

The Commission of the Church

by Steve Gallagher

Steve Gallagher's sermon explores the significance of the Book of Acts as a foundational narrative for the early church and its mission to spread the Gospel.

Duration: 56:24

Scripture: Luke 24:48-49, John 16:7, Acts 1:8, Philippians 3:8-10

Topics: "Church Ministry", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon introduces the book of Acts, highlighting the transition from the life of Jesus to the birth of the early church. It emphasizes the central role of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the acts performed through His servants. The importance of focusing on Jesus as the central character in ministry is emphasized, rather than exalting men. The narrative unfolds with a focus on the kingdom of God and the mission of being witnesses for Christ.

Transcript

Okay, we're going to begin a 20-week series through the book of Acts, but the way I'm going to handle this is I'm going to break it down into two sections. We'll spend eight weeks studying on the early church, which basically is Acts 1-12, and then we're going to spend 12 weeks going over the life and writings of the Apostle Paul, which of course is Acts 13-28, but also his epistles. We'll be going through his epistles, at least in a historical standpoint.

So, let's just take a look at the background of the book of Acts, first of all. It actually was the second half of a two-part book that was written by Luke the physician, and he probably wrote the gospel of Luke when Paul was in prison in Caesarea, which would have been about 60 or 61 AD, somewhere around in there, and he probably wrote the book of Acts when Paul was in the prison in Rome, which would have been around 62-63 AD. Also, the way the book of Acts ends, it just drops off.

I don't know if you've ever noticed that. It almost seems as though maybe Luke was thinking about writing a third section to this book. The things that occurred expanding the church after Paul was released from prison there in Rome.

But anyway, the Lord thought better of it, so it never happened, or if he did write anything, it was lost or whatever. So, the introduction to this two-part book is, of course, found in the first chapter of Luke. Let's look at the first four verses because this really does form the introduction to Acts as well.

This two-part book was basically utilized for a few decades. But anyway, let's read this. In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, that is quite a statement just there.

I mean, I didn't study out any of this, but I look at that statement and it's really, there's a lot there. What does that mean, compile an account of the things accomplished? Just as they were handed down to us by those who were from the beginning, eyewitnesses and servants of the word. It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

All right. So, this forms the introduction to this two-part book, and we'll get into Acts chapter 1 here pretty soon. But first of all, let's just look at the book of Acts from the standpoint of an introduction.

We see here in the first verse of the book of Acts, I'm just making mention of this, I won't be getting into this for a while, but basically what Luke is saying is the first book, which is the Gospel of Luke or what he calls the former writings here, the first account, he tells what Jesus began both to do and to teach. What he began to do and teach. That occurs in the book of Luke, and then in the book of Acts, what Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit, through the men who he empowered to be his witnesses in the early church time.

All right. So, this two-part volume was circulated together for a number of decades, and then early in the second century, someone compiled the four Gospels together, and they started being circulated, and it left the book of Acts out. So, the book of Acts is now a standalone book.

You got the Gospels, and then someone compiled the writings of Paul, all the different epistles he wrote. So, you have the Gospels, you have Paul's writings, and what book is it that ties it all together? The book of Acts. Think of where we would be in our understanding if we didn't have the book of Acts.

We would have the story of Jesus, we'd have all the teachings of Paul and the others, but there would be nothing tying it all together. How did all this come about? Well, it's the book of Acts. That's why it's such an important book for understanding the New Testament and the Gospel.

All right. As far as these books are concerned, Luke is actually the longest book in the New Testament, and Acts is the third longest, but it's just really a little bit shorter than the book of Luke. So, they're almost identical.

The book of Acts is a little over 1,000 verses, but the two of them together compiled made up 30 percent of the entire New Testament. There's actually a lot of parallelisms between these books, and I can tell you I'm not going to get into it, although it is interesting. I'm just not going to have time as we work our way through.

