

Unfinished - Acts 1:1-5

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Date: 12 September 2021

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[0 : 00] I want to begin today with an apology to my elementary, junior high, and high school teachers for not appreciating history as much as I ought to have.

And when I was in school, I didn't nearly have the appreciation that I ought to. And as I have grown older, and especially as I have traveled some, my appreciation for history has only increased all the more.

And I remember being in Rwanda shortly after the genocide and wondering what culminated into this event.

What were the contributing factors to a million people in a hundred days being slaughtered? What led to that? How is it that Hong Kong in 1997 transitioned under Chinese rule?

What was the history behind that? And so as I began to travel, and now I find history incredibly fascinating. And I am now, I love history.

[1 : 05] One of my favorite classes in seminary was on church history. And so I had the privilege of reading these two books, it's like Volume 1 and Volume 2. So if you want two books on church history, this comes to Christ until the Reformation, and this takes it from Reformation until today.

And it's a two volume set on church history, and it is incredible. And I now love history. And I love when world history and church history collide.

I remember being in Changsha, China, and being on the ancient city wall, and I was praying there and then I remembered reading something and I learned and I confirmed it later that that was the very wall that Hudson Taylor used to pray, and he ultimately died in that city.

And so I love where world history and church history collide. And to be in that place and pray over that city and for the Chinese people was such a privilege to know that we stand on the shoulders of great women and men of faith throughout history.

And today we have the opportunity to look at, begin a new sermon series through the book of Acts. And it is a story of history, of how the church began.

[2 : 25] These spirit-empowered witnesses for Christ, how they spread the gospel and kick-started the church, and it spread throughout all the world. And so today we have an exciting sermon series to begin called Unfinished, and we'll share with you how I came up with that title at the end of the sermon.

But we begin this passage. If you have your Bible with us, we're going to begin in Acts chapter 1. We're going to make it through the first five verses today.

And this sermon series will take us one year to complete. We'll be in this book of Acts for 12 months. And you think, Scott, if you're only going to handle five verses today, you better speed it up because we're not going to make it in 12 months.

But let's read God's word together, Acts chapter 1, verses 1 through 5. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after his sufferings by many proofs, appearing to them during the 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait.

[3 : 56] For the promise of the Father, which he said, you heard from me, for John baptized you with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

This is written by the same author that the Gospel of Luke was written by. So Luke is the author of Acts, or, and the Gospel of Luke.

He also has the same audience. If we look with me on the screen, Luke 1, 3 through 4 begins this way. Luke writes, says this, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely from some time past to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty about the things that you have been taught.

So apparently Theophilus is a person, and let me just share, Theophilus means beloved of God. Some think this may be a general representative name for a general audience.

So for example, some argue that Theophilus means beloved of God, so Luke is just writing to a general audience. You all are Theophilus, you're the beloved of God.

[5 : 15] Or there may be a gentleman specifically who is Theophilus that Luke is writing to. There's a debate I'm going to suggest to you that I believe Theophilus to be a specific person.

And I'll share with you why in a moment. Number one, we'll notice that in the Gospel of Luke, Theophilus is someone who may have been doubting. It says that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught.

Theophilus, I want you to write, I'm writing this Gospel about who Jesus Christ is, what He did and what He said and what He did, and I'm writing to you that you may not doubt, that you be certain of the things that you have been taught.

I believe He also is to be a person because He has a title, it says, Most Excellent Theophilus. In the book of Acts, most excellent, that title is given to Festus and Felix, who are governors of Judea.

And so this is a title that is given to Roman authority. He may be a Roman official of some kind. Whoever he is, he is likely an educated man for this reason.

[6 : 23] Luke and Theophilus are educated people because Luke's grammar and his vocabulary in the Greek is difficult. And so Luke writing is using Greek vocabulary and grammar that is difficult, and so Theophilus is able to read that and understand it.

So I likely Theophilus is an educated person. We know Luke to be a medical doctor. And so Luke, if you will, is this first volume, and we read this in verse one, O Theophilus, in the first book, O Theophilus, referring to the gospel.

So in the first book of Luke, Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

And so if you will, Theophilus, in my first letter to you in the gospel of Luke, it's about Jesus Christ's earthly ministry.

And we see then, then Acts, if you put emphasis on the word began, I've dealt with all of the Jesus began to do and to teach. So by implication, the gospel or the book of Acts is about what Jesus Christ's heavenly ministry looks like.

