

Title: Acts: Our story
Text: Acts 1.1-5
Theme: Our story is His story
Series: Acts #2
Prop Stmtnt: Our lives can count for something big.

Here is the sermon in three sentences: A 1st century physician named Luke, wrote a short book about the life of Jesus followed by a short book about the movement that Jesus started, called the church. Today, when you hear the word church or if you “go to a church” you will hear and experience many different things that are confusing and contradicting. We are studying Luke’s second book (Acts) in order to know what the church is supposed to believe, be and do, so that we will represent Jesus well.

Read Text:

Imagine being separated from your birth parents. Wouldn’t you wonder what they were like? Wouldn’t you want to know their history because in a way it is your history? My dad was separated from his birth parents. Perhaps because of how they neglected him, or the fact that they were willing to give him away, he was never all that curious about finding out much, if anything about them. My daughter has worked in cancer research for a number of years, part of that time in the bone marrow transplant unit of St. Jude’s Research Center in Memphis, TN. She had her blood analyzed which gave her information on where her ancestors came from. There is something about being able to know where you came from. I’ve often said that it is hard to know where you are going unless you know where you have been. But, if you are a follower of Christ, you are part of a family that has been established by the Spirit of God. It goes deeper than any other family tie, though that it is difficult for many to imagine. We are one people, out of many peoples, one race out of many races, one nation, out of many nations, one family out of many ethnicities. We are one, in Christ and the gospel that we have common binds us deeper than any social or cultural norm.

A number of years ago now, there was a promising young doctor from Wales who was practicing medicine in London. He was working under one of London’s pre-eminent physicians and was being groomed to take his place. Doctors to the rich and famous rub shoulders with powerful people. They also know many secrets. This young doctor, saw all of that early on. He was also a serious follower of Christ and was considering giving up his career in medicine in order to be a preacher though he really hadn’t shared that with anyone. In fact, when he did, it created quite the scandal. Who does that? He was in the midst of working through that decision when he was invited, by his mentor to attend a prestigious party. These were the men and women whose medical records the young doctor had organized, updated and filed. He knew things about them that most others didn’t. He saw that their life was a game, a show, a façade of sorts. Everyone trying to be what they thought others wanted them to be. The young doctor, was turned off by it all. Not long after that he was invited to go to another cultured event, which was fine, but when he stepped back out into the streets of London, he came upon a Salvation Army band. This, rather unsophisticated and rag-tag looking ensemble was quite a contrast to what he had been part of. And yet, instantly he felt a kinship. The hymns they were playing were the songs of the

gospel and in that moment, Martyn Lloyd Jones realized, “*These are my people, these are the people I belong to, and I’m going to belong to them.*”

If you are a follower of Christ, the book of Acts is our story. These are our people. We belong to them. We stand on their shoulders and we have been bequeathed with their legacy that all started with Christ. I want to point out 3 things from the text and then give you 4 take-away points.

I. **The book of Acts is a critical piece of the story.** (1a)

I find it interesting how some, in the name of higher education attempt to dismiss the Bible as a legitimate source for history simply because they do not like its message. But, if you consistently apply the rules of what is an historical document to the Bible, you have to admit that this is an actual historical account. The Bible is not primarily a source of inspirational and motivational sayings like a collection of Hallmark cards or Pinterest posts. The Bible tells us the history of God’s plan and involvement with this world. Creation, fall, flood, tower – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph – Israel all set the table for Jesus.

Luke built on the history of the OT and told the story of Jesus that he gathered from the eyewitnesses who were with him. He compiled this together for a man, perhaps a benefactor, named Theophilus (God-lover). The book of Acts is the sequel to the book of Luke. This is part of what sets Christianity apart from other religions.

The book of Acts is the early history of the birth, expansion and explosion of genuine Christianity. This book continues the story of Jesus Christ by telling us what impact his life had upon the earth in the years that followed his return to heaven. This book is the 3rd largest book in the NT behind Luke’s first book, his account of the life of Christ which is the longest NT book and Matthew’s account of the life of Christ which is second longest. The full title of the book, the Acts of the apostles, tells us that this is a historical book. Historians record history for a reason. They tell you about events in order to prove a point or answer some questions. Luke wants us to know how did a religion birthed in the tiny nation of Israel (that is by a Jew among Jews) end up being embraced by so many Gentiles? The issue of race and ethnicity is all over this book. A related issue is why did this movement, birthed in Israel end up being rejected by the vast majority of the Jews? So, our study of this book is going bring us face to face with issues of racism which is an expression of a deeper issue. But, Acts is not primarily a story of society and a commentary on her problems, but the book of Acts addresses the ongoing impact of the person of Jesus Christ through those who knew him and believed him.