But there are a lot of parallelisms between Paul and Peter, Paul and what happened in Jesus' life, and so on. But I will just mention a couple of parallelisms right here. First, like I said, is the size.

They're almost identical in size, but also the time span is right around 30 to 33 years long for both of them. So, that's very interesting to me. As far as the layout is concerned, Jesus said in Acts 1.8, he said, you shall be my witnesses, speaking to the disciples, you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

What he is laying down here is a game plan, a mission statement for this new organization that's being birthed. This is where you are going to go, and this is what you are going to do. So, he's basically laying out a game plan for what he wanted to accomplish through the disciples and their converts later.

But then, look at how the book of Acts unfolds. You see, it begins in Jerusalem. It's like Jesus said, the first seven chapters of Acts basically all take place in Jerusalem, and then it goes through Judea and Samaria, chapters 8-12, then to the Gentiles in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, chapters 13-19, and then the last eight chapters, nine chapters is all about Paul's arrest, his imprisonment, his trials, and finally his trip to Rome and so on, and that's how it ends.

So, it unfolds exactly like Jesus said. So, in other words, they accomplished what he wanted them to accomplish in that first century. There's one other thing I want to mention here, and that is that there are six summary statements.

If you want to write them down, I'll give them to you. Acts 6-7, chapter 9-31, chapter 12-24, chapter 16-5, chapter 19-20, and then the final verse in the whole book, 28-31. Let me just read one of them just so you have an idea of what I'm talking about.

Basically, you could very easily break this book down as far as an outline is concerned by these summary statements. There's a section of the book that is describing people, events, things that are happening, a period of time, and then Luke wraps it all up with the summary statement. So, let's look at chapter 6-7.

This is what he said during this summing up what was going on in the early church. Luke says, "The word of God kept on spreading, and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." That's a summary statement. He's just summing up all that has happened up to that point.

Then, let's say we went to chapter 9-31. Just to give you another example. "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up, and going on in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." That's a summary statement.

So, anyway, that's how the book was put together. I want to look at Luke's purpose in writing the book, and also the purpose of the Lord. I'll say it this way.

Luke had his own thinking involved here, and he had two purposes that he obviously was trying to accomplish. The Lord had a much greater purpose in mind that probably was possible. Luke never even thought of, I don't know.

But the first purpose is, he's basically just sending the story to this man Theophilus. If you look in Luke 1-4, this is what he says, "So that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." So, that's a statement right there of purpose. Luke is telling the reader, "This is why I'm writing it, so you will know exactly what's going on, or what happened, and how it all unfolded, and so on." Theophilus seemed to be some kind of an important figure in the Roman culture.

Maybe he was a Roman official, I don't know. I mean, he may not even have been Roman, but he definitely was very open to Christianity. He was interested in it, that's clear.

But he's got questions. So, part of what Luke is trying to accomplish in writing the Book of Luke, and also the Book of Acts, is to answer his questions, and to present to him the story of how the church unfolded,

and came about, and so on. Now, the second purpose I'll mention, and this one, as I say, is probably more the Lord's purpose, but it is just basically providing an accurate account of the origins of Christianity.

In other words, not just for this one man, but for the history of the church. He couldn't foresee that for 2,000 years, people would be reading what he wrote down. If he would have known that, I don't know, maybe he would have spent more time having his stuff edited, or something or other, I don't know.

But anyway, he didn't realize that, but he may have been having that in mind as well. Let me read what Albert Barnes says about this, because he really is very concise and lays it out. He said, "Acts was evidently written to furnish an authentic and full narrative of events concerning which there would be many imperfect and exaggerated accounts.

Since these events pertain to the descent of the spirit, to the spread of the gospel, to the organization of the church, to the kind of preaching by which the church was to be collected and organized, and as the facts in the case constituted a full proof of the truth of Christian religion, and the conduct of the apostles would be a model for ministers and the church in all future times, it was of great importance that a fair and full narrative of these things should be preserved." Yeah. I mean, that really says it. He's very comprehensive in what he's saying, but he's got it.

