

Four big themes of Acts

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[0 : 00] A little quiz for you. I've got a few pictures from things taken around our kitchen at home. Can you work out what they might be? So here's the first one. Any guesses? Just shout it out.

Some people have seen this before by the way. Light switch. Good, good, good. If you've seen it before, hold off, hold off. Any guesses? Any guesses? A sink or an apple? That's what I'm hearing. It's an apple.

Final, final one. Have a think. What might this be? Do you remember? Bay beans. Bay beans. Why do I show you those pictures? First picture, zoomed in. The second picture, zoomed out. And that's going to help us to think about how to read the Bible.

That's going to help us as we remind ourselves what we've heard from the whole book of Acts. Because often when we read the Bible, we're reading different verses and chapters. But actually at some points we need to zoom out.

[1 : 20] This morning we're going to zoom out and see what we've learned as a whole throughout the book of Acts. But also it's good to see, it's good to zoom out and see what does the whole Bible say?

What's the whole Bible's big story? And that can help us as we then delve into individual chapters and verses. Let's see why recently we've been saying a little summary, 30-second summary of the Bible story could be this.

So if you want to impress your friends this week, God made the world. We broke the world. Jesus fixes the world. You could say a whole lot more than that, but a very simple summary that we could remind ourselves of when we're going to any part of the Bible is, God made the world.

We broke the world. But Jesus fixes the world. That's what's going on from the beginning to the end of the Bible. And we're going to see, hopefully this morning, how does Acts fit into this big picture? How does Acts fit into this picture? Well, it comes, as you probably know, after the Gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts.

[2 : 38] And in fact, it's a continuation of the Gospels, really. Luke wrote Luke's Gospel. And then you could call this book Luke Volume 2.

This is Luke's second book. Let's just remind ourselves, how did Luke begin his first book? Luke chapter 1. If you've got a Bible, do turn that.

Luke chapter 1, verse 1 to 4. Luke writes this.

Luke reads this. that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were from the first eyewitnesses and servants of the words. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decide to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you've been taught.

Luke wants to help his readers to understand that the things that he writes about are certain, they're true. People have seen these things happen. They're reliable accounts. And he himself has carefully investigated them and drawn up both Luke volume one and then Acts, Luke volume two.

[4 : 11] And in his book, Luke is helping us to understand the big Bible story that Jesus has now come and he is coming to fix the world that we have broken. And then we get to Acts and we read, as we have read already this morning, verse one, I wrote all about what Jesus began to do and teach.

This book is about what Jesus continues to do then. Luke volume one, what Jesus began to do. Luke volume two, what Jesus continues to do.

And that leads us to first of four big themes in the book of Acts. Jesus risen and ascendance. Jesus risen and ascendance. And we see him here in Acts chapter one. He is risen. Verse three, after his

suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proves that he was alive. He was alive. But then comes a shock. Having said, this is about what Jesus continues to do. We see he disappears. Verse nine, after he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid them, hid him from their sight. He ascends into heaven, leaving people gawping up into the sky.

And suddenly we might be thinking, no, Jesus, you're wrong, Daniel. This isn't about what Jesus continues to do. He's done some sort of Houdini trick and he's disappeared. You can't say this book is about Jesus.

[6 : 07] Perhaps your Bible even says this is the Acts of the Apostles. But actually I think a better title would be the Acts of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus.

Let me help you to see that. Though Jesus was physically absent, his ascension to the right hand of the Father, exalted now in glory, means that he now reigns over all things and from there is in the best place to direct the mission of his church.

And it's good that he goes. Let me show you these words in verse six of chapter one. Then they gathered round him and asked, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel? That's what the Jewish people were hoping for in their Messiah. You're going to restore your kingdom. You're going to free us from the rule of our oppressors. And Jesus replies to them and he essentially says, no, not yet.

And it's not going to be in the way you think. Because actually something even bigger is going on. And it's revealed to us in the book of Daniel. Daniel 7, 13.

[7 : 32] In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. This is the continuation of verse nine when Jesus went up into the clouds.

And he approached the ancient of days, his father, and was led into his presence. And he was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. The book of Acts is about the risen and ascended Lord Jesus.

He's ascended to his throne in heaven. And because of that, he can give his people this mission in chapter one and verse eight.

This is the key verse of the book of Acts, I think. But 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.

[8 : 51] And he can only do that. Because he's now, as the ascended, exalted king at his father's right hand, he's been given authority to continue to build his kingdom, which is made up of all nations.

And so he can say to Jerusalem and beyond. That's what we've been saying. If you've not been here until this week, that's our Buzz Lightyear verse. Buzz Lightyear says to infinity and beyond. Jesus says to Jerusalem and beyond.

If you think I'm mad, that's okay. That's the mission. But how? How?

