

Introduction

History textbooks are a funny thing - they are never truly completed. These are my textbooks from college for American History. Two volumes covering the initial colonies to 1991. Although the publisher stopped with this edition, that doesn't mean that the story of our nation is done. Quite the opposite, really. I figure we could write another 700 or so pages just on the past 27 years alone considering all that has happened since 1991. History is never done because new chapters are written every single day. Just because the book is finished it doesn't mean that the story is done.

This is the mindset we need to approach the book of Acts. When we finished Luke's gospel back in May, it didn't mean that the story of God's Kingdom was done. In fact, it won't be done when we finish Acts. I'm going to say something that might strike you as odd, but I don't believe that the history of God's Kingdom will ever be fully written because it is an everlasting Kingdom. Consider Daniel 7:27 which tells us that "his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."

The temptation is to see Acts as the sequel of sorts to Luke's Gospel. And I want to dispel that notion. It is not a sequel but rather a second volume that helps us to see the implications of the gospel and how it motivated the earliest followers of Jesus to participate in the unfolding work of God's Kingdom coming to earth. It is the continuing reminder of the good news that through Christ God is making all things new both personally for those who repent and believe and universally as He redeems all things from its bondage to futility. What did Luke want Theophilus to know and by extension, all lovers of God to know as well.

The King Conquered (v.1-3)

When we approach a new portion of Scripture, we do well to pause and ask ourselves a few questions. Who wrote the piece? Why did they write it? Who is the intended audience and who are the primary actors in the narrative? These questions help us to interpret the text properly. As we look at this book, Luke does a great job of setting the scene for us and helping us to understand what is his purpose in writing this book.

In the very first verse, we see a similar introduction to Theophilus that should remind us of Luke 1:3

Luke 1:3 ESV- ... 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,

Now we look at our text today and we see in 1:1 that Luke reminds both Theophilus and other readers of his first book. We know that Luke wants the reader to know this is a continuation of his first work about Jesus who came as Messiah to defeat sin and the grave. This idea of Messiah or King is woven throughout both Luke's Gospel and his history of the early church we call Acts. We see in verse 3 the mention of the Kingdom of God and then we look at the end of the book and Acts 28:31 we see that term Kingdom of God again.

Acts 28:31 ESV - proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

This phrase appears 38 times between the two books. Luke weaves this idea of throughout both books. Along with that is the reminder of the King who came and conquered. Luke takes us back to his gospel work where we meet King Jesus and introduces the reader to His Kingdom. And in case you missed the end of the story in Luke's Gospel, he reminds us now that Jesus is alive and presented himself to the disciples.

Friends, we need to remember that the Gospel isn't good news unless it involves Jesus Christ both crucified AND risen. Both buried and resurrected. The fact that He died shows us he conquered sin and the empty tomb reminds us that He has defeated the grave as well. The gospel isn't good news unless it involves both. Luke makes that abundantly clear. Jesus is the conquering King who defeated death and the grave.

Each of our points today leads us to a key theme of this book. One of these themes, as one commentator puts it is that, "Jesus as the Lord, Christ, or judge of the living and the dead who offers forgiveness to those who turn to him in faith and repentance."¹ That same commentator also says that to understand who Luke says Jesus is in Acts is to see "Jesus' vindicated and exalted position, which has him ministering from God's side as Savior, Christ and Lord."¹ As we study and learn from this book, we need to keep in mind his overarching theme of King and Kingdom that we first saw in his Gospel and now see in this book as well.

The King Clarified (v. 3-11)

Do you ever feel like you just don't fully get that truth? Don't feel bad - neither did the disciples. They had lived with Jesus for three years, sat under his teaching for that time, saw his resurrection, taught them off and on for 40 more days, clarifying his teaching and they still asked him as we read in verse 6 "Now is it time?" The disciples still viewed the coming of God's Kingdom as a strictly Jewish thing for the Jewish nation. As such, they assumed that now is the time for God's Kingdom to come, that it would boot out Rome, that Jesus would take the throne and the Kingdom would be restore. However, they make two vital errors. They assume they know when something will happen and they assume they know God's plan for the nations.