That is at least the primary thing in the Lord's mind for sure, whether or not Luke thought of it or whatever. The third purpose that I'll mention really is very clear in Luke's mind, is he is trying to justify Christianity to the Roman world. Let me just show you what I'm talking about here.

Go back to the Book of Acts. You see that even in the time of John the Baptist, Luke is the one who mentions that Roman soldiers are listening to the preaching of the Baptist, and that's found in Luke 3. Then in Luke 7, the centurion whose slave Jesus healed. So there's another example of a Roman official looking favorably upon Jesus Christ, and as we'll see, the religion that he formed.

Then of course, Pilate's desire to release Jesus, and basically saying he's an innocent man found in Luke 23. So we already see that starting in the gospel account, but it definitely comes clear in the Book of Acts. He talks about the proconsul in Cyprus.

You remember when Paul and Barnabas went through the island of Cyprus, and Paul ended up striking Elymas' eyes, blinding him. Anyway, that was in Acts 13. Then there's the story of Galileo, who Paul was drug before by the Jews in Acts 18, and Galileo dismissed it as like these charges are bogus.

So there's another Roman official, and Galileo was a pretty prominent man in the Roman world, as we'll see when we get there. Then there's Claudius Lysias, who arrested Paul in Jerusalem, Acts 21-23, but he is very favorable towards Paul. Then there's Felix, Acts 24, and then there's Festus, Acts 25-26, and finally the centurion Julius, who's with Paul during that last journey.

All of these Roman officials are all looking upon Christianity in a favorable way. So in other words, Luke has definitely got it in his mind that he wants to show that Christianity has been time and time again attacked by the Jews, but supported by the Roman government. Of course, out of 17 chapters that deal with the life of Paul in the book of Acts, out of 17 of them, nine of them are devoted to his arrest, his trials, and all of that stuff there at the end of the book.

It's just way out of balance really when you think about the story. Why so much emphasis on that? It's because Luke had an agenda, and his agenda was to present Christianity to the Roman world, and to

show them that we are a legitimate religion. I don't know if you knew this, but if you were not legitimized by the Roman government, your religion was illegal, and you could be arrested, imprisoned, whatever, for bringing in a illegitimate religion.

They would call it actually illicit, was the word I think in the Latin. So, it started off as a sect of the Jewish religion which had been condoned by Rome, but Luke sees that there's a breaking out from Judaism, and Christianity is beginning to stand on its own, and I think he felt like it was very important to justify it to the Roman world. All right.

So, that was the purpose behind this book. Let's talk a little bit about the narrative. As I said, Luke partially approached it as a historian, and he got his material from three primary sources, and again, it's referred to in Luke 1, but I'm not going to read it.

But first of all, he was an eyewitness to much of what occurred in the second half of the book. I mean, he was just there. He was with Paul in a lot of those things that happened.

He doesn't come into the picture till, I don't know, Acts 16 or 17, right around in there. But from then on, much of what happens, Luke is right there alongside Paul going through it. But he also interviewed various people, and he had plenty opportunities too.

Obviously, he interviewed Paul and asked Paul about the earlier days and so on. But he also had access to Barnabas, and Philip, and Manassin, and probably the different disciples. That he probably, when he was in Caesarea or maybe some other time, he had opportunities to sit down with Peter, or John, or some of the other disciples that were available, and he probably interviewed them.

Definitely, for the book of Luke, and probably also for the early chapters of Acts. Also, the third thing was that he had access to written documents that are now lost. You can see by what he said in Luke 1 that that's obviously true, that there were already written accounts of the life of Jesus, and he went to them to get a lot of his material.

This story has basically two main characters. First, we have Peter, and then he fades from view, and then Paul emerges into the main position. Then you have secondary figures like Stephen, and Philip, and Barnabas, and James, the brother of Jesus.