How can these 11 or so ordinary men go into all the world? Well, the king who reigns on his throne says to them in verse eight, you will be clothed with power from on high.

You will be given the Holy Spirit. And that's only possible because Jesus is now exalted at the right hand of his father. Have a look.

[9 : 58] Chapter two, verse 33. Verse 32, actually. Let's begin. God has raised this Jesus to life. We're all witnesses of it.

He's exalted to the right hand of God. And he has received from the father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Jesus is directing the affairs of his church from heaven. And he gives them all the help that he needs by his presence with them, the Holy Spirit with them.

He's leading them and guiding them in this mission. So the book of Acts, it's about the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

And just in case you're still thinking, there is no Jesus here, Daniel. You're wrong. Can we look at a few other verses? I told you we're going to look at the whole of the book of Acts.

[10 : 58] Don't worry, not every single verse in the book of Acts, though. Chapter three, verse six. We find Jesus at work. Then Peter said to a lame man, couldn't walk, silver or gold, I do not have.

But what I do have, I give you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Walk. And as we know, he went walking and leaping and praising God.

The Lord Jesus is at work here. Through his people. Bringing healing to a man. Or chapter five, verse 41. Have a look with me if you can.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering, disgrace for the name. The apostles are going about their work.

Having spent so much time with the Lord Jesus. And they're saying we're continuing to live for him. In fact, we're suffering for him. And that's the pathway for all disciples.

[12:07] We're following Jesus' pathway. He on earth went through suffering. And now, as we've seen, is in glory. And for any who will come and follow him, it's suffering here.

But glory to come. Jesus is at work. His people are following him. We see him as well in chapter seven, verse 55.

Have a look there if you can with me. At the end of... As the church is about to see its first martyr, Stephen.

Stoned to death. We see the Lord Jesus is with him. Verse 55. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God.

And Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open. And the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He gets to glimpse what Daniel glimpsed in those words we read from Daniel 7.

[13:16] The Lord Jesus Christ is with his people. Even as Stephen is about to go through the stoning. Death. The Lord Jesus Christ, he's with his people.

In chapter nine, I'm not going to read the whole of the chapter. Don't panic. It's a bit of a turning point in the book of Acts. As we see, there's a bit of transition going on.

As Paul, or Saul as he was, is dramatically saved on the road to Damascus. And look who's working here.

If you have a look in chapter nine, verse three. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

And he fell to the ground and heard a voice say, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

[14:18] The Lord Jesus is at work. The Lord Jesus is bringing people into his kingdom. And here in a particularly significant way with the apostle Paul.

The once murderer of God's people. Now dramatically saved by God's grace. Jesus is at work here. Jesus risen and ascended. This is what the book of Acts draws us. Two more places. Chapter 12, verse 11. Chapter 12, verse 11.

Peter is in prison here. But he's rescued wonderfully. And look what he says as he realizes what's happened.

Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches. And from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen. By that, by the Lord, I take that as the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:26] Sending his angel to free Peter from prison. The Lord Jesus is at work as he reigns in the glory of heaven. And final place.

Chapter 19. Jesus is at work transforming a city. Transforming the city of Ephesus. A city full of all sorts of wickedness.

And yet look what happens. Verse 19 of chapter 19. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas.

That's huge money. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. The Lord Jesus is at work and he's transforming lives.

So much so that they're willing to give up their old lives in evil practices to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. The book of Acts shows us the Lord Jesus risen and ascended.

[16:34] A second big theme. Salvation for the whole world is another big theme in this book.

In Luke's gospel, Luke shows us salvation. Chapter 2, verse 29 to 30.

Luke chapter 2, 29 to 30. This man, Simeon, was promised that he would get to see the consolation of Israel.

And after Luke has shown us who this is found in, throughout the birth narrative of the Lord Jesus, we reach this point.

As Simeon took him, the baby in his arms, he prays God saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

[18:02] My eyes have seen, he says, not the Messiah, not the baby Jesus. My eyes have seen salvation. The Lord Jesus is salvation for his people and he says for the Gentiles, for the world.

What's salvation? Salvation is deliverance. That's certainly what it is in the Old Testament, deliverance from enemies, Egyptians, Philistines, Babylonians, Assyrians.

And when Jesus arrives, as I've said, they were hoping for salvation from the Romans, deliverance from the Romans. But Jesus comes and the salvation he offers is far bigger than that.

And Simeon realizes it as he holds this baby in his arms. This is salvation for the world, not from human oppressors, but from the problem of evil.

The problem which we have known since the garden that is part of the big Bible story. We broke the world as Satan came and deceived Adam and Eve.

[19:16] And sin entered it. Sin and death. This world is broken. But the Lord Jesus Christ comes. God's promises to his people are being fulfilled.

salvation has arrived and is going to the world. And through Jesus' work on the cross and in his resurrection, he brings us deliverance from those enemies, death, sin, hell.

