

## **The First 50 Days: Acts 1:1-5; John 16:4-13**

Portions adapted from "Like Ripples in a Pond," by Rick Burdette at SermonCentral.Com

On this third Sunday after Easter, now 2,000 years later, our confident message remains the same: **Jesus is Alive!**

Our confidence remains because of what Jesus did in those first 50 days following his resurrection, and what he continues to do today through his Spirit filled people furthering God's kingdom come. Which is why I am excited to be looking into the Book of Acts with you this Spring, because that is what it is all about.

In our country there is much ado about how our President defines "mission" by his first 100 days in office. Trump has just passed that mark and people are still trying to figure out what he is up to. But what Jesus did in those first 50 days following his resurrection did clearly define both the mission of the Church and the power behind its success ever since then. So let's get started.

Most of your Bibles reveal that the title "Acts" which we commonly use is just a shortened version of its real title which is "The Acts of the Apostles." It is called such because this book outlines the work of the Apostles for another 36 years from the time of Jesus' death until the approximate deaths of Peter and Paul ... who left behind them growing churches throughout the Roman Empire.

Wouldn't it be strange not to have this portion of the church's story? Can you imagine going from the end of the Gospel of John to the start of the book of Romans without knowing what happened in between. This is what the book of Acts tells us. Thus perhaps its title might better be "***The Acts of the Risen Christ Working Through His Holy Spirit Empowered Church.***" And while that may be a rather long title, it is exactly what this book is about: that **Jesus is alive and still ministering in and through those whom He has saved and empowered for ministry.** In this way, the book of Acts forms the perfect continuation of the Gospels.

- In the Gospels the Son of Man offered us his life; in Acts the Son of God offers us His power.
- In the Gospels we see the seeds of Christianity planted; in Acts we see the vibrant growth of the church.
- The Gospels tell us of Christ crucified and risen in Jerusalem; Acts speaks of Christ now going to the ends of the earth
- The Gospels model the Christian life as lived by the perfect Man; Acts models it as lived out by imperfect men.

Most importantly, as we read through this book, we will learn that Jesus' ministry has never been accomplished solely through the energy and efforts of men and women. Jesus still must empower His people for the ministry He is continuing to do today.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves, so please return with me to a time just before the first 50 days after Jesus resurrection...to the night of Jesus' betrayal.

- He has shared the Passover meal with His disciples in the upper room.
- He has washed their feet as an example of what it looks like to be a servant.
- And it seems just before they head to the Garden for prayer...and eventually His arrest...Jesus once again tells them **He is "going away, and where He is going they cannot follow now...but that they would follow later."** (John 13:36).
- When Jesus tells Peter he will deny him, Peter argues with Him... saying "No way...I'd die for you."
- Jesus replies, "Peter, before the rooster crows you will have claimed to not know me...three times."

In this conversation Jesus is having with his disciples he is clearly saying "goodbye." They know it...you can feel it. But he is also preparing them for what will come next. Jesus intersperses his conversation with **a promise**...He says, "***I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth,***" (John 14:16 -17a).

Jesus further says, "*I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*" (John 14:25-26)

So Jesus is giving them a heads up about their future... that they didn't choose him, but he chose them to bear fruit (to tell his story to the whole world). And just as the world has hated Him...it will also hate them...but they should not lose heart for he has conquered the world.

One of the last things He tells them about the promised gift of the Holy Spirit is this:

***<sup>4</sup>I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me ...***

*"it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you ....*

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;"*

John 16:4-13

<sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: **it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you ....**

<sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:4-14, abbreviated).

I have said this to you,  
so that in me you may have peace.  
In the world you face persecution.  
But take courage;  
I have conquered the world!  
John 16:33

Powerful stuff, right?

To hear this foreboding warning from Jesus, but also to be promised help...

Which do you think was most on their minds were in this moment?

Surely, the foreboding warning..."I'm leaving."

It's like hearing someone say, "It'll be OK" in the midst of a circumstance filled with doubt and fear...It doesn't feel like it will be OK and to hear "*It is for your good that I'm going away*"...that's even harder!

And it was harder ... wasn't it?

What would follow would be an arrest, a scattering of the disciples in fear, crucifixion and burial; but then a glorious, victorious resurrection.

God always had a plan...and Jesus knew the spiritual partnership that he would soon make with all his followers—in a way that he could not while he stayed on earth--which he would initiate in the 50 days following His resurrection. **The coming of the Holy Spirit to reside within them would change His disciples forever...and their testimony would change the world...**

But that transformation was still to come so he gives them this command:

WAIT FOR WHAT MY FATHER PROMISED.

The book of Acts tells us that after His resurrection, for a period of 40 days, Jesus continued preparing his disciples for their future ministry: proving to well over 500 witnesses that he was truly alive, opening their minds to the Scriptures, helping them better understand this idea of how God's kingdom would come on the earth (something they still did not get until after the Holy Spirit came into their lives.

