

1/11/15

Acts 1:1-5

## Jesus Prepares the Disciples

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

*4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

*(Pastor Prays)*

As a Christian and as a pastor I have a growing concern for the way our country is going and especially of how our churches are going. They are either part of the problem or part of the solution. I think Acts can help us with that.

Why do you go to church? Why do you go to *this* church? What is a healthy church? How does a healthy church move forward in a hostile community? What about the members of the church? What do they look like and how do they live? What goes on at the church on Sunday? Is the worship Christ-centered or man-centered? Is it performance-oriented or praise-driven? Is the preaching doctrinally sound, Biblically clear and Gospel-focused? Are the messages man-centered, hype-filled and entertaining – like watching a really good movie that captivates you while it's showing but when it's over, you get up and go home and aren't changed? And a Gospel that doesn't change you is a false Gospel.

It's why we turn our attention to the Book of Acts. Some have said that the book of Acts is the most important book in the New Testament because in Acts you have the pattern for the church and doing ministry as the church.

Acts was written by a man named Luke. We know he was a doctor. We know he was a loyal friend to Paul and a faithful member of Paul's missionary team. Luke is the only Gentile author in the New Testament. He has an exacting eye and a burning heart. He's written with an end in mind. He's written to a man named Theophilus which, interestingly enough, means "friend of God... loved by God."

Luke writes Acts as a means of progression, maybe even discipleship. In v. 1 Luke mentions the first book. That's the book of Luke and in Luke 1:3-4 Luke says *"It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly record for you most excellent Theophilus. That you may have certainty concerning the things that have been taught."*

The Gospel of Luke has an evangelistic purpose.

Now in Acts, Luke addresses him less formally. Maybe he was converted and Luke wrote this to help him grow. The Gospel of Luke is about what Jesus did and taught. The second volume, the book of Acts, is for us. Now what? What do we do? What do you do with your Christianity? That's what this is about. It's about the church. It's about being a healthy church.

## **A Healthy Church is Centered on Christ and Focused on Ministry**

As a healthy church...

### **We Must Have an Informed Ministry**

Isn't that why Luke is writing his Gospel and the book of Acts? For information – and here is an area in which many Bible-carrying Christians are woefully deficient – and it is a woeful deficiency that leads so many people astray – not *knowing* what you believe.

It's why we provide resources, make announcements and issue challenges. The more you know the Bible, the more you know God, and the more you know God, the better your life is. Your life is not made better by more love, money or success. Your life is made better by more of Christ so that your mind is saturated with the profound truths that will feed your heart, sustain your emotions, drive your will and make you into someone that lives to honor Christ. You're living for something right now! Something gets you up and moves you forward. For some of you it's manhood. Get up early, work hard to provide for your family, defend and love your family. That becomes an idol. Did you know that motherhood can become an idol? You live for something. An informed Christian lives his life – all his life-- for Christ. A healthy church is centered on Christ and focused on ministry. As a healthy church we must have an informed ministry.

As a healthy church...

### **We Must Have an Empowered Ministry**

An empowered ministry – in other words, we can't do this on our own. V. 1-2 say *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.* The day He was taken up and commonly called His ascension. Paul tells us in Romans 8:34, Jesus is interceding for us. Not only that, look what Luke records in Acts 1:4-5 about what Jesus said, *"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

And when they were, ministry happened – not confusion or disorder – ministry. We must attempt things that would be impossible without the direct intervention from

God...things like restored relationships, broken barriers, conversion of someone hostile to the Gospel.

Don Whitney is a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and wrote *Spiritual Disciplines*. He posted 10 questions to ask at the start of the New Year. I won't list all of them – just a few:

1. What is the most humanly impossible thing you will ask God to do this year?
2. What is the single biggest time waster in your life and what will you do about it this year?
3. Whose salvation will you pray for this year?
4. What one thing could you do to improve your prayer life this year?

Let's not spend this year as professing Christians and practical atheists. Let's spend this year seeking God the Holy Spirit to fill us – overwhelm us --wreck us if necessary-- so that we might be centered on Christ. A healthy church is centered on Christ and focused on ministry. We must have an informed ministry. We must have an empowered ministry

### **We Must Have a Clear Ministry**

Let's read v. 1-2 together emphasizing v. 2 “*After he had given commands through the Holy Spirit.*” That command is summed up in the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Making Disciples, sharing Christ, teaching the Bible – an outward-focused ministry-- and when a church turns inward and all the conversations are about inward things, we miss the whole point of what we are here to do, that church is not about me and you. It's about exalting Christ and making disciples. We must be clear on that and every ministry must be pressing toward that goal.

To add to that...

### **We Must Have a Specific Ministry**

Look how Luke phrases this in v. 2 “until the day when He was taken up after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.” The Apostles he had chosen were set aside for specific ministry that Christ had given them.

I would extend this choosing to each of us. Although we haven't been chosen to be apostles, we all have been created in such a way with our own gifts and abilities, personalities and quirks. We have been created and chosen to do some sort of Gospel ministry, and if you are not involved in some Christ-exalting disciple-making ministry, you are missing the point.

I had lunch with a fellow pastor the other day. He asked me what I regret in ministry. One of the regrets is the many times I focus on what *doesn't* matter to the detriment of what *does* matter. And these are the very things in our lives that we do that really do matter. I don't want to get to the end and find out I was *busy* but not *useful*. You have a specific calling, gifts, and usefulness to the Lord. Find a place to serve and live out your specific ministry.

A healthy church is centered on Christ and focused on ministry. Informed, empowered, clear, specific.

As a healthy church...

### **We Must Have a Cross Centered Ministry**

If you are not careful when you are reading this passage, you fly right past the cross. It's in v. 3. Let's read it and see. "He presented himself alive to them after his suffering." His suffering. It's where we get Passion. The Passion of the Christ – a Passion play. It's His suffering.

When we take The Lord's Supper, we remember His suffering. A church is not a Christian church if it doesn't center itself around the cross of Christ. It's at the cross where the Great Exchange happens. When you turn from your sin and by faith receive what Christ has done for you at the cross. He takes the justice and punishment of God and gives you His righteousness so that you no longer stand before God as a condemned sinner but as an adopted child, forgiven and loved, received, blessed and secure. And it happens at the cross of Jesus.

A healthy church is made of spiritually healthy people. As healthy church members we must have a cross-centered life.

*(Pastor Prays)*