II. **The influence of Jesus Christ goes on.** (1b-3)

“began to do and teach...through the Holy Spirit to the apostles....”

The fingerprint and aroma of Jesus is all over this book. The story of the church is rooted in the story of Jesus. Notice the language that Luke uses that links this book (Acts) with his first book, “I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.” What he did (miracles and perfect life) supported all that Jesus said. But, his life and ministry is not the end. The implication is that the influence of Jesus goes on and it goes on through his church.

The text goes on to say that the ongoing ministry of Jesus is happening now by means of the Holy Spirit who empowered the apostles to carry out the commands of Christ. Here is an important point. The Acts of the Apostles, that is the actions of the apostles are in reality the actions of the Holy Spirit through these men. This book is about how the Spirit of God continued the ministry of Jesus. Luke mentions the kingdom of God 32x in his gospel. The kingdom of God was what Jesus talked about. Here (v.3) Jesus is still speaking about the kingdom of God, so we should expect that the apostles spoke on it as well, which they did.

Sometimes you will hear people say that “the kingdom of God” is the theme of the Bible, while others will say that “the gospel is the theme of the Bible.” Actually, they are both correct. The kingdom of God refers to God’s plan to rule on and over the earth through one King, his Son, Jesus Christ. That is the story line of the Bible. The means by which this is done is called the gospel, which means the good news that God sent his Son, Jesus to pay for our sins by dying on the cross in our place, being resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven and will one-day return to reign in glory. So, it should not surprise that we read in Matthew 4.23 that Jesus came, “*proclaiming (or preaching) the gospel of the kingdom....*”

The kingdom of God had arrived in the sense that God’s rule on and reign over the earth had just been taken to an entirely new level. The king was here. The king had come. God’s promises for a kingdom were beginning to be fulfilled and one day they will ultimately be fulfilled, when not only will the King reign on the earth, but his authority will be welcomed and embraced. But, this, of course is the heart of the problem. Mankind wants the benefits of the kingdom, but people do not want the king. Look at what happened to Jesus. When he healed people and fed people, they loved him. When he told them the truth about their sin, self-righteousness and hypocrisy, they hated him and crucified him. Give us a world where we can do whatever we want without any consequences. That’s exactly what Lennon wrote about in “Imagine” isn’t it? Imagine there’s no heaven, no hell, no religion and all the people living in peace.” What a theme song for our world. This is what people want. We want peace, prosperity, health and comfort and our sin. But, it is our sin that destroys peace and everything else. We sin because we want to be a god. We want to rule our own lives. When we sin, we are pursuing the life of an enemy of God because sin is rebelling against the reign and authority of God over my life. Now, God would be just to condemn all rebels. Kings and powerful governments do that. It is generally not a good idea to rebel against the king, especially if he is strong and has a gigantic army that is loyal to him. So, here is the good news (the gospel) of the kingdom of God. The Divine King came to this earth in order to die for his enemies. Jesus died for rebels like you and me so that every rebel who repents of his or her rebellion and believes in and trusts in Jesus, is not only spared the wrath and punishment of the King, but inherits the kingdom! And you know what? It’s a really big kingdom! There is enough to go around.

This was the message of Jesus and the apostles. This is what Philip was preaching in Acts 8.12, “...*he preached good news (gospel) about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ....*” Luke is preparing us for what is to come. Jesus preached about the kingdom of God and while some loved and believed what he said, the rulers hated him and what he said and had him killed. Therefore, we should not only expect that when his followers carried on the same message that they would be given the same response. Some would love and believe the message about Jesus

while many will reject it and even hate the people who are saying it. But that leads me to the final thing I want to point out from the text. Believing this message, living in alignment with this message and proclaiming this message is our mission.