First, they thought that they knew the signs and the seasons and could determine the timing of the consummation of God's Kingdom. Jesus clarifies that only the Father knows the times and the seasons. Just a few weeks ago, we saw a lunar eclipse and a "blood moon" that some said is a sign of the end. I can't speak for all of you, but as far as I know, the world didn't end. Some days it feels like it, but it's still chugging along. Jesus very clearly is telling us in this passage that it is not up to us to know WHEN the kingdom comes. Our job isn't to predict when the end comes. Our job involves the second thing that Jesus clarifies.

The angels make it abundantly clear that we are not to spend our time, looking to the clouds, waiting for Jesus. We have a job to do. We cannot simply stand around looking for Jesus we need to be his witnesses in the entire world. My prayer for this church is that when Jesus does come, whether in our lifetimes or in another, that he would find this church doing her job rather than simply waiting for him. The church isn't a waiting room for heaven - it's a command center for the advancement of God's Kingdom into this community.

Jesus reminds us that that the Father has bigger plans than just saving one nation. He plans to save people from EVERY tribe and tongue and nation. In God's Kingdom there will be Jew and Gentile alike all equal and all worshipping Jesus. The truth is that it is because of God's promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations would be blessed, we get to partake of the great blessings of the gospel. Because the gospel isn't just for one nation - it's for EVERYONE! That is good news for anyone who hears it!

By saying that the job of the disciples - and I would contend that it is our job as

well - is to be witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, Jesus is telling them to be his witnesses in greater and more broad areas. It starts with our own city or town, then outward to our state or region. Then, Jesus reminds us that we are to reach those who are not like us but are nearby - that's who the Samaritans were in their day. Finally, we are to help take this message to the end of the earth. However, our job isn't to guess when the end comes but to tell others the gospel message that Jesus died and rose again so they can have their sins forgiven.

Finally, Jesus reminds them that all of this isn't done on their own. The helper - the Holy Spirit - will give them the power to do this work and they are not to start on the work until they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The power and strength to do this work wasn't their own and it's not our own. Instead, the power and strength to do these things are a gift from God. He is the one who empowers us for the unfinished task of taking the gospel to the nations.

Don't misunderstand - we still long for the return of Christ and the consummation of the Kingdom. But, we don't stand around on a hillside with our hands in the air wishing and hoping that Jesus comes today. Our blessed hope is that one day we will see our beloved savior face to face. No, that's not the issue. The issue is how will we spend our time while we wait either for the return of Christ or our own time on this earth to be up. This passage today reminds us that we are to be working witnesses, spreading the fame of Jesus to all we meet rather than sitting around waiting for his return.

This is a key theme of this book, that we have a mighty God who has a plan to redeem the lost. His purpose isn't just to restore A nation to sovereignty, but to restore ALL the nations not to sovereignty but to relationship with the Father. The plan and a purpose from the beginning wasn't JUST to redeem Israel, but to redeem people from every tribe, tongue and nation who would turn in humble repentance. We see in this that we have a sovereign King who will exercise this sovereignty over all the earth.

The Disciples Communed (v. 12-14)

There is one last major theme in the Book of Acts that shows itself to us in our first text - how did the earliest disciples react to all that Jesus taught and did? How did their lives change as a result of everything that happened. Moreover, after Jesus had clarified things for 40 days and then returned to his throne, the disciples

needed to figure this out. How would they respond to the life and work of Jesus Christ?

Simply put, Acts not only reminds us that Jesus is our Savior King, the promised Messiah, who came to teach, preach and pay for the sins of all who would trust in Him, but Luke goes to great lengths to show us how the early community of Christ-followers behaved - and by extension, he shows us how we should behave today as well as the church, the bride of our King. If we want to know how the church is to behave, there is no better way for us to learn than for us to prayerfully study and consider the actions of those who were the first generation after Christ's ministry here on earth.

