around AD 61, which would be the earliest possible date for this books completion.

What we do know is that the book of Acts covers a time period of about 30 years.

Why is that important to know? Because the gospel spreading around the world didn't just happen at once, instantly, or overnight. It took time. I remind myself of this constantly because I can get really impatient. But we're on God's timetable, not ours!

Now the working of the HS is a major theme woven throughout this entire book, and it starts here tonight in verse 1.

But before we get to that verse, did you know that video game competitions, known as e-games, are booming in popularity? The International Olympic Committee is considering adding e-sports to the Olympic Games in order to drum up younger viewers. Yes, video games may soon be an Olympic Event according to Time magazine. Can you imagine that?

And did you know just as many video game players are over the age of 50 that are under the age of 18 according to Sports Illustrated. In fact more fans watched a video game tournament (27million worldwide) than watched the NBA finals a few years ago.

Recently, a 26-year-old man won a Madden NFL football video game tournament. When interviewed after winning the \$100k grand prize, for pushing buttons on a controller he talked about his training.

He would practice between 8-12 hours a day. Like a professional athlete, he has a team with him to improve his performance.

After winning his video game championship, he said he had to get back to the grind and start training again tomorrow!

If you didn't know any better, he sounded exactly like the real players who wear the helmets and pads and bear the very real scars and bruises of playing real life football!

Doesn't this seem a little bit odd?

And while video game football may be ENTERTAINING, it's not the same as the real thing. Winning a computer game with a last-minute touchdown is much different than running over a tackler yourself to win the game for your team.

They're substituting the real thing, with an imitation.

I say all this because many churches today are doing the same thing-they are substituting the real thing and settling for an imitation.

And we as Christians have to constantly be on guard that we don't settle for imitations of the real thing. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THIS, THE WORD OF GOD, IS THE REAL THING!

This is what has power to change lives, this is what has power to break addictions, this is what has power to transform communities, and this is what has power to change the world.

The HS desires to move in every God fearing, Christ centered fellowship, but far too often Christians are pre-occupied with imitations. As we study God's word, we must be available to be guided by God's HS.

As we study the beginnings of the New Testament church, you'll see the apostles lived their lives in the book of Acts in 3 postures. On their knees, on their feet, and on the move.

If you and I have those same passions-on our knees in prayer, on our feet-ready to serve, and on the move wherever God directs us, the Lord will use us in mighty ways. But it requires death to self. It requires surrender.

Acts also presents three major lessons for the church that every fellowship should always keep in view.

SHOW PIC 1 First, the church's passion must be the glory of God.

This was the driving motive in the lives of Peter, Paul, and the other faithful missionaries and witnesses that Luke recorded in this book **CLOSE PIC 1**

SHOW PIC 2 Second, the church's governing principle must be loyalty to Christ.

Again, the leaders of the early church modeled this for us. They put Christ's interests before their own, and they were single-minded in their living. Their primary concern was letting Jesus' life work in and through them, and to carrying out His work, not their own. **CLOSE PIC 2**

SHOW PIC 3 Finally, the church's power must come from the Holy Spirit through prayer. The many references to prayer in Acts show us how conscious the early Christians were of their dependence on God's power. They did not go out in self-confidence, but in God-confidence. **CLOSE PIC 3**

May we be individuals, and a fellowship, that does the same.

Now Acts 1-8 gives a recap of the 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. That's the focus tonight-what Jesus said prior to His ascension.

1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, It's interesting that both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are addressed to this man named Theophilus. **Luke 1:3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus,** Notice he

says most excellent Theophilus. This is indicative that Theophilus was likely a high ranking roman official.

Now church tradition suggests that Theophilus was a wealthy man who converted to Christianity and that Luke was his private physician. It's then thought that Paul led Theophilus to Christ, and Theophilus then released Luke in order to serve as a personal physician to Paul. We'll find out exactly who Theophilus is when we get to heaven.

But more importantly at the end of verse 1 it says **all that Jesus began both to do and teach**. In the Greek this is a present infinitive active, simply meaning it's a continuous, ongoing action. Jesus' ministry didn't end when He ascended into heaven. His ministry continued through the book of Acts and continues today.