And so if you will, Luke is the first volume, Acts is the second, of the two volume set, Acts being the second to Theophilus. And Acts will be a letter about what the spirit-empowered witnesses of Jesus Christ the apostles did.

[7 : 57] Luke in verse two, though, puts a special emphasis on an event. Let me read one, and then we'll go into verse two one more time. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when he was taken up.

And so what separates the gospel of Luke and Acts, the thing that both of those letters or those books put emphasis on is Jesus' ascension.

Luke is the only gospel writer that includes something about the ascension of Jesus Christ. We read in Luke chapter 24, we read this, while he blessed them, speaking of Jesus, he departed from them and he was carried up into heaven.

Luke is the only gospel writer, Matthew, Mark, John did not include the ascension in their writings, only Luke did. And so here he says, again, he reminds Theophilus, he, he, I wrote to you the first letter and that all that he began to do and to teach until he was taken up.

So the gospel of Luke concludes with the ascension. And Acts kicks off with the fact that something is about to occur and I'll give it to you now, it's the spirit of God is going to come.

[9 : 16] Something is about to occur, but that event cannot occur until the Lord is taken. And so even in the book of Acts, Luke puts special emphasis on the ascension.

I wrote to you, all of Jesus began to do until the day when he was taken up. We need to note that Jesus was taken only after he did something.

And this is what Luke wants to put special emphasis on, only in the daily he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, whom he had chosen.

And so what we see is that Jesus's ministry now in the book of Acts is not going to be done by him. He is going to ascend to the father, to the right hand of the father.

And so Jesus's heavenly ministry is going to now be done through the apostles or by the apostles. And we're going to see here in a moment that they, the apostles are going to do that ministry empowered by and through the Holy Spirit.

[10:29] And this is clearly emphasized. We could read it this way in English, until the day when having instructed his chosen apostles through the Holy Spirit, he was taken up.

He was not taken up until he gave instructions to the apostles. This is what you are to do. And so Jesus now is, he ascended and he is going to do ministry by or through the apostles.

And they are going to do ministry through and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And so we get to the foundation of Jesus's ministry, the apostles.

Because the apostles were given this unique position, they were given a unique privilege. And Luke wants theophilus to know that he could trust the writings of the apostles.

What has set apart the apostles? And so it's at this point in time, I want to share what it is that Luke is emphasizing for theophilus in order for theophilus to put trust in what the apostles have said and done.

[11:38] And I just want to say this, there's something called apostolic authority. And this is important both for theophilus and this is important for us today. For example, there's a movement maybe started around 20 years ago, 15 years ago, really started catching influence.

And it's based out of North and South Carolina is where this is popular. But there is a new apostolic reformation where people are calling themselves apostles.

And so that is concerning in some ways. I want to be real clear though, apostles in the general sense means just sent one. So in some sense, we all are just sent, we could say we're all apostles in the general sense, but that's not how this group of people is saying it.

And I will probably never say that I'm an apostle because what it means specifically. And so it's the specific sense of the word that gives me great caution.

And it's this apostolic movement that is being in North and South Carolina up around 20 years ago, 15 years ago, really began. And it's still prevalent today. And I wanted to share with you why this is important to Theophilus and why this is important to us today.

[12:53] Because there's something called apostolic authority, that it's the authority that the apostles had. And that is this, that the apostles had the authority to establish doctrine.

We read in Ephesians 2 that the church was built upon the prophets, the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And with Jesus being the chief cornerstone, we read in Acts chapter 2.

In fact, read Acts chapter 2, verse 42. We're just going to read one verse real quickly. And they devoted themselves, this is the early church.

Notice what they devoted themselves to, to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship and to the breaking bread and to prayers. But what was this that they devoted themselves to?

The apostles teaching. Why? Because the apostles had this apostolic authority to establish doctrine. And so, why is this important?

[13:52] Let's put ourselves in the sandals of Theophilus for just a moment. In the first two centuries of church history, there were a lot of writings that were circulating around different churches.

Some of them by the apostles, some of them not by the apostles. And the church made the distinction, this is from Paul, we can trust this. This is from Peter, we can trust this.

This over here, I don't know who's the author of that, we can't trust that because it's not from a known apostle. And so, for Theophilus, he needs to know, what can I trust?

Who has apostolic authority and what doesn't have apostolic authority? And that is even true for us today. I am very nervous. There are movements today where people are claiming to be apostles.

