



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"The First 40 Days" Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"

Acts 1:1-5

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Acts 1:1-5 *Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven*

(New International Version)

¹In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with ^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 1:5](#) Or in

Introduction.

Whenever a newly-elected president of our country takes office, journalists and historians, as well as political advisors, are poised to analyze the first 100 days of his/her term in office. Have you ever wondered where that measurement of a president's effectiveness came from? It dates back to 1933 and Franklin D. Roosevelt. The country was in the middle of the Great Depression. The nation was in crisis, and everyone, including the Congress, was looking to FDR to provide leadership.

As a result, during the first 100 days of his term of office, he sent bill after bill to Congress, which they passed, and he proposed a sweeping program to bring recovery to business and agriculture, relief to the unemployed, and reform to government. The end product of these 100 days is what we now call The New Deal. Ever since then, every President is evaluated on what he/she can accomplish in their first 100 days in office. My point is that first few days of a leader's tenure are critically important.

This morning we look at a passage of Scripture which talks about the first 40 days in office of Jesus Christ as the risen Lord. As we shall see, even though Christ had less than half the time, He accomplished far more than FDR and all the Presidents put together ever did. In His first 40 days, our Lord prepared His followers for The Way of the Spirit! That's what we here to talk about this morning.

As we begin our study of the book of Acts this year, I want to talk about three matters: the 2 books of Dr. Luke; the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ; and the missional nature of the early church.

I. The Two Books of Dr. Luke.

The book of Acts is actually the 2nd book of a two-volume history written by Luke the physician, who was a missionary colleague of the apostle Paul. There is a gospel that bears his name, and most scholars believe that originally Luke and Acts were actually one book. However, after the other three gospels were written (Matthew, Mark, and John), the gospel Luke was separated from the book of Acts and gathered into a collection of the four gospels which circulated together. In this way the book of Acts gained its own notoriety as a record of the early church. You'll note that both books are written to a man named Theophilus.

While the text does not say specifically that Luke wrote the book of Acts, it is universally agreed by scholars he did. As far back as 120 AD and throughout the centuries evidence has supported Luke as the author. From what we gather, he was not a personal companion of Jesus before His crucifixion, and apparently (from



Colossians 4:1f) he was a Gentile convert to Christianity. Some have suggested he was the brother of Titus to whom Paul writes one of his letters, but we really don't know for sure. What we do know is that he was a physician with a great eye for detail and historical accuracy.

Luke is applauded by scholars as being a great historian. He had good sources (many of them eye witness accounts), and he used them well. He is the only NT writer who so much as mentions a Roman emperor's name, and his pages are filled with references to provincial governors and kings tying the events about which he writes to a particular historical time which can be verified in secular sources. Luke didn't have the benefit of access to a library or Google on the internet. He had to do the hard work of original research, and his record is nothing short of remarkable.

The book of Acts opens in the city of Jerusalem with the apostle Peter holding center stage after the ascension of Christ. However, it closes in the city of Rome, and the focus of attention shifts to the apostle Paul. Along the way is a tale of how God turned a band of timid, cowering disciples into bold proclaimers of the truth of the Gospel, and in the power of the Holy Spirit these people turned the world upside down.

II. The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ.

In verses 1,2, Luke begins the book by saying, *"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen."* The implication is that what Luke will write in this 2nd volume is about all that Jesus *continued* to do and teach, now through His disciples and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is easy for us to regard the Gospel of Luke as the story of Jesus and Acts simply as the story of the church.

However, that is not how Luke wants us to view his books. Rather, He sees the two works as an organic whole. He views the Gospel of Luke as a record of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the book of Acts as a record of the heavenly ministry of Jesus, now exercised by the power of His Holy Spirit through the apostles He chose and commissioned. Traditionally, the book has been called The Acts of the Apostles, but we may rightly call it The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Ministry of His Church.

John Stott has written¹ these first two verses in chapter 1 are extremely significant. It is not an exaggeration to say they set Christianity apart from all other world religions. The other religions of the world regard their founder as having completed his earthly ministry during his lifetime; Luke is the only one who says Jesus *began* His. It is true that Christ finished His ministry of the atonement on the cross, but that end was also a beginning. After His resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the Spirit (about which we will read next week), Jesus continued His work through the apostles and subsequently through the Church in every age and every place. The Jesus you and I believe in today is both the historical Jesus who lived and the resurrected Christ who continues to reign. The Jesus of history began His ministry on earth; the Christ of glory has been active through His Spirit ever since, and He will continue to be until the end of history.

Do you realize that you are an extension of the ministry of Jesus Christ and what you do reflects upon the Lord for good or for ill, just like the apostles? Are you conscious of the fact that in some measure people will judge Christianity by the way you and I live our lives on a daily basis? Do you know that when you hurt a brother or sister in Christ, you are hurting Jesus? And when you help the little ones of the world, you are ministering to Christ Himself. There is an organic union between Christ and His Church.

III. The Missional Nature of the Early Church.

Next week we will study the rest of this opening section of Acts 1, and we'll read in detail the final marching orders Jesus gave His disciples before He was taken up into heaven. Today we'll discuss the first part of His command in which Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit about which they had heard Him speak before. During the first 40 days of the reign of Christ and the Kingdom of God, Jesus set the stage for all that would follow, and He prepared His followers to carry on the ministry, which He inaugurated.