Then, near the end of 40 days, *he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. (Acts 1:5)*

Here is one of the best definitions of faith:

Faith is .... Waiting for what God has promised
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After Jesus resurrection, His disciples now had a hope, a vision, and a mission and they were rarin' to go! Let's get on with this kingdom building business ... but then Jesus tells them to **wait**.

Why wait?

Simply because, they had already proven what they could do in their own strength ... and their own understanding of God's plan.

In times of crises they had fled, hid, and denied even knowing him. In times of doubt they go back to fishing. And when Jesus commands them to wait, they ask "*How long?*" and "*When?*" "*Lord, are you going to restore the Kingdom of Israel now?*" Even now, after the resurrection, after 40 more days with Jesus, the plan they had for Israel and the Kingdom of God was far from what God had planned.

Jesus tells them: "*It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.*" (Acts 1:7-8)

Waiting on God's power and authority when we think we've got it all figured out is rather hard, isn't it? It's also rather surprising when He shows us that what His kingdom is to be about isn't anything like what we thought.

You see, even after 40 more days with Jesus, the disciples were still looking for an earthly kingdom..., one where they would get to rule. They've forgotten what Jesus had said about God's kingdom. *Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered,*

**"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed;**

nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

Luke 17:20-21

The Pharisees were a very religious people...and very religious people always focus on what you must do, how you measure up to "the standard." ... that's why most of them completely rejected Jesus as the Messiah... "I mean look at Him...He's a carpenter from Nazareth (the wrong side of the tracks) ...from poor parents...who hangs around with tax collectors and sinners."

Religion focuses on doing things so people can see how "religious" you are. But Jesus said, "*The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed.*" he told one of those Pharisees named Nicodemus "*No one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again...the Spirit gives birth to Spirit...*(Literally our spirit is born from above by God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit)).

And Jesus also described how the Holy Spirit was like the wind..."*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You can hear it, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it's going* ***so it is with EVERYONE born of the Spirit.***" (Jn. 3:3, 5-8)

This is the promise of power that the disciples were to wait to receive...you might say it was their spiritual birthing, and it remains to this day the only power that can truly transform our lives, our acts of worship.

Francis Chan in the book, *Forgotten God* writes:

"The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice." (Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*)

Listen to how this promised gift from the Father transformed Jesus' disciples, into the Apostles who would become the foundation stones of the church; His witnesses:

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.***

Acts 2:1-4

Remember Jesus' plan for them is to be His witnesses... they were to testify, to teach others all that He had taught them, all that they had seen. **And the Holy Spirit would help them not only remember all this, but also empower them to do it with a crowd from every nation under the sun gathered right outside their door.**

***"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."** (Acts 1:8)*

The Holy Spirit transformed these ambivalent confused fishermen into "A Biblically guided Christian Community: loving God, loving others, serving the world and growing disciples." ... and a joyous one at that!

Religion gives you a partnership with a book of rules and etiquette. Jesus promises a partnership with His Spirit. Religion is for restraint and control, but the Holy Spirit is for new birth, an empowered life, and joy!

Let me end with a personal experience. One I think is absolutely essential for the church to understand in these times...

### **Religion didn't save me. Jesus did.**

I was born and raised in the Presbyterian Church where I was baptized as an infant and confirmed as a member at the age of twelve. Yet this had made no difference in my life. Everyone in church, including me, assumed that's all it took. I now had my union card, what more did I need? **If you asked me if I were a Christian, I would answer "Certainly! I am a Presbyterian"** (whatever that was—I really didn't know at the time).

It wasn't until a teenage friend challenged my corporate idea of Christianity that I ever thought I needed anything more. He helped me realize that I needed to make my relationship with God real and personal; that I personally needed to trust Christ as MY Savior.

But the day I did make it real and personal, suddenly like never before I had a family (much larger than my physical family). I also now also had a purpose for my life, an eternal hope, and a mission to accomplish. I knew at age fourteen that I was going to be a pastor. But I still needed to grow a lot, because I was just a baby...so the Holy Spirit fed me and the Spirit brought amazing people into my life to strengthen and prepare me.

As a young Christian, I wanted to tell people this great news of God's love: my high school classmates, my friends, co-workers, my family. I once shared the Gospel with my entire gym class, and some thought I was crazy. Some still do. My enthusiasm earned me the high school nickname of "John 3:16 Salley" but Jesus saved me and filled me, and I was burdened for them. I still am.

I fear that what people hear our churches saying these days is, "become a Pharisee and show up at the temple each Sunday" instead of **be born again so your body becomes Jesus' temple.** The temple of God isn't here in Bedford Presbyterian Church. **The Temple of God is "within you."**

Francis Chan asks:

"If it's true that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that our bodies are the Holy Spirit's temple, then shouldn't there be a huge difference between the person who has the Spirit of God living inside of them and the person who does not?"

**We are made by God not to go to the temple...**

**but to be His temple...**

**in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the whole world!**

This all started on the day of Pentecost when as PROMISED the Holy Spirit came to live within.

Let's Pray.