

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS JESUS DOING? OR JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH ACTS 1: 1-8

INTRODUCTION

Children's sermon

Have you ever seen a miracle? What is a miracle? When God does something in an unusual way to draw our attention to His power, love and grace. What are some of the miracles in the Bible? What do you think is the biggest miracle that has ever happened? (Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection & ascension) What's the second biggest miracle?

Our church is part of the biggest miracle the world has ever seen. How many people believed in Jesus after He died and was raised to life? At the most 500 were followers of Jesus. Only 120 were gathered together in Jerusalem to pray after he left. Yet Jesus had said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations and then the end will come." And "I have sheep that don't belong to the Jewish nation, I must bring them also." Jesus told this small group of people that one day people from every country in the whole world would believe in Him.

Just imagine that we were Jesus and his disciples. We are the only Christians in the whole world. I told you one day people from every place in the whole world will believe in Jesus. How would you feel about that? Today, out of 5.5 billion people, over 1 billion say they are believers in Jesus. How has that happened? How is God performing this miracle of taking people who hate Him and gathering them together into churches full of people who love Him? That's what the sermon is about.

Give sheets.

TRANSITION

21 years ago I was a lot younger. It was also my first year working with Campus Crusade for Christ. Jane and I had moved to Houghton, MI to begin our work at Mich. Tech. Univ. One of the first assignments I was given by my Campus Director was to go share the message of Christ with the football team. I didn't think the coach would let me do it so I readily agreed. I went to see the coach and told him I would like to take about twenty minutes and explain to his team how they could know Jesus Christ personally and see if any of them were interested in talking with me further. He said, "OK, how would this Friday night before our meeting in preparation for our game on Saturday be?" I said that would be fine. I arranged with a couple of students to go with me to help pass out comment cards. We agreed to meet prior to going to the team for prayer. I clearly remember having one thought and one overwhelming emotion as we got together that day. I thought, "This is stupid." I felt absolute terror. "Who in the world do I think I am? These guys have no interest in Jesus? They're getting together to talk about a football game and I'm going to tell them about God? They'll never listen. Only one thing got me through that meeting. I decided there was no reason these men should listen to me, but the God who made them and sent His Son to die for sins had something to say that they needed to hear. God graciously used that meeting to save at least one guy that I know of.

That describes how I felt when I agreed to move my family to Janesville to plant a church. That's how I often feel now as I go about the work that God has called me to. Who do I think I am? Why would anyone listen to me or want to join in this work? I'm having enough trouble being a Christian myself, loving my wife and raising my kids. How will I ever see a church develop?

You ever feel like that? I really ought to share the gospel with my neighbor, my coworker but they would never listen to me. My sin is too great, my problems are too many, my life is too busy for me to influence anyone else

for the sake of Christ. Maybe you are trying to faithfully serve Christ in your home, at work in the community but most of the time you feel like your puny, half-hearted efforts are barely stirring the dust.

When you move beyond our own lives and the local situation and look at the global, it can become downright depressing. By the end of this year there will be 6 billion people in the world. Half of them still have no credible witness for Christ in their own language and culture. Then there is the moral and spiritual decline that is all around us in our own country. Then there is the advance of Islam all over the globe. It seems that the work of Jesus in the world is threatened at every turn. How can I, can we move ahead with confidence?

We need, like Christians through the centuries, the message of the book of Acts. This account of the early church was written for Christians who were a very small, persecuted and struggling minority in a sea of pagan idolatry and Jewish hostility. Luke wrote his account of the beginnings of Christianity to instruct and inspire succeeding generations of Christians with a vision of God's program to save His people out of a fallen and rebellious world. I want to examine the opening two paragraphs to gain a vision that will inspire and sustain us as we seek to be faithful disciples at the end of the 20th century.

Acts 1: 1-11 serves as the introduction to Volume 2 of Luke's 2 volume work. How many have seen the "Star Wars" movies? At the beginning of each of the movies there is rolling script, white against the backdrop of outer space that tell where we are at in the story. These introductions remind us of what happened in the previous movie and tell us what is about to happen in the new movie.

