

Text: Acts 1.1-11
St Stephen's

September 2, 2007
Sunday Message Outline

All that Jesus Continues to Do

Intro to the Book of Acts

To introduce the Book of Acts, I want to **go back to the Gospel of Luke**, because Acts was written by Luke, part of a two-book series Luke wrote on the origins of Christianity.

Together, Luke and Acts form ¼ of the NT. We are looking at Luke's introduction to his Gospel, which is really his introduction to his two-volume work of Luke and Acts...

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Luke 1:1-4 (RSV)

- **Who was Luke?** An educated man, a doctor, a traveling companion of St Paul, and a Gentile - the only gentile author of any of the books of the NT. He became a remarkable **historian** and **theologian** and **evangelist** through his written works. The sources for his works included the other Gospels (esp Mark), information gathered from his own '*careful investigations*' and '*eyewitnesses*' during a two year stay in Palestine, information gathered from St Paul during their travels together, and his own personal experiences on mission trips with Paul.
- **Who did he write to?** Both Luke and Acts were addressed to a man named '*Theophilus*', an unknown person, perhaps a Roman noble ('most excellent'), but also perhaps a pseudonym for all people, because '*Theophilus*' literally means 'loved by God', and that's who we are.

- **Why did he write his two volume work?** that you may know the truth
- **Why do I want us to spend the better part of the next nine months going through the Book of Acts?** Because Luke wanted us to **be clear**, to **be certain** about some very important things. He wanted us to be clear about the gospel. About the Christian faith. About the truth. About what God is doing in the world. About why we are here, and why God has loved us in the extravagant way he does.

And this is important this year, to be clear. Because our church is going to come under a **lot of pressure** this year. Our denomination is going to be challenged, and a lot of us think it is going to fracture, and this congregation – which is a **leadership congregation** in this diocese, a parish for decades committed to serving the gospel – we are going to **be challenged** like we never have before to stand tall for the gospel. We may very well **be persecuted**. We might have to **suffer** for what we believe.

And so we need to be **clear about the basics**. About the essentials. About what really matters. So that's why Luke wrote and that's why we are going to spend a lot of time studying and looking - that you may know the truth

Let's look now at the first verses of the Book of Acts...

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Acts 1:1-2 (RSV)

Many people think Luke's **Gospel** is **about Jesus** and **Acts** is **about the apostles and the church**. That the **Gospel** is about Jesus from his birth through his years of ministry to his death on the cross and his resurrection. **Acts**, then, picks up with the Ascension of Jesus and the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost, following the ministry of the

Apostles all the way to Rome and beyond over a period of some thirty years. So, the thinking goes, **Luke is about what Jesus did and Acts is about what his followers did.** This is true, but it is not a fair summary, and it actually creates a big problem when we think like this.

Here's the problem. We think, 'The Gospel is about **what Jesus did 2000 years ago**, and the Christian faith is about **what we do today** in response.'

But that is **a misunderstanding** of the gospel, and if you think that way you will **empty the gospel of its power.** And it is **not how Luke himself sees it**, and he wants us to be clear about this.

Luke's perspective comes in the little phrase in verse 1 (I have it underlined on the screen), '*all that Jesus began to do and teach*'. That, Luke says, was the subject of **his 'first book'**, his gospel.

But here is his corollary: the implication is that his second book, **Acts**, is all about **what Jesus continues to do and teach.**

The Gospel of Luke is about **what Jesus did** and taught during his ministry on earth. Acts is about **what Jesus continues to do** and teach during his ministry from heaven. **Both are about Jesus - what Jesus did and does**, to this very day.

Let me put it this way: **Christianity is about what Jesus has done.** And it is about **what he continues to do.** The Gospel is about Jesus. Not about me or you, but about Jesus.

Let me say it another way. **The greatest factor** in your life with God is not your past, but Christ's past. Not your present, but Christ's presence. Not your future, but Christ's future. That is **the Resurrection Result.** Not your thoughts, but Christ's words. Not your failure but Christ's forgiveness. Not your weakness, but Christ's strength. **He towers over** any challenge, any circumstance, any suffering, any failure. Right here. Right now.

When that Resurrection Result comes over you **it reshapes** how you think about yourself, what you dream about, what you hope for, what you remember, and how you face your life.

This Resurrection factor is the theme of the book of Acts.

What do you expect when you come to church? What do you expect when you gather in your **small group**? What do you expect when you join **a ministry team**? What do you expect when you come to one of our **education seminars**? I want to remind you that Christianity is **about what Jesus continues to do and teach!** He is alive, ascended, to carry on what he started, to finish what he began.

Every founder of every other religion has finished his work and died. His deeds are all done. His words are completed. Buddah. Socrates. Mohammed. Moses. But not Jesus. The Gospels are about what he did during his days on earth. Acts is about **what he did in the past during his years on earth and does in the present from where he lives in heaven.**

Jesus ascends to his Father, not to get away from us, but to get to us, to send his Spirit to live inside us! We will see again and again in the book of Acts that **his deeds of mercy and his words of truth have present power.** That his **suffering** on the cross and his **resurrection** from the dead **have present power.** Are a present reality. Not just a distant memory, because he is alive and risen.

Michael Vick apology...

To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 (RSV)

Look at the phrase, "*many proofs.*" And he had to do this, so that you

could be certain, clear, convinced.

1. You cannot receive the resurrection power of Jesus without believing that these are facts, and are true for everyone.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be clear about his resurrection, so he gave them '*many proofs*' over a period of 40 days. He appeared and appeared and appeared to them again. He taught them extensively during those days. Ate with them. Drank with them. They touched him, walked with him, saw him – again and again. He wanted them to be certain. Because they were going to face challenging times, tough times in their mission to the world. God wants you to be certain.

This is not just a good story, made up by some ancient creative writing team. These things happened. God did them. It really happened **the way Luke said it** happened. That is why he does such **painstaking investigation**, such **careful history**. Because these things really happened and are faithfully recorded, you can **bet your life** on this gospel, on this Jesus, no matter what you are facing, no matter what your mood or circumstance or danger.

2. You cannot receive the awakening power of Jesus unless you believe that these things happened, and are true for you.

Which means you have come to **believe it**, this gospel, and you have come to **trust him**, this Jesus. It brings you to the place where... **The greatest factor** in your life with God is not your past, but Christ's past. Not your present, but Christ's presence. Not your future, but Christ's future. **He towers over** any challenge, any circumstance, any suffering, any failure. Right here. Right now.

Let me say it again: **Christianity is about what Jesus has done**, and it is about **what he continues to do. Right here. Right now. In your life. Everywhere you go, every day you live.**

You are going to love the book of Acts.