Then you have minor characters, Apollos, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Aquila, and Priscilla, and so on. Also, you have Gentile politicians such as Galileo, Claudius, the different ones I've already mentioned. So those are some of the main characters in this story that unfolds in the book of Acts.

The way that Luke presented it was by offering up dramatic vignettes. In other words, you've got 30, 33 years of a story here. How do you tell that story in 28 chapters? Well, obviously, you can't write everything else.

So you just take some of the main stories or different stories that represented different things. He didn't tell about all the miracles. He didn't tell about all the answers to prayer, the tremendous answers to prayer.

He didn't tell about all the healings and all the powerful sermons or powerful meetings he was in. He couldn't tell all that. So he would, it looks like, kind of pick out different things, events, stories, situations, things that occurred.

He picked out different ones to show different things probably in line with his purposes. But as far as the Lord is concerned, it was enough to present the story and to give readers down through the ages a good sense about what happened. When I wrote the story of Bobby Lloyd, I did it that way.

I actually more than Luke did, I just took these little incidents that happened in different parts of his life. Usually, each chapter had three or four of these incidents, and I would just kind of painted his life through that method of writing until by reading all these stories, you get a sense of who this man is, what happened to him, how he changed, and all that sort of thing. That's really what Luke did.

So he used these different vignettes to portray the essence of the preaching. There's a number of sermons that are mentioned in the Book of Acts and we'll get into those as we go. But these different sermons are just kind of the main points of what he's saying.

They're not word for word. He wasn't sitting there dictating the whole thing, but he was probably writing down some of the main points, kind of like Judy Lucas always does. Just trying to get the main stuff that's being presented.

He's showing that, he's showing the activity of the Holy Spirit, the spread of the gospel, the different people involved. Luke's presenting all of this, but the climax to this story is Paul's entrance and work in Rome. That's where the whole thing is headed.

Really, as we look back on it, we think of Acts 2, man, that's when the great outpouring was. That's where everything was the most exciting moment. Yeah, that's true, but that was a means to an end.

What was the end? The Lord is trying to accomplish something. He's birthing something in the world and he wants it to spread forth. That's what Luke is trying to show is the spreading forth of what began in Jerusalem, 50 days after Jesus died.

Now, let me just wrap up this introduction part by reading a few quotes that are worth reading. Schofield said this about the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit fills the scene. As the presence of the Son exalting and revealing the Father is the great fact of the Gospels so the presence of the Spirit exalting and revealing the Son is the great fact of the Acts.

Yeah, that's very good and it's true. Jameson Fawcett Brown said this, this book is to the Gospels what the fruit is to the tree that bears it. In the Gospels, we see the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying.

In the Acts, we see it bringing forth much fruit. There we see Christ purchasing the church with his own blood. Here we see the church so purchased rising into the actual existence.

Albert Barnes said this, this book is an inspired account of the character of true revivals of religion. That's the truth. This was a church that was birthed in revival.

That's a word that's never even used in the Book of Acts, but it is all about revival, a powerful revival. Finally, Kiddo's Encyclopedia said, the design of Luke in writing Acts was to supply by select and suitable instances, an illustration of the power and working of that religion which Jesus had died to establish. That's a good quote also.

All right. Let's take a few minutes and look at the first chapter. We'll go through this.

Now, this first chapter of Acts is important because it's a transition from the life, the story of Jesus Christ, his life, and then he dies. He's crucified. The last chapter of Luke 24 is all about his resurrection.

Then in Acts 2 is the birth of the church. It's the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So chapter 1 is a transition tying the two together.

You've got the life of Christ, you've got the church being birthed and spreading forth. The first chapter is a transition in that story. It also is fit right in between the Passover and Pentecost.

As we'll see here in a minute, there was what happens here in these first few verses of chapter 1, occurred after 40 days. So Jesus died during the Passover. We know that Pentecost is 50 days after the Passover always.