These opening verses of Luke tell us that...

MAIN POINT

The Lord Jesus continues the work He began

I. Through his chosen people (vv. 1-2)

If you'll look at v. 1, this is a summary of Luke's gospel. "The works and words of Jesus." What Jesus did and what he taught. Notice the emphasis, he gave instructions to the apostles he had chosen. When Luke wants to summarize the ministry of Jesus, he does not emphasize the miracles and the teaching of the masses but rather the instructions he gave to the apostles, his chosen ones. NOTICE: The word, "began" is the critical word for Luke. See the implication? I told you about the work he began to do in my gospel, now I'm going to tell you about the work he continues to do. He did his work while here through the Holy Spirit and that is how he continues to do his work now, through his Holy Spirit through his chosen people. If you ask the question, where is God working in the world today? The answer is, in and through his church by His Holy Spirit.

This is the paradox of Christian living. How many think the Christian life is hard? Not hard, it is impossible. Has anyone ever lived a perfect Christian life? Only Jesus has lived the Christian life and only Jesus is continuing to live the Christian life. Yet, I am the one living it too. This is what the apostle Paul is referring to in I Cor. 15: 10. (Quote it.)

Mary Ann, neighbor in Champaign. Profuse in her thanks to us and telling us what wonderful people we are. Kept telling her, it's not us, we're selfish, evil people, but Christ is gracious and gives us loving hearts. We get confused, just like Mary Ann. We think it's us doing it or we think others Christians are just better people. We could never do what they are doing. We can't, but Christ can. Anytime there is progress in my life, Jesus does it.

Book of Acts is a book full of human action. Luke wants us to know, right at the start, humans are acting but it is actually Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, continuing the work he began when he came to earth 2000 years ago.

Jesus is continuing the work he began through his chosen people...

II. Who are persuaded of His reality

Look at verse 3. This is a summary of what Jesus did for the 40 days after his resurrection until his ascension. He appeared to His disciples to prove He was really alive and to instruct them about the kingdom of God. This is the same thing he'd been doing prior to his death. Proving He was the Son of God and teaching about the kingdom of God.

A superficial reading of this verse could lead you to a false conclusion. It is important to remember this is the second volume in a series. Have you ever seen the second movie in a series of movies without seeing the first one? Or have you ever read the second book in a series without reading the first one? If so, you know that it can often be confusing as you try to figure out what's going on and how people are related to one another. In the same way it is important to pay attention to what Luke has said in his gospel as we read the book of Acts.

A superficial reading will lead you to believe something false that many people believe. I can't tell you how many times I've had conversations with people who believe this false idea. I remember in the first year of my work with CCC, a student I was meeting with to help grow in their relationship with God told me, after reading the story of the Exodus, "If I had seen those miracles, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, God sending the manna, the pillar of fire, I would be a strong believer. If I could have been alive when Jesus was alive and seen him walk on the water and raise Lazarus from the dead and seen him raised from the dead, I'd be a way better Christian." Is that true? Is seeing miracles the only thing that stands between me and having a vibrant faith? No!! Luke doesn't believe that either.

Look with me at Luke 24. Tell the story of the Emmaus road. Now look at v. 31 and notice the passive verb. Look at v. 41 and v. 44. The only reason that anyone believes is because God, in his mercy, opens eyes to see and hearts to understand. How else do you explain the fact that I stand here today as a Christian, while others who have had similar experiences as me are not. Am I smarter, more spiritual, a better person? NO!! God has been gracious to me and given me faith to believe the miracles really happened, that Jesus really is my Savior.

The same Holy Spirit who persuaded me of the reality of Jesus Christ is able to persuade my neighbor, my family member. This same Holy Spirit who enabled the early disciples to believe Jesus was really resurrected and to gladly give their lives for him is able to give me a vibrant, growing faith. I must seek him to do so.

