

The Never Ending Story of Acts Acts 1:1-11

Adapted from: Living Acts Chapter 29, by Darrell Stetler @ SermonCentral.Com

“Turn to Acts 29, please. . .”

Couldn't find it, could you? Actually, it has not been written yet; or I should say, "*it's not there because you are still writing it.*" You see, this your portion of the story in that book of the Bible which is titled, "The Acts of the Apostles." I know. You have always assumed that there were only the twelve Apostles plus Paul. But remember that the word "apostle" literally means "sent one," and in that sense this story also, and has always included you and me. In fact we were specifically included in Paul's last remarks at the conclusion of his chapters in Acts. Let's take a look.

Acts 28 brings the account of Paul's travels up to the point of him having been arrested and brought as a prisoner to Rome where for two years he was allowed, at his own expense, to rent an apartment for himself and the soldier who was guarding him. And though he wore a chain around his wrist tethering him to the building, he freely preached the Gospel for those 2 years, to all who came to visit him. One day a large group of Jewish Rabbis came to question him about this new faith that he was preaching. Chapter 28 records that while some of them believed Paul, others refused to believe. And as the Rabbis' walked out of his house arguing over this matter, Paul's parting remark was, "***Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.***" (Acts 28:28)

And that is where we came in to the story. In the opening chapter of Acts, Jesus declared to all his disciples (not just the Apostles) that

you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the ends of the earth.**
Acts 1:8

And then at the close of the 28th chapter, Paul hands the baton to us...

this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen
Acts 28:28

So now the 29th and following chapters are for us to continue writing. Thankfully for Paul, neither was chapter 28 the end of his story. Church tradition tells us that after those 2 years, Paul was released and that he did go on his mission trip to Spain, before returning to Rome six-years later to again be arrested and finally beheaded by Nero.

And thus, while Paul's story has concluded, ours continues. The Acts Of The "Sent Ones" is a never ending story to which we are expected to be adding.

Metaphorically speaking, each day when we get up, we pick up a pen and paper, and we write the next sentence in chapter 29.

- What does our chapter say that we, the current "sent ones" have been up to?
- What adventures in the name of Christ have we experienced?
- Who has been listening to us declaring the Good News of *Jesus Christ, God's son, Savior* (ixthus)?
- Does what we are now adding to the story of the church look anything like the first 28 chapters of Acts?

Sadly many Christians, many churches, are no longer adding to the story of Acts. Instead, they are now slowly dwindling away as they hold their Sunday devotional meetings and only doing things the way they have always done them. When I first came to Bedford, one of my tasks as a Presbyterian pastor was to officially administrate the closing a small mountain church whose membership and energy had dwindled nothing. The Church property was purchased by a private individual and sat mostly vacant for several years until an Acts 29 pastor could be found to serve its Sunday pulpit. For 20 years previous and still continuing, the Rev. Keith Johnson has provided Sunday worship services at the Peaks of Otter campground, now he is doing both. And that little mountain church is beginning to live again. It was not its remote location that closed the little church but rather its lack of witness; it had stopped adding to the story of the "sent ones."

Along with this Church that I have now been privileged to pastor for 11 years – and have much better hopes for – I continue to supervise the Sessions of 2 other churches, who like that little mountain church have dwindled to just a few members and will someday soon officially close, because long ago they had ceased to add to the story of the Church that was begun here in the start of the "Book of Acts."

So this summer as we again explore some of the adventures of the early church – as recorded here in Acts – let us first remind ourselves of why we are still to be a continuing part of that story. This is how our story begins

*In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about **all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning** until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering **he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs**, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, 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.'*

*So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, '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 in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**'*

*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? **This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.**'*

From this beginning then, here are 5 lessons we need to remember if we are to continue on adding to the story of Acts:

1. We are the continuation of Jesus' ministry.

"all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning"

The story of Acts is how the disciples and the very first Church then carried on the ministry first begun by Jesus. They , and now we have in effect continued on where Jesus left off. Or, to phrase it more accurately, **Jesus is now performing – through all of us – the same work that he had once done as an individual.** Ours is not a new story but a continuation of his story. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,
and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:5

This is why we are called - "The body of Christ." We are Christ indwelt people continuing his ministry.



The story is told that during World War II, a church building in Strasbourg, France, was almost completely destroyed by bombings. After the bombing had ceased, as the members of the church looked over the remains of the building, they were happy to see that their statue of Christ with outstretched hands was still standing. However, both hands of the statue had been sheered off. As the church was being rebuilt, a sculptor in the town offered to replace the broken off hands of the Christ. But after giving it considerable thought, the church leaders decided not to accept. They felt the statue without hands would be a powerful reminder to everyone that the work of Jesus Christ is now only done through His people. If there are sick, lonely, or hungry people around us, we are the hands that Jesus now uses to answer those needs.

<http://pitterlepostings.blogspot.com/2009/12/christ-has-no-hands-but-ours.html>

In the Gospels you saw Jesus preaching, praying, filled with the Spirit, healing the sick, raising the dead, showing compassion, and sacrificing his life. Here in Acts you see the church preaching, praying, filled with the Spirit, healing the sick, raising the dead, showing compassion, and sacrificing their lives. And now, 2000 years later, can it be said that we are still doing what Jesus did? Whatever Church History IS, it SHOULD be the record of how we, "the body of Christ," have carried on where Jesus left off! We are the continuation of his ministry because ...

