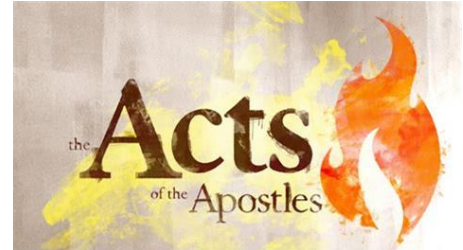


ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – Part 1

Jesus Leaves the Scene

Acts 1: 1-11

We begin a study of Acts, officially known as The Acts of the Apostles. Jesus is leaving the scene. In human, physical, “alive” terms he’s already left, at least the part of him that was human. He came as the God-Man, both 100% human and 100% Divine. It is impossible to fully fathom.



After his resurrection he hung around. Luke the Physician and likely Greek Gentile (or Hellenized Jew) provides this account:

To Theophilus, the lover of God. I write to you again, my dear friend, to give further details, about the life of our Lord Jesus and all the things that he did and taught. Just before he ascended into heaven, he left instructions for the apostles he had chosen by the Holy Spirit. After the sufferings of his cross, Jesus appeared alive many times to these same apostles over a forty-day period. Jesus proved to them with many convincing signs that he had been resurrected (Acts 1:1-3)

The Church Age would begin with a flourish but not before an eventful forty-day period that saw Jesus appear (post-resurrection) many times:

After the sufferings of his cross, Jesus appeared alive many times to these same apostles over a forty-day period, Jesus proved to them with many convincing signs that he had been resurrected (1:3).

Why was this important? The Pharisees were already at work seeking to disprove any notions that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, much less a supernatural being who could defeat death. For the Jesus movement to progress there had to be verifiable proof that Jesus had indeed gone from the cross, to the tomb, back to life, albeit in a different state.

It was also important for Jesus to have opportunity to teach the disciples a few final times the role they would soon play in the formation of the new church.

Over the forty-day span Jesus spoke exclusively to the rule of God. The central theme the disciples would take up and that of the new church would be the rule and reign of God in the present age.

It is important to note that Jesus did not center his teaching on individual salvation leading to an eternity in heaven, or a new political structure, or a removal of Rome from Jerusalem, or a resurgence of Israel to its former prominence. The “Jesus” Gospel called them and continues to call followers today to proclaim the rule and reign of God over heart, souls and minds. It is not a call to salvation as an end-all as it is a surrender to God’s reign in one’s life. This is (if you really take the time to think deeply about it) much more encompassing than just salvation, especially if you see salvation primarily as “hell insurance.”

This would be our totality. This would be thought, deed, intent, need and want. Salvation would be step one but so much more would follow.

In the online and most excellent series on the Gospel story, *The Chosen*, Jesus explains to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well that she would soon be able to worship God whenever and wherever she wishes. She scoffs and reminds him that it is Jews like him that refuse Samaritans like her entry into the Jerusalem Temple. He tells her that when the Messiah comes all will worship Him in *Spirit and Truth*.

This is what Jesus is telling the disciples and what all followers of Jesus should convey with their lives to the world. We need not make the Gospel more difficult than it was meant to be. To do so is to treat the Gospel as something other than the Gospel.

We have a tendency to make things more difficult, or at least a bit more cumbersome, than they need be, and often for less than noble reasons. Fast forward a bit and you will find the early church fighting about Gentile followers of Jesus being forced to become Jewish before officially becoming Christian. This is the *do this-do that and then you can join our club approach to religion*.

And Jesus died for this???

But let’s not get smug. It did not stop in the mid-late first century. We have been layering on *believe this, believe that and do this but don’t believe that* or you can’t

be part of our church for eons. Plus, certain mistakes, even big ones that were sins would disqualify people from being able to be part of a church.

Go back to the Samaritan woman at the well. She had been married to five men and the man she lived with at that time was not her husband. Her past was checkered. None of the village women would associate with her so she had to draw water in the middle of the day. Pure Jews would not allow a Samaritan to worship with them and a Samaritan would not allow her to worship in their temple. And what did Jesus say to her? “The time is coming when you will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth.”

Her. A sinful, many times married and now shacked-up and scorned woman who was not allowed to worship anywhere was told by the Hebrew Messiah and the Savior of the Whole Wide World that she would soon (actually, much sooner than she realized) worship God in Spirit and Truth.

Hang onto the whole Spirit and Truth and thing for a while. I have a feeling it will become our mantra over the course of this study, but another important element presents itself in the first chapter as well.

In verse 3b Luke writes:

During these encounters, he taught them the truths of God’s kingdom realm and shared meals with them. Jesus instructed them, “Don’t leave Jerusalem, but wait here until you receive the gift I told you about, the gift the Father has promised. For John baptized you in water, but in a few days from now you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit!”

So they responded: *OK, We will wait patiently. Yessir, we will sit tight in Jerusalem and wait patiently on the gift of the Holy Spirit. You betcha. Right Guys? Uh, what’s the Holy Spirit, again?*

Nope. Verse 6: *Every time they were gathered together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is it the time now for you to free Israel and restore our Kingdom?”* They were yearning for the days of old, when things were comfortable and safe. They wanted to go in reverse to a time when Israel was the true center of the universe, or so they imagined. Jesus had been redefining the God’s Kingdom for years in word and deed, but they had not yet experienced Pentecost (or the soon to come gift of the Holy Spirit) so he gave them a straight answer (for once): *“The Father is*

the one who sets the fixed dates and the times of their fulfillment. You are not permitted to know the timing of all that he has prepared by his own authority (v.7)”

Two things here: First, wait. Stay in Jerusalem and wait. Don't ask a lot of questions, just wait. You wouldn't understand the answers anyway, not right now, so just wait. One day you will, but not now. So, wait. Chill. Trust me. Wait.

And second, it's all about the future, it's not about the past. Israel's past did not have to be her future. The Samaritan woman's past did not have to be her future and it wasn't. The disciple's past did not have to be their future and soon it would not be. No one's past has to be their future. That is the essence of the Gospel.

This is the Gospel, and we will see that play out as our study continues.

Amen and Amen.

Dr. Michael McCullar
Formations Pastor
Johns Creek Baptist Church