That's what Pentecost means, it's 50. So 50 days, there's this period of time between when Jesus Christ died, he was resurrected three days later, and then during these next 40 days, those first 40 days, he's making different appearances to different people. Doesn't it say somewhere, I think in 1 Corinthians 15 that he appeared to 500 people or something? But anyway, during that 40 days, he's making these appearances on the 40th day, and that's a significant number.

On the 40th day is right here. This is transpiring on the 40th day. Then he says, not many days hence or however he says it in here, I'm going to pour out my Holy Spirit on you, and that happens 10 days later.

So for 10 days, they're waiting on the Lord. They're waiting on the Lord. That'd be a good thing for you, Jeff, for this coming event here.

Ten days of sitting and waiting on the Lord. Wow. Can you imagine? The anticipation that must have been building in their midst during that time.

So now, just as an introduction to the early church, I want to read something that Harry Ironside said. One is reminded of the Lord's word to Moses when he commanded him to build the tabernacle. This comes from Exodus 25.40. See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Now, he's just cutting into something that the Lord said to Moses regarding the tabernacle and he's saying, I gave you a pattern, now make sure that you do it exactly like the pattern says. I'll continue now with what Ironside said. God has given us in the book of Acts a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism, and building of Christian churches, a pattern which we would do well to follow.

Certainly, we can be assured of this. The closer we come to following this holy pattern, the greater blessing will attend our efforts. Yeah.

When you get away from this pattern, and I'll say something about that in a minute. But when you start getting away from this pattern that has been laid down by the apostles in the early church time, the further you start getting away from that, the more man-focused it will become, and the less God-focused it'll become, and the weaker it will become for sure. All right.

So let's read these first eight verses and go over them. The first account I composed Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach. So that's the book of Luke.

Until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after he had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen. To these, he also presented himself alive after his suffering, by many convincing proofs appearing to them over a period of 40 days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, which he said, you heard of 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 were asking him, saying, Lord, is it at this time you're restoring the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it is not for you to know times or epochs, which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

All right, now I want to go over these verses here for a few minutes. Verse 1 says, all that Jesus began to do and teach, and I want to read what Jameson Fawcett Brown said. It's very good about that little phrase there.

A very important statement. Dividing the work of Christ into two great branches, the one embracing his work on earth, the other his subsequent work from heaven. The one in his own person, the other by his spirit.

The one the beginning, the other the continuance of the same work. The one complete when he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, the other to continue till his second appearing. The one recorded in the gospels, the other in this book of Acts.

Yeah, that's good. It really shows how the life of Christ continued on. Verse 2, he uses the word here, the NIV uses the word instruction, which is good.

It's better than new American standard use the word orders. Basically saying after he had by the Holy Spirit given instruction to the apostles. Now, probably when Luke wrote that down as part of his letter to Theophilus, he was probably thinking about the statements that you would find in Luke 24.

Actually, I think it's verses 48, 49. Yeah, you are witnesses of these things and behold, I'm sending you forth the promise of my father upon you, but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. So he's probably referring back to that with that statement.

But I think that the Lord again can see the whole picture. I think the Lord is thinking more in terms of tying together the words from Jesus that are found in the last chapters of all four Gospels. And if you piece it all together, you get the great commission.

This is the great commission to be my witnesses, to take this new message out to people, to lead people into a knowledge of me. That's the great commission. This is the commissioning of the church.

So I think that that's more like what the Lord had in mind when he had Luke write those words down. Then verse 3, you see Luke mentioning how Jesus presented himself after his death, and appeared to different people during that 40 days. This is important also because the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, which the disciples witnessed, is the foundation of their message.

If there was no resurrection, then they're serving a dead God, right? So these are the witnesses, they lived with him, they saw him and all that, they saw this happen, and this is the foundation of the Gospel. And of

course, in the Gospels, there's at least 13 different appearances of Christ documented there. Okay, verses 4 and 5, he's telling them that something is about to happen.