That's way the book of Acts really has no ending. No conclusion- because the works of Christ are still happening today, but through the person of the HS!

2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, Let's remember the events of Jesus ascending to the Father after the resurrection. **Luke 24:46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise[fn] from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem[fn] until you are endued with power from on high."**

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and^[fn] blessing God. Amen.^[fn]

So what was the command He gave the apostles-that they wait for the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Our entire justice system in America is based on the testimony of eye witnesses to determine facts. In our justice system if 2 or 3 witnesses who have sworn to tell the truth, all have an agreement in their stories, it is counted as fact.

In addition to Jesus' several post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, Paul tells us of the infallible proofs in 1 Cor 15 He appeared to more than 500 people at one time

The word proof here that Luke wrote in the Greek is tekmeriois, which occurs only here in the New Testament. It refers to proof by irrefutable, unquestionable evidence. Luke asserted that Jesus Christ's resurrection was beyond dispute. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus was WITHOUT A DOUBT.

Further infallible proof was the fact that Jesus ate with the disciples. Jesus said to them touch, feel, see that I'm real-they touched Jesus and when they did, they realized it was truly Him who had risen from the dead.

The men who saw and touched Jesus, who shared food with Him, bore witness to the fact they had seen the resurrected Lord. Many of them were martyred because of their witness to the fact that Jesus rose again. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, surely, they would have recanted their story to save their lives when faced with the threat of death.

But it wasn't just the death of the disciples that proved the truth of the resurrection. They proved it in the way they lived! Their lives changed dramatically after they witnessed the risen Christ. We'll witness this as we go through our study.

Look at the end of verse 3 again with me...

and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. All through His earthly ministry, Jesus taught the disciples about the kingdom of God-how it is in direct opposition to the kingdom of this world.

So important was the message of the kingdom of God that Jesus spent another 40 days teaching it to His disciples after His resurrection. He wanted them, and us, to rightly prioritize our lives so that we're living in view of God's coming kingdom!

Vance Havner was right on target when he said "We will move this world not by criticism OF the world, nor conformity TO the world, but we will move the world by combustion WITHIN it of lives ignited by the spirit of God.

The 1st century church found this to be true, for even their enemies saw the power of the HS in the lives of the disciples.

Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who

have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Wouldn't you love to have that accusation thrown at you-turning the world upside down for Jesus?

It starts when we have our focus not upon our kingdom, but God's kingdom.

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; Jesus is referencing the coming of the HS, but notice that oh so pesky word in the middle of verse 4-wait. It must have been difficult for these disciples to wait for God to do what He had promised.

Put yourselves in the sandals of the apostles for a brief moment. Jesus was risen again. Can you imagine their vigor, their enthusiasm after realizing Jesus was risen? The apostles must've thought 'we're ready to be unleashed upon the world!'

But Jesus says wait. We see the theme of waiting throughout the Bible.

In the book of Ezra chapter 4 we read how the Israelites came back from Babylonian captivity to build the temple, but the enemies conjured up a sinister plan. They sent a letter filled with lies to King Artaxerxes, (fake news), which caused the king to command the construction of the temple of God to cease.

Did you know they weren't able to work on the temple for over a decade! This is God's temple we're talking about! Every instinct and fiber within us would say 'God don't you want this done-this is for you!' Why would God allow the reconstruction of the temple to be halted for over a decade?

All thru the bible we see that God does a lot of His work thru times of waiting. Abraham had to wait for the birth of Isaac, Joseph had to wait in a prison cell. Moses had to wait 40 years before his ministry began. The apostles had to wait. Paul had to wait in the deserts of Arabia.

The theme of waiting is dripping throughout the pages of scripture.

We have to fight our instinct of getting frustrated and restless during Gods times of having us wait. It's important to remember that while we wait God is building us up. While we wait, God is making us spiritually fit to receive what He has for us.

Let's read verses 4 and 5

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." It would be days from now, but not many days. Notice Jesus didn't tell them exactly when it would happen? His promise would come to pass, but He doesn't tell them exactly when!