So, how did these early Christians behave? In short, we see the beginning of the community of Christ-followers acting like they should. They obeyed Christ's command from 1:4 and returned to Jerusalem. They devoted themselves to prayer as they saw Jesus do throughout his time on earth. They were of one accord, we read in verse 14, united together. Friends, they were a church! They were together, prayerfully obeying the instructions of Jesus to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They became the church. They were changed. They communed with God and with each other.

We don't use the word "communed" often in our language today. At its heart, commune means to "communicate intimately". It also carries with it the idea of communion - or as we oft call it *The Lord's Table*. In this text, we see the disciples were communicating so well that they were of one accord. That same verse says they were committed to prayer, thus communicating intimately with God almighty. When you consider that scholars believe that the Upper Room they returned to was THE Upper Room, the site of the Last Supper, it takes on even greater significance.

However, there is another meaning of this word, with a slight change of pronunciation. When we move the emphasis on the first part, COMMune rather than comMUNE, we are reminded that this is the birth of gospel-centered community. A commune is a group of people who live and work together, sharing possessions and responsibilities. That, as we will see in the weeks to come, is exactly what happens with the disciples and all those whom God adds to their numbers.

Now, don't misunderstand. I'm not calling us to all come live here at the church or

in some field like a bunch of hippies from the 1970's. Nevertheless, what I believe this text is calling us to is a different sort of church than what most in America have come to expect. It is a church that is unified around the Gospel, deeply dependent upon God in prayer and, as we will see, one that makes a radical difference in the world through the proclamation of the gospel.

The early church makes us uncomfortable at times because it calls us to a lifestyle that is completely counter to what our culture calls us to. It calls us not to individuality but to deep community with God and with each other. It calls us to a different way of looking at everything because Jesus' life, death and resurrection changes everything. When we truly understand not only what Jesus calls us to but what the Holy Spirit empowers us to do, we suddenly realize that salvation, the church and our lives aren't merely a holding pattern until we go to Heaven, but everything exists to spread the fame of the name of Jesus Christ in the hope that more people will turn from self and trust in Christ. But this lifestyle is impossible unless we follow the example of the disciples who, after seeing the King conquer the grave and receiving his clarifying teaching, knew they needed to commune with each other and with God in humble fellowship.

Conclusion

Your Bible may have this book entitled "The Acts of the Apostles". And that is true to an extent. We read this book and we marvel at what these early followers of Christ did to turn the world upside down. We become awestruck because of what they did. But the true hero of this story isn't Peter, Paul or Luke. It's not Stephen or anyone else. The hero of this story is the triune God. Jesus as King is the hero because it is His sacrifice that motivates the early church to action. The hero of this story is the Holy Spirit who empowers the first followers of Jesus to action in their neighborhoods to the end of the earth. The hero of this story is God.

And the good news for each one of us is that this same God who conquered death with Jesus is the same God we worship today. The same Jesus who clarified the promises of God and who ascended into Heaven remains there interceding on our behalf and instructing us through His Word. The same Holy Spirit that we will read about in a couple of weeks is the same Holy Spirit empowering us for life and mission today. In other words, the same God who worked through the disciples is the same God who works today in us and through us.

If there is anything that Acts teaches us it's that the work and calling of the

Kingdom of God did not end on Easter Sunday. It did not end with the ending of Luke's Gospel and the ascension of Christ. No, the end has not yet come. Acts teaches us that the Holy Spirit is still active and working in leading people to repentance and he is calling the church to join with him in that effort. The history of the Kingdom of God is still being written because it is not yet complete. God's story is not yet complete. Acts teaches us that God invites ordinary men and women like us to join Him in His yet unfinished yet extraordinary work. Whether you need to join him through trusting in his sacrifice for the first time today or a recommitment to the unfinished task that lies before us, will you join with God today?

Let's Pray.