

Acts 1:1-8

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[0:00] Well, good morning. For those of you that I've not met online or in the room here today, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors, and I have the exciting task today of introducing to us! the next large sermon series that Shoreline is walking through.

For the last two and a half years, we walked through the book of Matthew, side by side with Christ. And now we're continuing that story into the book of Acts.

So I invite you to join me in Acts chapter one. We don't expect to spend two and a half years in the book of Acts, probably something more like one year, but don't hold me to that.

And here we begin in Acts chapter one. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and 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 suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

[1:23] Which he said, you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

And he said to them, it is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Lord, as we walk into this next stage of the journey, Lord, will you do great works in our hearts?

May we have testimonies of thanksgiving for what you do in your people and through us, for your glory, for our joy, and for the good of the world. Lord, we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Amen. Luke begins this book by saying, in the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

[2:47] What is he talking about? Well, Luke is the author of the book of Acts. He's also the author of the book of Luke, the gospel of Luke. And so that's what he's talking about in the first work is that he covered much of the same ground, the same events that Matthew's gospel did.

And so this is, the book of Acts is essentially the sequel to the book of Matthew. So that's why we're walking next right into this. Theophilus was likely a patron, so a wealthy person, probably a Greek, or a non-Jewish person at the very least.

Theophilus literally, it could be more a title than an actual name. Theo, meaning God. Phyllos, meaning a lover of the Lord, right? And so he could be using this sort of as to not explicitly name the patron.

We're not sure. But we're walking into what happens next, right? Christ, the Lord, came.

He lived a perfect life. He taught a perfect way. He went to the cross, bearing his people's sins upon his shoulders, made an end of them there, and rose to life, opening the doorway to heaven so that all who trust in him might come to faith in the Father.

[4:16] And then, well, then what? What happens next? What happens to his people? What happens to his mission in this world? That's what we are discovering in the book of Acts.

And, friends, I mean, 2020 has been a challenging year, has it not? You don't need me to tell you, you know, list out the reasons why. And each of us has experienced those difficulties in a slightly different way.

But what did we do just now today? We gave thanks. I'm so encouraged that we, in the midst of such a trying time, right, that my church family sees the big picture and is thankful to our Lord, who is so good to us.

And not just in a, hey, this situation worked out okay. No, in a, the Lord has opened my eyes to see his glory.

And I'm thankful for that sort of way. Right? We have been sharing things today and the things that went unshared that we're still thankful for, right? The Lord has been doing things in his people that the world doesn't have eyes to see.

[5:34] The world's not expecting. Right? Who, you know, the infinitude of God, someone shared, right? The world doesn't have something like that to rest on, to bank on, to count on.

The world can't give that kind of thanks. It doesn't have a bedrock like that. And the Lord, you know, has been doing stuff in your lives.

That's what you've been sharing, right, in your testimonies of Thanksgiving. By his word, through his people, by those who care, right? So, like, he has been doing things actively.

And this book of Acts that we're walking into now is about that. How God actively is at work in the world by his spirit through his people.

And I want to hone in on something interesting that Luke says in verse 1. He says, In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

[6:53] What Jesus began to do and teach. As in, what we just saw in the book of Matthew, what Luke recorded in the Gospel of Luke, was the first chapter.

But he's not done yet. The work of Jesus is not all in the past tense. You know, sometimes I'm guilty.

You probably are, too. Of thinking that, you know, Jesus did a bunch of stuff in the past. To rescue and redeem and make the offer of grace. And then he's going to come at the end.

And then we're kind of just hanging out until... You know, we're just making it through today. Making it through tomorrow. He's not really doing much. I can fall into that pattern of thinking.

No problem. It's my default. And it's every day that I have to preach the Gospel to myself and remind myself that he's not. And maybe that is something that resonates with you. That, you know, you walk through today and the next day pretty much like your non-Christian friends and neighbors.

[8:01] Not expecting that he's going to be doing something. But all throughout the book of Acts, even when the apostles, even when the church, they're very active.

It's God who is empowering it all and doing the work. Right? We're going to see in chapter 2, Luke preaches a sermon on the day of Pentecost.

And then at the end, the summary statement is, the Lord added to their number. Day by day. Those who were being saved. Right?

Peter preached the sermon, but God transformed people. What does that mean for you and for me, practically? That God is still at work.

And we often, you know, think about what we have to do. Right? But everywhere that God has commanded us to do something, he is there working as well.