It's recently, you may have seen it in the news, it's recently been 20 years since the 7-7 bombings in London. And out of that has come all sorts of stories and reflections.

And here's one. On one of the underground trains bombed, there was this guy called Dan. He didn't believe that he would get out of that tunnel alive.

He had seen this bright flash, silenced for a moment, it felt like far longer than seconds, and then suddenly screaming like he'd never heard before.

[20:25] And he was bleeding. But then, this man Adrian came along and he said, don't worry. I've been in this situation before.

He'd been working as a combat officer, combat medic even, in the Kosovo war. And he said, you're going to be okay.

And he managed to stop Dan from bleeding and pulled him up and waited with him until the ambulance crew arrived. Adrian was Dan's savior from death that day and here's them together 20 years later.

And that's just a little picture of what the salvation Jesus offers to us is like. We were human beings, we're stuck in darkness, there is no way out. And yet the Lord Jesus comes and says, don't worry. I have done what is needed to save you. Trust in me and if you do, you'll no longer be heading towards certain death but certain life with me.

[21:35] Salvation. This salvation then is being proclaimed to the whole world. And that's what Acts helps us to see. Salvation is to be proclaimed to the whole world.

And we see that in miniature on the day of Pentecost, the great day of Pentecost, as the Jewish people from nations all around gathered in Jerusalem and Peter stood up to proclaim the Lord Jesus to them.

and look at what he said to them at the end of his quote from the prophet Joel. Acts 2, 21.

He says, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And the result is verse 36, or 37 even, when the people heard this, they were cut to the hearts and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

And then on that day, as Peter explained, what you should do, repent and believe. Salvation came to them. saved from heading towards death and now in the kingdom of light and life.

[22:57] And 3,000 people here and are saved. And that work of salvation goes on. We could look at chapter 8, the saving of the Ethiopian eunuch, the first person outside of the Jewish people to be saved.

And later on, Cornelius. And then last week, we got to Rome. And Paul is preaching salvation to people there. He'd made it to the ends of the known worlds.

And we are too involved in this work of spreading salvation to the world, aren't we? Salvation to people all over this city.

It strikes me that we really do have an opportunity to declare salvation to the nations in this very city. Because whatever you think of it, through immigration and things, we have the nations coming to us.

That's no accident of the Lord, is it? And so we have opportunities to declare salvation to the nations in this city. And perhaps you're with us this morning and you don't know salvation as I've described it from the Lord Jesus Christ yet.

[24 : 16] This can be yours if you call out to Him. Everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved.

We're going to pause there. It's a hot day. And salvation to the world. Two more. The power of the Spirit and the words in Acts.

The power of the Spirit and the words. Early on, maybe you'll remember it, in Jesus' earthly ministry, He said these words in the Gospel of Luke, they're recorded from the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord is on me and has anointed me to preach good news. The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He empowered His mission throughout the earth.

And the Lord Jesus, as we've seen, gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people, empowering them for mission in His worlds.

[25 : 23] And I think we've seen through Acts that it's not just the Holy Spirit who's powerfully at work in believers' lives, enabling them, emboldening them to go and be Jesus' witnesses to the world.

But also, we have seen that there's another power going on, the power of the Word going out. and that is doing the work of God.

We've been saying the Word of God does the work of God and it's by the Spirit of God. So Word and Spirit go together. Let me try and show you that just a little bit in the book of Acts in chapter 2 and verse 4.

Chapter 2 and verse 4. On that great day of Pentecost as the Holy Spirit came to rest on his disciples, Jesus' disciples, we read this, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, there's the Spirit, and began to speak, there's the Word, in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The Spirit and the Word go together. We see it elsewhere. Chapter 4, verse 31. At the end of this amazing prayer meeting, verse 31, after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 00] There's the Spirit. And they spoke the Word of God boldly. Spirit and Word go together in Acts. Chapter 6, verse 10. This is Stephen speaking.

And then we read this. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave Stephen as he spoke.

Spirit and speaking. Going together. And finally, chapter 9, verse 17. Chapter 9, verse 17.

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it, placing his hands on Saul. He said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And then immediately something like scales from Saul's eyes fell and he could see again and he got up and was baptized. And after taking some food he regained his strength.

[28 : 15] The Spirit came on him and then we read in verse 20, at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Paul's filled with the Spirit and almost immediately he speaks, he proclaims that message of salvation to people.

And throughout the work book of Acts we've seen that going on and that truly does transform lives as the Spirit and the Word go together.

And let me try and show you that as well to build on that. So it's chapter 6 verse 7. chapter 6 verse 7.