I think it is interesting to note the four stages of development Christ provided in His school of discipleship for the earliest members of the Church during those 40 days. Luke references them here.ⁱⁱ **First, Jesus chose them** (v. 2). None of the apostles were self-appointed; they were chosen by Christ Himself. We read about this in Luke 6 where Jesus appointed the 12 to be His disciples. However, most scholars believe that in this passage in Acts 1, Jesus is addressing more than just the original 12 disciples (or really 11, minus Judas). He is perhaps talking to the 500 to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection, which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus reminds them He chose them.

Most of us think we made a decision to follow Jesus. Some can even point to a day and an hour. For me it was at a youth conference in North Carolina in 1969. However, the longer I have lived as a Christian and the more I have come to know the Lord, the more I realize now that, while my will and mind were at work when I made a decision to give my life to Christ, it was Jesus who chose me and gave Himself for me. The fingerprints of God are all over my life; they are unmistakable. And I have come to see the truth of what Jesus said when told His disciples, *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last”* (Jn. 15:16). Christ is the one who chooses us for Himself. Look back over your life. Do you see the fingerprints of God all over it and the ways He called you to Himself? Hold up your hand, and think of five ways, one for each finger, in which God’s fingerprints have been on your life. Can you trace His faithfulness?

Second, Jesus showed Himself to them. These disciples were unique eye-witnesses to the reality of the resurrection. Jesus gave them many convincing proofs that He was alive, and these continued over a period of 40 days. Christ was no ghost or apparition. We read here and elsewhere in the Bible where He ate with the disciples (v. 4, see also Lk. 24:41-45 and Jn. 21:10) and that at least on one occasion the Lord invited them to touch the wounds in his hands and side to verify that it really was Him (John 20:24-31). Christ presented Himself to their senses, their eyes, their ears, and their hands. They could see and touch the risen Lord for themselves.

Third, Jesus commissioned them. In addition to speaking about the Kingdom of God and coming the Holy Spirit, Christ gave His disciples certain instructions (v. 2) regarding the proclamation of the gospel. Elsewhere in Matthew 28 we read the extent of this commission where our Lord told His followers that they were to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching everything Christ had commanded them and He would be with them always. It was a comprehensive commission of global proportion.

Finally, Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit. In the Upper Room, according to John, Jesus had already promised them that the Spirit of truth would both remind them of what He had taught and supplement it with other insights (Jn. 14:26; 16:12ff.). Now Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the promised gift of that same Spirit had been received. Not until God fulfilled His promise to pour out His Holy Spirit would they be able to accomplish their mission. It was only as the Spirit of God lived inside them would they have what they needed to turn the world upside down.

It is clear from these words that the early church was to be a missional church. The disciples understood from the lips of Jesus that the Good News of God’s salvation was not a message they could keep for themselves, and the church would not be an institution that existed solely for its own members. Rather, it was to be a living organism which had as its prime directive the extension of the Kingdom of God and the proclamation of the Good News of His love to a lost and broken world. You and I have been given this same mandate, and we are called to be a missional people, too.

Conclusion.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus stayed only 40 days after His resurrection to set the stage for all that was to follow? Why only 40 days? Why not a month, or a year? Have you ever noticed that 40 days is a rather significant timeframe in the Bible.

- In Genesis the flood that destroyed the world was caused by rain that fell on the earth 40 days and 40 nights.



- The young nation of Israel was taunted by Goliath for 40 days, and they shook in fear before the giant (1Sam. 17).
- Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai meeting with God and receiving the 10 Commandments.
- Christ spent 40 days in the wilderness after His baptism and was tempted by the evil one (Lk. 4).
- These 40 days the disciples spent with Jesus changed their lives.

However, when all is said and done, it's not the time with Jesus that transforms lives. It's the power of the Holy Spirit. Even these 40 days with Christ would accomplish little apart from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is only as we are tapped into the source of divine power of God that you and I can meet the challenges life sends our way.

There is a song on the radio by the Christian band Switchfoot with a chorus that hammers my soul: "This is your life – are you who you want to be?" That's a question that haunts me. Am I who I want to be? The answer is no. Too often I'm just surviving in life, not thriving, but Jesus said He came that we might have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10). Why don't you and I experience more of that abundant life He promised?

As a pastor for almost 30 years, I've had a first-hand look at the lives of people, and what I have found is a gaping chasm between the faith that people talk about and what they actually experience. I have found a large disparity between what people think life can be and what it actually is. And I believe the reason is because we haven't really learned either the Way of Jesus or the Way of the Spirit, and we fail to tap into the abundant spiritual resources God has to offer us through His Son. In the course of these next months as we study the Book of Acts, I hope we gain more insight into how this actually works and begin to experience a transformation unlike we've ever known. Will you join me in this study? Will you be here every Sunday you're in town to dig deep into these mysteries? I hope you will.

I close with this. There was once a large wood-frame hotel built in Florida at the turn of the previous century. The hotel was made out of beautiful Florida pine from the panhandle of the state, and just one match in the wrong place would create the largest pile of Florida pine ashes in the world. So the engineers designed and installed a very expensive and elaborate sprinkler system to protect the building. It was state-of-the-art for the time. Tragically, however, a fire swept through the hotel and burned it to the ground. It was discovered afterward that the sprinkler system, as wonderful as it was, had never been connected to a water source.ⁱⁱⁱ

Are you tied to the source? Are you plugged into the Holy Spirit? Are you dependent on God to give you the strength you need this fall? May we be faithful to heed the call of God and be plugged into the Way of the Spirit and discover the life He offers which can turn our world upside down. Amen.

ⁱ John R.W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts*, p.34.

ⁱⁱ These are adapted from John Stott in his book pp. 35,36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from Steve Brown in his book *Jumping Hurdles*, p. 145.