[9:08] Right? In evangelism and in sanctification. And when he calls us to run to him for comfort, he is there. He is the strong tower. He is the one who is at work for his people.

It looks, as we look at the book of Acts, a lot like, here's what the apostles did, the church did. Here's what happened by all the work of these people.

But Luke is careful to explain to us from the outset that this is the Lord's doing. Not by our might and our cleverness. The Lord is the one who guides and leads and empowers and gives the victory for his people.

We faithfully obey. And he is the one who powerfully works through our faithful obedience. And I hope that isn't just an encouragement to you, but I hope that it's exciting to you.

Because if you think about it, it's a lot of like, you know, the ministry of Moses. Moses, right? God told Moses to touch the Nile with his staff.

[10:13] And then God turned the Nile to blood. God told Moses to lift his staff. And then God parted the seas. God told Moses to lift his arms.

And God caused Israel to prevail in battle, right? When we act in faithful obedience to God, we aren't the effective agent in the world.

Because what he's asking us to do in evangelism, in killing sin, in growing in the fruits of the Spirit, is those are miracles, friends. Things that you and I can't accomplish.

But things he is glad to do. And so, be comforted that the strength to obey the Lord and to accomplish what he's called us to doesn't rest on us.

The strength to do it does not ultimately come from me. Do you feel like the call to mission, to evangelism, is daunting? Friends, he's at work there. Do you feel like you have no power over your own sin?

[11:19] He's at work there. Do you feel like you simply can't grow in the fruit of the Spirit? Well, God the Holy Spirit is at work there. And so, just like the apostles, he calls us to faithful obedience.

But the outcome is secured by his strong hand. Friends, the Lord only began his work in the Gospels.

He is at work today. And friends, that changes and empowers us for mission. And Luke is going to show us, in the book of Acts, more and more what that looks like.

And this changes the way we view our lives. If God is at work, if he began something and continues it presently to do that work in the world, are you living like you expect that?

Are you living like you expect God to act truly in your life? Benjamin Franklin was one of our nation's founding fathers, as they say.

[12:33] He was not a Christian. He was a deist. If you look up deism in an encyclopedia, you'll read that it includes a belief in a remote creator uninvolved in the world.

In other words, they believe there is a God, who created all things, who checked out after he created all things. And that this world just kind of is spinning on an empty cosmos with an uninvolved God.

And so, obviously, Franklin had no use for the Gospels, the idea of a God who would enter the world, suffer on behalf of his people, offer them adoption.

That God of love is truly foreign to his worldview. And certainly, the idea that God would still be at work in the world would be foreign to him as well.

And I wonder, as you and I are here in this room or on a live stream, in the late modern West, are you a little bit like Benjamin Franklin?

[13:52] Do you expect God to act at all? Or are you going through your day-to-day much like he's not there?

Do you expect him to stoke joy in your heart when you lift your voice together with the saints in praise?

Do you? Do you expect him to confront you and encourage you and change you when you open your Bible? Like, do you expect that the word of God is actually living and active?

Do you expect him to find a refuge, a strong tower, when you run to him in prayer? Or is it just going through the motions?

Do you expect your walk of faith to be vibrantly alive because he is alive? Or are we practically deists like Benjamin Franklin?

[15:01] Do you do the, you know, the religious things? Or pretend to do them? Out of duty? Out of habit?

Out of repetition? Not expecting much? Not looking for much? Or do you go to prayer looking to actually connect with your Heavenly Father because he truly opens his ear to his children's cries?

Do you go to his word because you know it to be living and active and life-giving? Do you share your faith because your life in Christ is the central, life-giving force in your life?

And I think if you're looking for a litmus test here, if you're not like sure, like, am I kind of a deist? Am I kind of not? Right? Think about your prayer, life.

Tell me about your prayer and I will tell you if you're living like God, like if you believe God is continuing to work today. Right? With what attitude do you pray?

[16:17] Does it feel like dry ritual? Or do you speak to your Father who is in heaven? What do you pray for?

Are you asking God for anything that actually requires a living God to be a part of? And do you pray with expectation?

Do you expect that God will actually do anything? What if you don't like the answers to those questions?

What if you're sitting here today and you're like, oh man, I'm really not living like I expect that there's a living God who's active in this world. What do we do if we've failed the test, so to speak?