So the Word of God spreads and what happened as the Word of God spread the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

[29 : 22] And then I'll just show you I won't show you chapter 19 but verse 13 verse 48. When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

The Word of the Lord spread through the whole region. The Word of the Lord was going out and it was transforming lives transforming cities transforming communities transforming individuals.

the Word going forth by the power of the Spirit. The Word of God does the work of God by the Spirit of God.

We see that throughout this book. The Word and Spirit go hand in hand and often it seems to me that in churches like ours at Calvary we could be accused of spending too much time looking at the Word and ignoring the Spirit.

And we might look at other churches and say they spend too much time talking about the Holy Spirit and not enough time in the Word. We need both and how we pray and long that our churches would be both Word and Spirit filled.

[30 : 47] Spirit and Word together they go hand in hand and they're at work every time the Word of God is preached and so we can pray rightly pray for our preachers Lord work in them by your Spirit as they proclaim your words and we unashamedly will keep proclaiming God's Word by the help of His Spirit here at Calvary.

It's been a big week for us as a church thinking about our ministry to children and young people and we make no apology that whether children and young people are in groups or in a service the Word of God will be opened with them and we trust that God will work as He assures us He will in His Word through that Word opened by His Spirit who is far more powerful than we are and He can speak to all ages all levels of understanding so we trust that and we will keep doing that in our church.

the power of the Word and the Spirit and finally final big theme in the book of Acts the unstoppable mission of God a key verse for you with that chapter 5 verse 38 to 39 chapter 5 38 to 39 as people were deciding what to do with the disciples as they were continuing to do God's work God's mission and they were seen by some as troublemakers they said this in verse 38 as they were thinking about killing some disciples they said therefore in the present case I advise you leave these men alone let them go for if their purpose or activity is of human origin it will fail but if it's from God you will not be able to stop these men you will only find yourselves fighting against

God's spoken by someone who didn't believe this was actually God's word I don't God's work I don't think but also sharing so much truth if this is the work of God it will not fail you cannot stop it it's unstoppable and we have seen that through the book of Acts and it's been so exciting to see that amid persecution through divisions between Jewish believers and Gentile believers through a division between Paul and Barnabas do you remember that that sharp dispute through disciples being arrested through times in prison and more recently through ships and shipwrecks and snake bites God was ensuring all the time that his mission won't fail this truly was a work of God's and because his mission is unstoppable last week we got to chapter 28 and Paul made it to Rome he might be imprisoned he might be under house rest but the book of Acts let's just show you Acts 28 ends with Paul continuing to proclaim the word of the Lord it's wonderful verse 30 of chapter 28 for two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him and he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance God's mission purposes and what the Lord Jesus says go to Jerusalem and beyond were being worked out even right to the end and now friends we're living in Acts 29 if you try and find Acts 29 you won't find it in your Bible if you do come and have a word with me but we are living in Acts 29 the mission continues it's been continuing for these last 2,000 odd years let me tell you of one way that unstoppable mission of

[35 : 42] God has been working out did you know this that 160 years ago at this place down the road Brighton Beach a man called Hudson Taylor was on Brighton Beach and he was praying he was praying this for 24 willing and skillful workers to take the gospel to those with the fewest opportunities to hear it and his heart was for the inland provinces of China and his prayers were answered and for almost 90 years China Inland Mission started churches open schools and hospitals and engaged many of the social needs of the country at the time by 1939 the mission had not 24 but over 1,300 missionaries from around seven countries his prayers were answered beyond his imagination and almost 200,000

Chinese and minority people have been baptized and the work in China continues though it looks different because in 19 around 1949 the Chinese communist revolution happened and it resulted in the expulsion of missionaries and the closure of churches but we've just said God's mission is unstoppable and it is because the church grew from just under a million then to an estimated 247 million today and some places people cleverer than I have said that by 2030 China of all the countries in the world China could have the biggest population biggest Christian population of any

country in the world that's amazing and that's because

God's mission is unstoppable people might try and stop us this week as some of us go out into Brighton really intentional on mission people might try and stop us from speaking or handing Bibles to them might happen in the city mission work it might happen wherever God has placed you but we take confidence in the word of God knowing that the spirit is with us knowing that the Lord Jesus is risen and ascended and is directing the affairs of his people and all of it all of his mission in this world is unstoppable whatever people might try and do so the book of Acts is part of this big Bible story God made the world we broke the world and Jesus fixes the world Jesus is fixing it through his people in the power of his spirit as his word is going forward he's using us in this mission he's given us an amazing purpose in our lives as we go out and do as he wants us to do and we take confidence completely in the

Lord Jesus don't we who was our crucified and risen saviour and is now ascended exalted at the right hand of the father and is reigning and one day he will bring this mission to a close and we will gather with people who have been saved throughout history from around the world from all nations all tribes and all tongues and we'll say Lord Jesus you receive all the glory and all the honour for what you have done