III. Acts tells us the early story of our people and our mission. (4-5)

Jesus told his disciples that they were not to leave Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father. This promise refers to what Jesus called the baptism of the Spirit. Whatever this baptism of the Spirit is, it is so important, that you have to wait in Jerusalem for it. Think of this. Jesus had been meeting with them, teaching them, encouraging them and challenging them for 40 days now since his resurrection. These guys were ready to tell their world about Jesus, but Jesus said to wait. Whatever this baptism of the Spirit is, you need it. Which also tells us that Jesus was going to give them the authority and empowerment to accomplish what he was calling them to do because you cannot do this on your own.

But, there was another reason why they were to stay in Jerusalem. This was where the mission was to begin because, this is where it will end.

The message of Jesus (the gospel) is designed to completely capture your entire life and be more important to you than anything else. It is a message that is personal, powerful, hopeful (can my sins be forgiven?) but goes against our natures. It is offensive and yet exactly what we need. We become followers of Christ by faith alone, and then spend the rest of our lives learning how to live more and more consistently as followers of Christ. It is a beautiful and yet never ending challenge to follow Christ.

Take-Home Points:

1. This world is here and is functioning according to a purpose and plan.

God's plan for creating this world is to create a place and a people to live with, love, enjoy and worship his Son, Jesus Christ. God is carrying out this plan and you are part of it. This means that your life has meaning and an intentional place in history. You are not an accident. You are not a random, chance blip on the screen of this universe. If you ever studied computer engineering, you studied code. Computer engineers write programming codes so that computers know what to do and how to do it. If your computer does not have coding, it will not work and if it has coding, it means that someone wrote it. A computer did not evolve from nothing and neither did you. Look at your DNA! Your DNA is the biological coding of the Divine Engineer who created you. God is not only the Creator; he is your Creator. Your existence is not the result of a random meeting of a sperm and egg in a long dark tunnel. Oh no! Your conception is the result of billions of processes that lined up in time and space and mass to create you! Therefore, history, properly understood, is not just the past and what happened before us. History is His story, and it is to be your story (our story). The story of the church is forever knitted to the story of this universe. The story of Christianity is the story of the church, one people who belong together into one family who will live with, love, enjoy and worship God forever.

2. God is calling you to be part of something so much bigger than just you.

Your heart and this world tell you that your greatest happiness is found when you have power, respect, attention, and envy. That is a lie! It is a lie that is easy to believe because so many people believe it. But it is a lie. You were made to be part of something that is so much bigger than you. Jesus expressed it this way, “if you want to be first, be last. If you want to lead, serve. Want to be powerful? Be weak. Want to be respected? Give up your rights. Want to live? Die.

3. You cannot live as you were called without understanding who Jesus is and what he accomplished.

You cannot grasp God’s plan for this world and for your life until you first understand what is wrong with this world and what is wrong with your life. When you realize that you are the biggest problem in your life, then you will be ready to be rescued from your sin, and you can be. You can be rescued from your sin. You can be forgiven. That is foundational to everything else. The only way for you to know God is through Jesus because only Jesus can provide for you the necessary sacrifice for your sins.

4. The church is here to demonstrate that by living out this calling.

I was invited to a mosque in order to “debate” the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. My Islamic opponent presented his case and then it was my turn. I began by explaining the gospel so that the audience would understand why the resurrection of Christ is a foundational truth for Christianity and then I presented evidence for the historicity of the resurrection of Christ. When my part was done, the moderator opened it up to the audience to ask either one of us anything they wanted. The first question was from a Muslim-background girl in her twenties. The room we met in, was not very big. I had already sat down on a chair while the audience sat in front of me on the floor. We were all rather close together. When she asked the question, I still remember her face, particularly her eyes. She looked almost desperate when she asked, “How can I be forgiven of my sin?”

That moment reminded me of a very important truth. The historical facts upon which genuine Christianity is built matter because of the message that genuine Christianity embraces and proclaims. In that moment, the most gripping thing that this girl heard was not that Jesus had risen from the dead, but that she could be forgiven of her sin. Our study of the book of Acts is not so that you will simply be informed of the historicity of the church and of the factual basis for our past. I want you to know there is a Savior who died, who rose again and will come again and reign and this is for every single person who puts their trust in him.