

Sermon Date: July 28, 2013

An Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles - Acts 1:1-5

The book of Acts is a primary thread from which the other epistles/letters of the New Testament branch out. Acts explains (but is not limited to) the history of the New Testament church after Jesus' resurrection and great commission (Matthew 28:18-20). It is an elaborate masterpiece constructed to paint an intricate, beautiful picture of the Christian faith as it was being birthed. When we understand the *what, where, when and how* of Acts, we are able to make better sense of the letters written by the New Testament writers. The letters of Paul, James, Peter and company will never be read the same again.

Acts was written by Luke, a "beloved physician" and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24). Luke, a Gentile, was not an eyewitness of the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:2), but became a believer most likely through the sweeping growth of the early church. The book of Acts is written primarily through Luke's careful gathering of information from first hand eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4), however it is evident Luke was present for some of the action in the book – notice the transition from "they" to "we" Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16. As with Luke's gospel, this letter was written to Theophilus, a Greek name meaning "friend of God" or "loved by God."

In his sermon, Doug taught "we live in an extremely skeptical world. To the early believers as well as us the current disciples, this book could be considered one of the original letters written to the skeptic."

Book of Acts Overview - from last week:

- *Faith in Jesus Christ and the promised Holy Spirit begins with a band of ragamuffins in Jerusalem, extends to Gentiles and spreads like wildfire to outer regions to reach "the ends of the earth." Below is an outline of the frame and structure of Acts:*
  - *Acts 1:1-6:7: Pentecost - the Holy Spirit given. The Word is **established** and the church birthed in Jerusalem.*
  - *Acts 6:8-9:31: The New Covenant message **expands** beyond Jerusalem. The church is growing and on the move, being **extended** beyond Jerusalem's borders.*
  - *Acts 9:32-12:25: The message of salvation is **expanded** to include Gentiles. The church is growing and on the move.*
  - *Acts 13:1-16:5: The message is **extended** and **expands** Cyprus & Asia Minor as momentum builds to spread the gospel message "to the ends of the earth" (Matthew 28:19).*
  - *Acts 16:6-19:20: The message continues to burst out the seams, **extends** and **expands** out to more regions to Greece.*
  - *Acts 19:21-28:31: The gospel message, salvation in Christ continues to the ends of the earth as it **extends** and **expands** to Rome.*

1. The verses below are considered transitional between the shifts stated above. Look up these verses and comment on the common theme:

- Acts 2:42, 43, 44, 46-47
- Acts 6:7
- Acts 9:31
- Acts 12:24
- Acts 16:5
- Acts 19:20
- Acts 28:30-31

2. Jesus told the disciples that they would be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Read Joel 2:28-32, Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 11:19, 36:25-27. What does the term “clothed with power from on high mean?”
3. In his sermon, Doug commented “It is through the sin of Israel that God built His church. The resounding theme: We screw up and God uses it. ‘Where sin increases, grace increases all the more’” (Romans 5:20). How has this worked out in your own life?
4. Luke writes that Acts is about “What Jesus **began** to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). We can infer that it is also about “what Jesus **continued(s)** to do and teach.” Consider how this theme applies to us as part of the “ends of the earth.”
5. In his sermon, Doug commented that the person(s) to whom this letter is formally addressed Theophilus & recent converts were in need of reassurance and teaching in their newfound faith. Think about and comment on ways you have gotten reassurance in your faith journey.
6. Doug continues to use the word “Narrative” in his sermons, from our jaunt through the Old Testament through the gospel of Luke, and now in this series on Acts. How are we collectively part of that narrative? How are you individually part of that narrative?
7. Acts is not just about what Jesus has done, but what Jesus is continuing to do through His church. If we place ourselves in that story today, what does that say about us?
8. Doug pointed out that the pre-resurrection disciples were weak, scared at the end of Jesus’ life. In Acts we see a complete shift in their demeanor “these are the same guys...BUT these are NOT the same guys. Something has happened to them, something has changed.” Read Ephesians 1:17-20 and comment on this change for them and what that means for you/us.
9. Doug taught us “They changed the world not through self-effort, but (notice the shift) when THEY/WE are connected through the Trinity in a relationship with Him and in a relationship with one another.” How does that work?