And so, what they're claiming to do and to be in this specific sense is they're claiming to have apostolic authority so therefore they can create new doctrine. If I said, you know what, today, I think we all should be able to have 10 spouses.

[14:54] And I'm just going to create a new doctrine. We're all going to have 10 husbands and wives and all this. I hope you would know that you're now no longer a part of a church, you're now part of a cult.

And so, I don't have the authority to create new doctrine. The doctrine's been created by the apostles and it's been written down for our edification. We have the very word of God. So that's why I'm very hesitant to claim the title of an apostle.

I'm a disciple of Christ. I'm not an apostle.

And we know that here. What is one of the characteristics? How can theophilus put trust in what the apostles have done as Jesus has chosen them?

Look with me in the bottom of verse two. He was taken up after he had given commands to the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. The apostles were chosen by God.

[16:00] And what is the, in the book of Acts, we'll read this in a little bit later, a few more sermons down the road, but it says this in Acts chapter 10. What is the qualification of an apostle?

We were witnesses of everything he did in the country of Jews and Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on the cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.

He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Notice we were witnesses. And it says by the witness of whom God has already chosen, that is the apostles we ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. So who are the apostles?

[17:02] They are the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus Christ. That's who the apostles are. And they had this unique authority to establish doctrine.

So I wanted to take this a little bit and share with you how did we get the canon of Scripture? What I mean by canon is this.

How do we know that these 66 books that we have in this Bible that we read, that we say this is the final authority of God and it is sufficient for life and godliness?

How is it that we do this? I want to share with you the criteria of what made it into this book and what was left out. And I want you to see what emphasis we place on the apostles.

Notice this. And I'm sorry that's a little difficult to read perhaps. But it is this, the canon by the way just means rule or standard. And we refer to that as so what made it into the canon, the 66 books, what made it into the Bible?

[18:10] It was either written by or recognized, written by a recognized prophet or an apostle. So one of these letters that we have that can make up the Bible, they are written by and recognized as a prophet or recognized as one of the apostles.

This is why the book of Hebrews was probably one of the last letters in our Bible to be part of the canon of Scripture that we have. Why? Because it has an unknown author.

So Isaiah, Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Paul, Peter, these are clear cut. These are prophets. These are apostles. Number two, it was written by those associated with a recognized prophet or an apostle.

And this is where Luke comes in. Luke is not an apostle. Luke is associated with an apostle who, Paul. He traveled with Paul for years.

In fact, we know that in the letter to Timothy, second Timothy, Paul writes and says, Demas has left me. He has loved this world, but Luke is still with me.

[19:26] I alone am left, but Luke is with me. And so we know Luke is with Paul and he has been with Paul. And so it is written by those associated and recognizes prophets or apostles.

So Luke is associated with Paul and so that's why his letters are in here. And if you think that's not a big deal, Luke and Acts consist of the total writings of a quarter of the New Testament is from this guy that's associated with an apostle.

Faithfulness to previously accepted canonical works and canonical writings. This is where Hebrews shines. Why is Hebrews included with this unknown author in terms of the church's acceptance?

Because Hebrews not only agrees with, but helps explain and to bring greater clarity that which has been taught in the Old Covenant and now seeing it anew in Christ as the New Covenant and is beautifully on display.

And I'm grateful that we have the book of Hebrews. It's truthful in the church's usage and recognition or its acceptance.

[20 : 30] We have this notion sometimes that some books should have been in the New Testament, but they were excluded. And that's not how this worked. That the early church readily accepted some letters and said, we know who these are.

And these have been circulating in the churches, but we don't know who these are. And so we're going to close the canon at 66 books and 66 letters. And so these other things, they may be Gnostic gospels, they may be pseudopigraphal works, they may be some of these other things, they may be the apocrypha, but they're not a part of what we know.

So my point in sharing this with you is this, notice how many of these points relate to the apostles. They're incredibly important.

They're incredibly important for theophilus. It's incredibly important for us today. So we have that Jesus chose them. Notice Jesus showed himself to them.

This is the second point. Luke wants theophilus to know that Jesus is alive. Look with me in verse three.

[21 : 35] He presented himself alive to them after his sufferings by many proofs. I think Paul is so understated here after his sufferings.

Luke says after his sufferings, oh, you mean his scourging's where his flesh is ripped bare. You mean, oh, his crown of thorns.