2. We have a message that is certain.

"he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom . . ."
(V. 3)

The truth of our message does not rest on our personal experience. Our message is certainly not the subjective "You ask me how I know he lives, He lives within my heart." Jesus is alive, and has proved it WITHOUT a DOUBT! The Book of Acts along with the other letters of the Apostles testify, not that they were following in the spirit of a dead savior but at the command of a very much alive Jesus. Who has sent all of us, his followers to the ends of the earth, telling the world his good news. As the Apostle Peter wrote ...

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we have been eyewitnesses of his majesty.
2 Peter 1:16

3. We have a Spirit that is empowering us.

"...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." (V. 5)

Ephesians 5:18 tells us, ***Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.*** . . ." Paul draws a contrast here with being full of wine which leaves us in a state of drunkenness or being full of the Holy Spirit which leads to power, joy, thankfulness. We believe that being baptized by the Spirit is a one-time event, wherein the Spirit enters your being to take up residence with your soul, thus sealing you a God's own. But being filled with the Spirit is an ongoing process. Being filled means staying in touch, staying dependent, staying dependent, listening to the promptings and not grieving God's Holy Spirit. As I wrote in this month's newsletter, if we have God's Spirit within, where then is the power? If we have quenched the Spirit's power in our lives, then we need to be brought to life again; We need to be revived!

The New Testament never uses the word "revival" – they didn't need reviving, they were full of life! But the Old Testament uses the word "revive" many times, often in prayers that are lifted up to God to return life to the dead, dry bones of His wandering children. The Old Testament is also full of such promises as this.

Return to me and I will return to you,
says the Lord of hosts.
Zechariah 1:3

God has promised us, " *I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" (Hebrews 13:5). So, **if you feel far from God, guess who moved.** The Church in Acts was promised the power to witness. **If you are lacking that power, then please join with me in now praying for revival: first for yourself, then for this church, then for all Christians everywhere (this is why we are gathering for a time of extended prayer every Sunday after worship; come join us).** These early disciples, whose stories we read in Acts, "turned the world upside down" for Christ. We desperately need to be doing some world turning once again.

Why?

4. We have a mandate to spread the Gospel.

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

In the last days of his ministry, when Jesus sent the 72 out in front of his journey to Jerusalem, he told them *the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest (Mt. 9:38, Luke 10:2)*. I always found that verse intriguing because they were sent out by Jesus to do the harvesting – the sharing of the Gospel that would lead people to faith in God – and yet they were also to pray for more workers or for themselves as they worked, or both?

But notice, that following his resurrection, Jesus' prayer for workers became his command for all his followers.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ..."

Matthew 28:18

Several places throughout the Epistles, we have been called, God's own people, God's royal priesthood, God's holy nation, God's ambassadors.

So we are ambassadors for Christ,
since God is making his appeal through us;
we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20

This is what we have been left here to do. This is the task that has been handed to us until we go to meet Jesus or he returns as king of kings. Because of this you can be certain

5. We have a King who is returning.

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven

Acts 1:11

Jesus will return one day and there will be a reckoning both between him and his brothers and sisters, and another reckoning between Jesus and those who rejected him. While I am very glad that I will be at that first reckoning and not the second, I still think that I will have much to answer for in my failure to live fully as a child of God and co-worker with Christ. My failure to add many more chapters to the Acts of the Apostles.

Methodist minister John Boor recalls, "I had an opportunity to work in a bakery while going to high school. I remember one particular day when the telephone rang and one of the ladies went to answer it. She put down the phone like it was hot and yelled, "He's coming!" I wondered what in the world was going on. The ladies ran for their hair nets and men ran for clean aprons and clean caps. The boss told me to sweep the floor, and cover all the containers. There was a wild and excited look in his eyes. Everyone was running around like chickens with their heads cut off. I thought to myself, "Who is coming?" Suddenly through the front door entered a man in a suit with a case under his arm. As I observed him he began to walk around and check the bakery for any health hazards. I then realized that he was the state inspector for the Board of Health. After he left everyone breathed a sigh of relief and went back to work. One of the ladies told me that all the places of business always watched out for each other. The first one to see the inspector coming would then call the other business.

They had a system of warning. When Jesus comes again there won't be time to prepare a speech on all the good things we have been involved in. There won't be time to tell him how our neighbors and friends hindered us in His service. If we keep in mind and practice, Jesus mandate, given here at the beginning of Acts, then we will certainly add to the victories, the adventures, the witness, when Acts 29 is completed.

(Summary) This message to us from the Book of Acts, shares one of the most important truth in scriptures.

- **We know Jesus rose; in this is our own hope for salvation.**
- And we also know that **our Lord departed this world leaving his disciples with the charge to continue bearing witness to their faith This is now our mission.**
- And WE know **that he will return one day to ask us how we have done his works: This is our motivation.**

1. We are the continuation of Jesus' ministry.
2. We have a message that is certain.
3. We have a Spirit that is empowering us.
4. We have a mandate to spread the Gospel.
5. We have a King who is returning.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world,*

*Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)