Something that he had mentioned before, and actually even before he came. You remember in, actually it's in Luke again, Luke 3, John the Baptist had told the people that he baptized with water, but one who is coming is mightier than I, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. So Jesus is picking up the same theme that he had heard three years before, or whatever, that John the Baptist had been preaching, and he's saying, this is what's coming.

You know, I am going to baptize you with my spirit. But there's an interesting statement found in John chapter 16, that I want to read to you that Jesus made some time before, just a few weeks before, it was on the night that he was arrested actually, a few hours before he was arrested, but this is what he said to the disciples. John 16 verse 7, but I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away.

For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. Now, think of the poor disciples, they were so out of it. They didn't know what he was talking about.

They're like, well, are you going away? Are you going somewhere? Who's the helper? I mean, they were just so out of it. You and I would have been too, don't laugh too hard, because we would have been out of it just as much. But anyway, this is what Jesus is saying, and the Holy Spirit will bring these words to remembrance, to at least the Apostle John who wrote them down later.

Okay, so he said, for if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. That's what we're going to see next week, is him sending forth the helper, the comforter, the Holy Spirit.

He, when he comes, what's he going to do? He's going to have such a greater impact than the life of Jesus had. Jesus really didn't have all that much to show for his life. Really.

There was only 120 people gathered. After three and a half years of miracles and healings, and tremendous words of truth, all that he brought forth to the Jewish people, all he had was just a smattering of followers really. But he was going to send someone else who had a way of not only preaching the truth, but getting inside of people's hearts, and doing a work inside them.

That was the difference. But anyway, when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment. Praise the Lord for the Holy Spirit.

Praise the Lord for the Holy Spirit. I thank God that we have the Holy Spirit, and we're not just depending upon a historical thing or some teachings that have come down over the years or whatever. No, we have the Spirit of God working with us, in conjunction with us, and also directing us.

All right, verses six through eight, he mentions two important themes, or introduces two important themes here, that are going to basically run throughout the book of Acts, and carry the book of Acts. The first is the kingdom of God. If you remember, throughout the Gospels, Jesus was continually talking about the kingdom of God.

I mean, it was the first thing he preached, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Over, and over, and over again, he would talk about it, especially to his disciples. His disciples, just dull of hearing, dull of mind, were so stuck, that they weren't getting what Jesus was trying to say to them.

They were very much in the nationalistic mentality that all of Israel was in, in those days. The prevalent thinking of the time was this, that the Messiah is going to come, and he's going to come with mighty power, and he's going to overthrow the Romans, and we are going to be the head, and they're going to be the tail. We are going to be the mighty nation on earth, and everyone will look up to the Jews, and respect us, and obey us.

That was pretty much the prevalent mentality of the day in Israel. The disciples were very much in that same thinking. You would probably be surprised, and I would probably be surprised, at how much we are also susceptible to the prevalent thinking in the church today.

We also live in a time when the church is in a terrible condition, spiritually speaking. When I say church, I mean that in a loose way, tying also together a lot of unsaved people who are in the church. But anyway, we have no idea how errant some of our thinking is on these sorts of things, just because this is the culture we've grown up in, and this is the way it was for the disciples.

They were stuck. The disciples' idea of the kingdom of God was carnal, temporal, and unrealistic. They didn't understand that the establishment of the kingdom was going to require a great spiritual battle that would cost them their lives.

They just didn't understand that at this point. Yes, the Lord would establish his kingdom, but it would be through their efforts. He would be working through them.

He wasn't going to just come riding in on a white horse. Not this time. Later, yes, but not this time.

Yet his promise was that he would empower them to do this work, even through all the periods of uncertainty and fear and suffering that they would be encountering in the days ahead. But you know what? Ten days later, something was going to happen that would completely change their thinking. You never again see them in confusion about the kingdom of God.

They got it. When the Holy Spirit came in and they had that powerful outpouring, and I don't know exactly how that affected them internally, but everything changed. We'll get into that next week.