You mean, oh, he carried his cross until he couldn't anymore. You mean the nails that were pierced in his hands and his feet. And they fixed him on the cross and his struggle for breath for many hours until giving up his spirit and dying.

Oh, you mean his death for sin. And Luke just writes after his sufferings. Oh, that's a very G rated way of saying what was graphic.

He presented himself alive. Why do you think that's important that he is saying he presented himself alive because you have been hard pressed to see this pound of flesh that they had taken off the cross and to say he is the king of the universe.

[22 : 47] He is the Messiah. He did that for us. You would be hard pressed to say he could be alive. And so he, Luke is saying, oh, he presented himself alive after his sufferings by many proofs.

My translation says by many proofs in verse three and anything. Well, what are those proofs? He says, oh, by appearing to them during 40, 40 days, speaking to them about the kingdom of God. So after he was raised from the grave for 40 days, he appeared to many people showing himself I'm alive. And in fact, we read with Thomas and the disciples in a room, he says, see my hands and see my feet.

It is I myself handle me, see me, touch me for spirit has no flesh and no bones as you see that I have. And after being convinced that this is Jesus, we're not seeing a ghost, we're not seeing a spirit, we're not seeing this is Jesus presenting himself alive.

You know what the disciples did? And it says, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and they took it and he ate it in front of them. There was no doubt Jesus is alive.

[24 : 02] And Luke is writing to Theophilus and he says, oh, he appeared to many. In fact, there are 10 instances that we have in the New Testament where Jesus appeared to people in those 40 day period of time.

Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus appears to Peter in Jerusalem. Jesus appears to the 10 disciples.

He appears to the 11 disciples. He appears to seven disciples upon returning who have returned to fishing in Galilee. Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples in Galilee.

Jesus appears to 500 and Jesus appears to James, the Lord's brother. Yes. In 40 day period of time, Jesus made many appearances to many people and Luke is saying he presented himself alive to these apostles.

He's alive. Your faith Theophilus is not in some dead savior. He rose from the grave and he is alive.

[25 : 10] And it is this eyewitness of seeing the resurrected Christ that an apostle can claim apostleship because I saw the resurrected Christ.

And we don't have to wait for Easter to celebrate his resurrection. We celebrate and we remind ourselves when we take the Lord's supper.

We remind ourselves of the death and the price that he paid for sin. We remind ourselves of his resurrection and him being alive when we witness a baptism when someone testifies to that in

baptism.

We sing songs every week talking about the resurrected Christ. And what was he talking to them about in the bottom of verse three?

He says he was speaking to them about the kingdom of God. There is an already and not yet sense about the kingdom of God. God's people, if you were to define the kingdom of God, you could say it's God's people and God's place under God's authority.

[26 : 27] Every king has subjects, every king has territory and every king has authority. And so there is an already sense of the kingdom of God and a not yet sense of that.

And so what is evident in the spiritual realm, we will see by faith. That we see by faith will one day be evident in the physical realm that we will see by sight.

And Jesus was speaking to them about the kingdom of God. Thirdly, concerning the apostles that Luke wants theophilus to know, is he says that Jesus commanded and he commissioned them.

Look with me back in verse two. I want to spend a little time on the bottom of verse two until the day he was taken up after he had given the commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He had chosen them and then he commissioned them in verses four and five. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he would heard from me for John baptize it with the water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

[27 : 37] And when that events happens, when the promise of the Father, and we'll get to that here in a moment, he says it relates to what he commanded to them in verse two.

Well what was it that he commands, he gave them these commands in verse two. It's related to them doing something when they receive the promise of the Father. And I know this is a little vague at this time, but I want us to look at Luke 24.

Remember Luke recorded the ascension of Christ in his gospel and this is what he writes. Thus it is written that Christ should suffer and on the third day will be raised from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. What is it that he commanded them before he was taken up? He says, well, that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations beginning in Jerusalem.

So what is it that I've commanded you? Proclaim his name to all the nations, my apostles. That's what I want you to do. That's your job.

[28 : 54] Proclaim my name to all the nations. The mission of the apostles were to proclaim the nations, his death, his resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sin to preach repentance and forgiveness of sin.

And it is evident that this is what he asked him. He commanded them to do because of what they did beginning in the very next chapter. He receives the Holy Spirit and he does this beautiful sermon.

He declares of Christ's death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. And lastly, we see that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

What does Luke again want theophilists to know about the apostles? He chose them. He showed himself to them. He commanded and commissioned them and he promised them the Holy Spirit.