Jesus is continuing the work he began through his chosen people who are persuaded of His reality and ...

III. Who trust His promises in patient prayer

Turn back to Acts 1, look at vv. 4-5. These two verses contain the only commands in verses 1-8. What is remarkable is that Jesus knows he's about to leave for at least 2000 years and that the entire future of the Christian church will lay in the hands of these 11 men. He fully intends for the gospel to be preached in every nation of the world. His plan is that a church will exist in every people group of the world. He is serious about the Great Commission, which is his command to the church to make disciples of all nations. Yet, here at the beginning of the book that contains the story of how He went about beginning the fulfillment of the Great Commission, the only command he gives is, "Don't go anywhere, wait right here in Jerusalem."

The word, "wait" is a major OT word. Listen to these uses of the word in Isaiah 30: 15 & 18 and Psalm 130: 4-5. How did the disciples wait? Look at v. 14.

John Calvin says this, "God has promised us nothing that he has not also commanded us to ask of him in prayer."

John Piper says, "God is not looking for people who will serve him he is looking for people who will let him serve them." Then read in "Let the Nations Be Glad", pp. 55-56, 67.

Jesus' plan is that the whole world will hear the gospel and people from every tribe, tongue, language and nation will join in His worship in heaven. He has this little group of 11 men that he plans to leave behind to accomplish that task. What should be the first step? His answer is so different from ours- from mine. He says, stay in Jerusalem and wait for God to act. We say, what strategy will we use to reach this city? What kind of music will we have to attract the biggest crowds? What kind of youth group and programs for children will we do so that consumers will be attracted to our product? Our Christian bookstore shelves are lined with books to tell us how to have successful churches, successful families, successful financial management, successful bodies, etc. I don't want to be entirely cynical here but when Jesus is telling us the first and most important thing you can do to participate in the work I'm doing in the world is to wait and pray, then what in the world are we doing? Are we praying? Is God really the one we are going to for help or do we pursue every other avenue of help first and most and maybe tack on a prayer here and there for God to bless us.

Pastor Ron Dunn in commenting on this passage says this: "The disciples prayed for 10 days, preached for 10 minutes and 3000 people became Christians. We pray for 10 minutes, preach for 10 days, 30 people become Christians and we say, 'Hallelujah, it's Pentecost all over again.'"

You want to know Christ better? Pray. You want to love your spouse and children better? Pray. You want to overcome your addiction? Pray. You want to share the gospel with your neighbor? Pray.

One of the habits we are trying to build into our church is the habit of fasting and praying at least once per month. On January 15-16 we are going to have 24 hours of prayer and fasting. Explain it. Join us.

Jesus is continuing the work he began through his chosen people who are convinced of his reality, trusting his promises in patient prayer and...

IV. Whose greatest passion is love for Christ

Verse 6 starts with "therefore". This talk by Jesus about the baptism of the Holy Spirit causes the disciples to ask a question. It is a question they have asked before. They had expected that Jesus was going to set up God's kingdom on earth, prior to his death. In fact, in Luke 22, eighteen hours before Jesus was going to be killed, while they were eating the last supper together, the disciples were arguing about who was going to get the job of Vice-President in Jesus' kingdom. That last supper to them was a victory celebration, they were certain Jesus was going to take over in the next day or two and they would get to be in charge. The death of Jesus was a crushing blow to these men. So now that Jesus is resurrected and using this OT language about the HS, their expectations are aroused again and they want to know, "Is it now you are going to take over the world and put us in charge of things?"

Notice Jesus' response. On one hand he confirms that God is going to establish his kingdom on earth. But, on the other hand he rebukes their desire to have God do things their way. Basically he tells them it's none of their business.

Verse 8 is one of the most famous verses in that part of Christianity to which we belong. Evangelical Christians emphasize the fact that God intends to save people from all over the world and that he intends to do it through us. This verse says that very plainly. I have taught this verse dozens and dozens of times as I have tried to help and encourage Christians to take serious our responsibility to tell others about Christ. However, several years ago I noticed three things about this verse that are not usually emphasized in its treatment.