But the important thing to notice here is even now, after all that they had witnessed, they are still stuck in that carnal mindset about the kingdom of God. The other important thing mentioned here in this little passage is that they would be witnesses. This word witnesses, especially for those of you who are with me, when we went through the book of Revelation, you remember how that word was such an important theme throughout the book of Revelation.

In other words, this is the ending of the church, now we're going back to the beginning of the church, and it's the same thing, to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. The disciples had lived with Him, walked with Him, for three years, three and a half years, something like that. They witnessed the way that He lived His life, they witnessed the miracles and the healings, they heard the tremendous words of life that came forth through those lips, the tremendous wisdom.

They were in awe of the things that Jesus said. And you remember in John 6, when they all turned away, and Jesus turned to the disciples and said, will you also leave? And Peter said, where would we go? Jesus, you have the words of life. They had witnessed all this.

They witnessed His death on the cross, and then they witnessed Him alive, resurrected for 40 days. They saw Him appearing, and then they witnessed Him ascending into heaven. Wow, these were real witnesses.

And their job was to go forth with that message. Here's their mission statement. You know, take that message forth to the people who need to hear about the gospel.

And what was needed was for someone who could present a viable witness to people out there. And where would it begin? In Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and murdered the Messiah. That's their mission field.

Wow. Anyone want to complain? That was their mission field. You are going to stay right here, and you're going to preach to the very people who murdered me.

And that's where it began. It will begin in Jerusalem, and then it will spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the world. Praise the Lord.

All right, now this, you know, then it talks about the ascension, and then from verses 12 through the rest of the chapter, he's describing this incident that occurred sometime during that 10 days. They were all gathered in the upper room. They obviously were waiting on the Lord every day, and they had some business to take care of, you know, filling the seat that Judas had left vacant, and so on.

So that's just a little bit of business there. And next week, we'll get into what happens on the day of Pentecost. Now, I want to just leave you with a few... a final thought regarding this unfolding story.

The title of this book in my Bible says, The Acts of the Apostles, and that's probably what yours says also. And I can't believe that Luke gave it that title. I don't believe that Luke came up with that title, because, well, as you'll see here in a minute, that is not the way he was thinking at all.

That was probably some sentimental second-century Christian who was compiling these things together. He took it upon himself in veneration of the apostles, who he looked upon as, oh, Peter, you know, Paul. And you know how people are that way.

This is how we tend to be. Oh, you know, whoever you want to put in that spot in your thinking, and I could name some names, you know, and so on, but we're just human beings, and the Lord knows better than we know, you know. So it probably, I can almost guarantee you that that's what happened.

Some second-century Christian gave it that title. But I think probably a more accurate title would be, The Acts of Jesus Christ Performed by the Holy Spirit Through His Servants. You know, it's kind of a lengthy title, but it's much more accurate than the one that guy gave it.

But here again, you see the difference between man's perspective, which is very man-centric. Is that how you say it? Man-centric. Ed says yes.

Versus theocentric, which is God-focused, God-centered, where God takes the central position. And in this case, in regards to the church, the formation of the church, the beginning, all that occurred then, and through the church age, it is all about one central figure, Jesus Christ. He is the center.

And it's him through his Holy Spirit who's behind all the events that happen, you know, through the book of Acts. And from 63 A.D. all the way to here we are, 2014, you know, all these hundreds of years, all the

saints who have been born, got saved, lived their life for the Lord, died, went on to be with the Lord. Think of how many millions of people down through the centuries.

But it's Jesus Christ who is behind it all, guiding, directing, anointing, influencing, working miracles. It's Jesus Christ who has done it all, and man is nothing in comparison. You know, Paul understood this.