They were not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. And so the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father that we read in verse four, but wait for the promise of the Father.

[30 : 02] And you say, well, how do we know this? Look with Luke again, Luke 24. Look with me in verse 49. And behold, how does Luke in the Gospel of Luke describe the promise of the Father?

Who is this? I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

This is amazing that these apostles were given extraordinary spiritual power for Christ exalting ministry. They were giving supernatural power to be his witnesses to the nations.

And notice the observations that we can make here in this Luke passage, that the promise of the Father was going to be sent. They were to stay in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high.

That's a unique detail that isn't mentioned here in the book of Acts. The apostles cannot proceed without this enabling power and this empowerment for a new era that the Spirit of God is going to bring.

[31 : 14] This provision from the Father from long ago, the promise of the Father. Theophilus can be rest assured that the suffering of Jesus did not end the story of God's kingdom, but it was very much a part of God's kingdom.

Just raised from the dead, he is alive and he ascended to the Father that the next phase of God's redemption plan can be inaugurated. The promise of the Father, the sending of the Holy Spirit that will provide the divine enablement and the power to communicate God's redemptive plan to the nations.

And Theophilus can be rest assured that this is a part of God's plan and so too can we. God I want us to go back and try to seek to apply this message to ourselves.

What unique ministry the apostles had specifically, we have the same ministry generally. Notice Jesus chose the four aspects of the apostles specifically we have been given generally.

Jesus chose us to those who are in Christ. Listen with me Ephesians one, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before us.

[32 : 42] Jesus chose you. Jesus showed himself to you. John 6:44, no one comes to me unless the Father draws him and I will raise him up in that later last day, he revealed himself to you.

You have this authorizing and commissioned by Jesus to speak in his name. Jesus said in Matthew 28 all authority has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son Holy Spirit teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.

Jesus commanded and commissioned you to make disciples and he promised you the Holy Spirit. He has given you the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1 through 13 says this, in him you also when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, you believed in him and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

The moment we believe in Christ we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. And so this ministry that the apostles began, we share in this ministry.

I hope today that you are fully convinced that Jesus is alive. He is seated at the right hand of God.

The ministry he is doing began with the apostles and continues with the church today.

[34 : 17] Luke wrote to Theophilus in order to communicate and I pray this message would be heartfelt to us. He is alive.

He will reign. His cause is unstoppable. He is worth living and dying for. Let's go.

The New Testament is perfectly aware that you will never see Jesus in the flesh until he returns.

But just as Jesus said to Thomas, blessed are those who have not seen yet believe.

And in 1 Peter 1:8 says having not seen him, you love him and rejoice with joy that is unspeakable full of glory.

And so, oh, that we would remind ourselves, renew ourselves to the very thing that we have been called to that began in the book of Acts.

[35 : 19] The sending of the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, because Jesus ascended, sends the Holy Spirit for these Spirit empowered witnesses. So why is it that I entitled this message unfinished or this sermon series unfinished?

Because it's the task of the Spirit empowered witnesses. That's what the book of Acts is. It's the Spirit empowered witnesses of the apostles through the early church history.

That's the book of Acts. And it concludes, it starts in Jerusalem and it stops in Rome. But the ends of the earth are still not yet reached. There are people, groups that are still unreached.

Your neighbor, your colleague, your family members, your friends, they don't know Jesus. So this task of the Spirit empowered witnesses is unfinished.

It began with the apostles. It continues with the church. And he chose you. He showed himself to you.

[36 : 22] He commanded you and commissioned you. And you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The same thing that the apostles received, specifically, we received generally.

Let's pray. Father, I pray just as theophilus was undoubtedly encouraged, hearing Jesus alive and that he could trust the word of the apostles, for they had the right and privilege to establish doctrine so if he received a letter from the apostles that he was to be encouraged and take it to heart.

And those apostles wrote, of your great love for all humanity, how you lived a sinless life, you died for sin, and you rose victorious over sin and death, and all who placed their faith in Christ can be saved.

Thank you, Lord, for that great news and for that awesome responsibility we have. And so we live in this era of a task that is unfinished.

So may we enjoy being sealed with the Holy Spirit and have this commission and command to go and make disciples.

[37 : 51] The church is a disciple making agency. May we do that well, corporately, but may we do that well individually and be unashamed of the gospel.

We love you, Lord, and it's in your name, Jesus. We pray, amen.