Now if you recall from the gospels, when JTB baptized, it was the baptism of repentance. But it was not the baptism of the HS.

We know that when a person accepts Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in that person's life. If a person does not have the Holy Spirit, then they do not belong to Christ. **Romans 8:9. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God**

dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His

Few topics have been as neglected, misunderstood or frankly even abused in the church by Christians as the topic of the Holy Spirit. It's even gone so far that sometimes people think to talk of the HS is weird, or unnatural.

And it's a sign of the times-what is a part of God is neglected, yet the perversion of the world is considered normal.

Edward Mady, a longtime manager of The Beverly Hills Hotel, asked the hotel to arrange a \$15,000 wedding for his two dogs, including an ordained minister and catering. If that's not weird enough, another guest at the hotel actually requested the entire staff address him in dog language only, instead of English. Listen that's weird!

Laura Vardon, sales manager at The Eliot Hotel, in CA, is quoted as saying 'We had guests who requested a specific room because of the effect the sun at that angle had on their aura.' How is it things like this are considered normal, yet talk of the Holy Spirit is considered out of bounds?

There is nothing unnatural or weird about the HS. He is part of the triune God and is the one who is confirming us as believers into the image of Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 3:8 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.** We'll be talking much more about the HS and His work as we go through this book.

6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

The disciples expected the restoration of Israel and assumed it would happen in their lifetime. Again, you can picture their excitement. ‘Now’s the time when all of the OT prophecies will be fulfilled-the messianic kingdom is at hand!’

And note Jesus’ response:

7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. I don’t like this verse. Because it’s another reminder that God’s calendar doesn’t have to sync up with mine. More than that, what makes me think I need to know everything? There are some things I JUST DON’T AND WON’T KNOW.

So after Jesus dismisses their question regarding the timing of the coming kingdom, He gets right back to the focus of His instruction, the soon coming of the HS.

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me^[fn] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” So the question was “Are you going to set up your kingdom now”, Jesus says that’s not for you to know, BUT you are going to receive power when the HS came upon them.

But why did they need this power? The power of the HS is what would allow them to fulfill the great commission. **Matthew 28:18-**

19 19 Go therefore^[fn] and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of

the age.” Amen.[fn]. Jesus commanded that His disciples make other disciples, and that can only be done through the power of the HS.

Read verse 8 with me one more time as we close. **8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me[fn] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth**

Now Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria weren't exactly ideal places for the disciples to spread the gospel.

Jerusalem was where Jesus was executed at the word of an angry mob.

Judea rejected Jesus and His ministry in the gospels.

Samaria was regarded by the Jews as a wasteland, filled with violent racist tensions.

And the end of the earth, well that's where the Gentiles were! Gentiles were seen by some Jews of that day as nothing better than fuel for the fires of Hell.

But God wanted witnesses sent to all of these places, and the Holy Spirit would empower the disciples to do this work.

Now some folks call it the baptism of the Spirit, others call it being filled with the Spirit. Whatever you choose to call it, verse 8 is describing being overflowed with the HS.

We see these words from Jesus about the HS

John 14:17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you

In the Greek there are 3 prepositions regarding the HS-“para”, “en”, and “epi”.

In John 14:17 we see the HS ‘with you’-speaks of the para relationship, the coming alongside. The Holy Spirit is “with you” prior to your salvation. It is the HS that convicts us of sin, and draws us to the Savior.

The “en” in the phrase, ‘in you’ is equivalent to our English preposition in as in “He is going to dwell in you”

The third relationship is separate and distinct from these 2, and we see it here in **Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.** This is the Epi- which means upon or over, or overflow. It describes the HS flowing out of our lives.

Which means our lives then are not just a vessel meant to contain the Holy Spirit, but our lives are to become channels by which the HS flows from to impact the world around us. This is what we see in the book of Acts.

Most Christians today would readily say that we want to experience power through the HS like the apostles had. But how many of us are truly willing to crucify our flesh to do it? **Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

We will never know our full potential in Christ until we have yielded fully to the Holy Spirit in our life. May that be our prayer.