



to the ENDS of the EARTH

Studies in the Book of Acts

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Acts 1 | September 11, 2016

Prepared by Rev. Curtis A. Bronzan
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This week we begin a series in the Book of Acts we're calling To the Ends of the Earth. The title comes from a statement of the Resurrected Jesus to his earliest followers in Acts 1.8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And, in a way, this statement forms a basic outline of the book.

Warren Wiersbe writes of Acts, "Imagine how confused you would be if, in reading your New Testament, you turned the last page of the Gospel of John and discovered - Romans! 'How did the church get to Rome?' you would ask yourself; the answer is found in the Book of Acts." In other words, Acts provides the historical bridge between the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to the flourishing Christian churches throughout the ancient world.

So, over the next 19 weeks, we'll explore together how the gospel went to the ends of the earth in the 1st century, so we can become better equipped to continue that work in the 21st century, too!

II. Connecting with One Another

When have you had to wait? Did your patience pay off?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Acts 1.1-3.

At the outset of Acts, its author, Luke, refers to his "former book" which detailed all Jesus "began to do and teach." This theme of the Risen Jesus continuing to act and teach will continue in Acts 2.47, 9.34, 14.3, 16.14, and 18.10.

Turn to Luke 1.1-4 to read Luke's reason for writing these two accounts. What do you learn about Luke's research methods for these two volumes? Why is it important?

b. The recipient of Luke's research is Theophilus, which meant either "one who loves God" or "one whom God loves" (not a bad name, huh!?). In a way, however, this book isn't just written to one Theophilus - we are all Theophiluses!

How do you best receive God's love? How do you demonstrate your love for God?

c. Verse 3 tells us that the Risen Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom of God for forty days, similar to Moses on the mountain in Exodus 24.12-18 (referenced again in 1.22 and 10.41-42, see also 1st Corinthians 15). Spend some time looking through different passages about the Kingdom of God in the gospel accounts (use of

concordance or biblegateway.com is encouraged!), then try explaining it in your own words.

If you're meeting in a group, spend a few minutes sharing your personal perspectives of the Kingdom of God.

d. Read Acts 1.4-5.

Have you noticed in Luke's writing how important things usually happen while eating? He must have been a Presbyterian!

Similar to Luke 24.49, Jesus instructs his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Read through Matthew 3.11-17, Luke 1.26-45, John 14.15-27, and 16.12-15. If the Holy Spirit was already at work in Jesus' ministry, why do you think he instructs his disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive the Spirit?

e. Read Acts 1.6-8.

The disciples' question to Jesus was understandable, but misguided nonetheless. John Calvin once said "There are as many errors in this question as words." John Stott explains:

The verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. For the verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment. (examples of each can be found in Luke 24.21, Isaiah 2.2-3 and Matthew 24.14, respectively)

Where do you see this understandable but misguided question come up in Christian faith today? In other words, how can Christians in our culture envision the Kingdom of God in a political, nationalistic, and/or instantaneous manner?

Why are these perspectives problematic? What's the trouble with viewing the Kingdom in these ways?

f. If, then, the Kingdom of God is *spiritual in character, international in membership, and gradual in expansion...*

- How have you seen it "transform the lives and values of its citizens"?
- How have you seen it bring together people from all cultures?
- How have you seen it continually grow throughout time and space?

g. In verse 8, Jesus assures his earliest followers that they would "receive power" when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

How do you understand this phrase? What do you think it meant to "receive power"?

h. Immediately after discussing the power they'd receive from the Holy Spirit, Jesus tells them "you will be my witnesses." It prompts images of courtrooms, and for good reason; these earliest followers were to go into the world, telling all they had known of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. One author writes, "To be a witness is to speak from personal knowledge of facts and their significance. The apostles, as eyewitnesses

of the saving events, were witnesses in a unique sense" (notice, for instance, the requirement to replace Judas in Acts 1.21-22).

Interestingly, though, the Greek word used for *witnesses* is "martus," where we get our word for "martyr." In other words, these witnesses were called to not only share the facts of what they knew, they were called to give their lives to take the gospel to "the ends of the earth"!

How are you a martus - witnessing and giving your life for the Kingdom of God?

What "ends of the earth" has God called you to?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up this series and all the Covenant Partners of Good Shepherd - that together we would each be equipped for taking the gospel to the ends of the earth where God has called us,
- b. Pray for the many children and youth returning to school this fall - that God would surround them with Godly friends and teachers, and protect them by the power of His Spirit,
- c. Ask God to give you boldness in living for Him as a *martus*, and that you would rely upon the Spirit's guidance for sharing your faith in Jesus.

Weekly Reading Schedule Continue to meditate on these passages through the week!

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Monday, September 12th | Isaiah 49.1-6 |
| Tuesday, September 13th | Acts 1.1-11 |
| Wednesday, September 14th | John 14.15-27 |
| Thursday, September 15th | Acts 1.12-26 |
| Friday, September 16th | Acts 2.1-13 |