If you look through his epistles, he mentions Jesus some 400 times. Can you believe that? Some 400 times he mentions him. And, you know, you remember what he said in 1 Corinthians 2. He told the Corinthians who were all, oh, you know, Paul or Peter or Apollos or whoever, you know, this man-centered, immature mentality, he said, I'm just determined to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

And that little statement sums up his life. But he, you know, broadens that out in his letter to the Philippians who could handle things a lot better, as we'll discover later. In Philippians 3, he said, but whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

More than that, I count all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death. That says it right there. That is the spirit that the Apostle Paul was in.

So it's all about Jesus Christ. It's not about men. It's not the acts of the Apostles.

In fact, if you look at it, where's the Apostles in this story, you know? Peter is the only one mentioned. John is mentioned just as kind of his sidekick during one episode, which was when he healed the lame man, and then they were beaten by the Sanhedrin and all that. That's all John's mentioned.

Peter is mentioned for the first through 12 chapters, and then he's just dumped. What happened to Peter? Wait a minute, you know, he's my hero. Where's Peter? And for the next however many 20 years, we don't hear anything about this man.

He was, you know, the formation of the church was going to be built on the testimony of Peter. But he's just dropped from the story by the Holy Spirit's guidance. You know, just not important.

He's just a vessel, he's just an instrument for the Lord to use. He's not that big of a deal. The other 10 disciples are never mentioned at all.

And even Paul, you know, who did all these things, and Luke obviously adored him, respected him, tremendously honored him. But even him at the end, he's just dumped, you know? He just wraps it up and moves on with the story, you know, and that was it. And it's been the same all through church history.

And I'll say it this way, I'm wrapping this thing up, that whatever ministry, and here we have a ministry, a work of God, if Jesus Christ is kept as the central focus, as the central character, the work will be blessed by the Lord. But if man becomes the center, then what will happen is it will be weak, it may be dramatic in outward ways, it may wow people, you know, in certain ways and stuff, but what goes on behind the scenes in the spirit world will be very weak. And you know, it's a testimony to Pure Life Ministries that this work continued on.

When it was time to lay Steve Gallagher aside, I was dumped, you know? Happily so. I was dumped, Jeff Cologne was put in my place, and he's running it until he's dumped. You're going to get dumped too later, I promise you.

Just wait for it, and it's no fun to go through, I can tell you that. In fact, Kathy and I watched that movie, Peter and Paul. I don't know when's the last time you've seen that, or if you have seen that movie, it is worth watching.

And you know how these Hollywood movies are, they get a lot of things wrong, but they get some things right, most of them do. And this one really captured what Peter went through. Because Peter had his great day at Pentecost, and then it was all downhill after that.

You know, it reminds me of me a little bit. I've said it before, back in 1988, in February of 1988, I shared my testimony to millions of people on the Oprah Winfrey Show. And I would never do anything, as far as a single event was concerned, that would begin to compare to what happened that day.

You know, so kind of in the same way, it's the same thing. You start going down, then you just drop off completely. And I was joking with friends, I guess it was a couple of years ago, I was calling myself Mr. Irrelevant, because that's what I've become, irrelevant.

But you know, that's what happened with Peter. And yet, years later, towards the end of his life, when he wrote those two epistles, they are full of God, praise the Lord, it's okay. You know, we may not have an outward ministry, that, you know, people see you in the limelight for the rest of your life, and so on.

We may not have that. We may not have a name. But if we represent Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world, in whatever little or large way that He's given us to work, that's all the Lord asks for.

He is the center. Let's keep Him the center in this work and, you know, in all that the Lord has for us. Lord, I thank you that, man, I'm just so grateful for how you put together the church.

How you have purchased a bride for yourself. And it's all about you and your bride. That's what the story is about.

And we thank you, Lord, that you are the head. Yes, we are the body, and we play an important part in that sense, collectively. But none of us are anything but a speck of dust next to you, Jesus.

You are the center of heaven, the darling of heaven. As someone said, you are, Lord, you are the center of it all. And we love you, we worship you, and we devote our lives to you, Lord, and to glorifying your great name.

In your name we pray, Jesus Christ, amen. God bless you.

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