1st, it begins with the word, "but". This means that verse 8 is in contrast to verse 7. Jesus tells the disciples, "The kind of power you are looking for you are not going to get. You want power to make the world fit your ideas of how things ought to go. You want power to throw off the cruel Roman oppressors. That's not your job, that's not your business. But you will get power, not the kind you lust for but the power of the Holy Spirit.

2nd, it's not a command, it's a promise. Jesus is not saying, "I command you to be my witnesses". He is simply saying, "You will be my witnesses because you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit." Every true Christian bears testimony to the saving power of Christ by their life and by their words. That is a fact. Jesus is absolutely confident that the gospel is going to all the world, not because he is confident of the faithfulness of Christians but because he is confident in his own power to accomplish all his will. The history of the past 2000 years bears out the reality of this promise that Jesus made. The U.S. Center for World Missions has documented the growth of the Christian church in this way:

RATIO OF NON-CHRISTIANS TO CHRISTIANS

YEAR	NON-CHRISTIANS	EVANG. CHRISTIANS	RATIO OF BELIEVERS TO "NON"
100 AD	180 million	½ million	360:1
1000 AD	220 million	1 million	220:1
1500	344 million	5 million	69:1
1900	1.062 billion	40 million	27:1
1950	1.65 billion	80 million	21:1
1980	3.025 billion	275 million	11:1
1992	3.647 billion	540 million	6.8: 1

3rd, notice that it says that when the disciples receive the power of the Holy Spirit it says "and they will be witnesses", not "so that". Christians will bear testimony to the saving power of Christ, it is a result of being a Christian it is not the purpose for which God saves you. God does not save us to make us into evangelists. Luke is building on a long history of teaching about the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the OT the Holy Spirit has been promised to God's people as the agent who would give new hearts, new minds, new affections to God's people. It is the first and chief work of the Holy Spirit to cause you and I to love God and all of God's ways. It is his first business to give us hearts that are full of love for and delight in Christ as our Savior that then results in glad obedience and delighted declaration of the mercy of God in Christ.

It seems to me that there is a huge disparity between how much time and energy the modern church tells Christians they ought to be sharing their faith and how little the NT commands evangelism. In fact, there are only a few places where you might be able to find a command to share the gospel. It is the assumption of the NT writers that all those who belong to Christ will be so amazed at God's mercy that they cannot but help to declare it.

Illustration: How all Packer fans responded to the first Super Bowl. Why is it so easy to worship the Packers and to witness for the Packers but it is so difficult to worship Jesus and witness for Jesus? Because we love the Packers and we don't love Jesus. C.S. Lewis says this, "I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it. "Isn't she lovely?" "Wasn't it glorious?" "Don't you think that magnificent?"

Our problem is what we value. We are asking the same question the disciples asked in v. 6. "Is it now Lord that my wife is finally going to love me the way I need to be loved? Is it now Lord that my children are finally going to respect and obey me? Is it now Lord that I will finally get that promotion I deserve? Is it now Lord that I'll finally be healthy?" Our agenda and God's agenda are very often at odds with each other. We're looking for life here. God is building a kingdom that is not in this world. God wants us to know life to the fullest, but we're trying to get a full life in this world. What we love is what the disciples loved, this world to go the way we want it to go. Our hearts are in love with this world and so this world is what we pray about, what we praise and what we talk about.

Jesus wants to give us the Holy Spirit's power so we will have a new delight, so we will see his powerful salvation and love it and Him. When this is true we will worship and declare his praises to all who will listen.

CONTINUES

PEOPLE

HOLY SPIRIT

PRAYER

CONTINUES

PEOPLE

HOLY SPIRIT

PRAYER

CONTINUES

PEOPLE

HOLY SPIRIT

PRAYER

CONTINUES

PEOPLE

HOLY SPIRIT

PRAYER