If we find that we're living like practical deists, well, the answer must be that the Lord is at work.

That's what this passage is about, right? The answer, I think, lies in a strange place.

[17:39] Look with me at verse 8 when he talks about the mission. He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Now, this might feel like another burden, another command. And even if he says here, you know, we'll receive power to do it, it still feels like a weight, another command to labor in, right?

But, this isn't a command. Is it? Look at verse 8.

There's no imperative. There's no do this. Now, certainly, Matthew 28, you know, go make disciples of all nations.

It's a command. There is a command to mission. It's not optional or something like that, right? The Lord clearly commands us to mission. But, that's not Christ's focus in this moment.

[18:49] In this moment, he doesn't give a command. He declares that God, the Holy Spirit, will do a work of transformation in his people.

He will shape them into witnesses. witnesses. He doesn't say, go witness, a command. He doesn't even say, you will witness, as if it's just a description of duties.

He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses. It's a declaration by our Lord and Savior that one of his continuing works is to shape and change his people into witnesses by the power of his Spirit.

And so, first, we can go to the Lord. If we failed that, you know, deism test, right? We can go to the Lord and ask for just that transformation.

Lord, I'm not living as if you're alive and working in this world. Will you do a work of renovation in my heart so that I do come to you in prayer and I do go to your word looking for life and that I do expect to see victory because you are alive and working in my life.

[20:18] And second, look to what the Lord is accomplishing in you. If you have eyes to see, because sometimes we just aren't looking for it because we don't expect it.

if we're not expecting for God to work, we'll miss it when he does. Look for what God, and that's why moments like today when we said, what are we thankful for?

And someone said, I didn't expect to be sharing. When we take the time to think about what the Lord is actually doing, we might see more than we expect.

we have a good Lord who has acted, who has flung wide the gates of heaven by his cross and by his empty tomb.

And we have a good Lord who continues to act, transforming those that he loves. And third, let's allow God to set the priorities.

[21:25] That's what verse 8 is, right? he's setting priorities. I think that one of the reasons that God's people, myself included, often feel such little spiritual vitality is because we aren't pursuing spiritual things, right?

The things of God where he is active. Jesus didn't say that we would receive power from the Holy Spirit for our own pursuits. there's no promise for that anywhere in the scriptures, right?

So if I'm only after my own interests, I ought not expect to find God vibrantly alive except to confront me and turn me back to his mission.

Verse 3, Jesus taught them about what? How to have your best life now? No. Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God. That's his priority.

The resurrected Christ, that's his priority. Verse 8, their question, verse 6, their question and his answer are about what? The kingdom of God and the mission of God.

[22:36] He's active in this world building his kingdom, not mine. I shouldn't expect to really see him at work, to behold his power when I'm working on a different job site, so to speak.

his focus was on kingdom, on mission, and so too should ours be.

But that's not how the world around us, and I'm thinking here about mission, right? That's not how the world perceives Jesus, especially perceives us, is it? People who are about the kingdom of God?

People, I think, in our culture, when our culture thinks about Christians, they think chiefly about what we're against, right?

We're against abortion and divorce. Some Baptists are against dancing. Our culture knows Christians as chiefly in terms of what we're against, right?

[23:41] And in an election year where evangelicals have largely been treated and maybe acted as a voting block. Our culture thinks that Christians are against high corporate taxes and immigration.

Thrown in there, right? On top of the other things. Our culture thinks of Christianity chiefly as a crusade against certain ethical problems. Now, certainly we are against sin and evil in this world, right?

But Christianity is not chiefly against something. You can be against abortion and divorce and dancing and high taxes or, you know, pick whatever the lot, right?

And have no interest in Christ. Have no knowledge of Christ. Have no new spiritual life. Because Christianity does not consist essentially in those things.

Those are outworkings, except the dancing thing. because Christianity at its core is not against but for something.

[24:50] And Jesus sets that agenda in verse 8, right? You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Christianity, friends, is first and foremost about the spread of the gospel, the good news of this king. We are about him. It is the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, when you get in a conversation with somebody, this is just a practical thing, you know, as you witness, because we are called to this witness, right?

To be witnesses. When you get in a conversation with somebody, you know, there are probably plenty of times where you might be in a political conversation with somebody, right?

And they bring up how Christians are, however you get into a conversation with somebody about the things of faith. One of the great questions you can just ask them is, you know, what have you been told that Christianity is about?

[25:56] Because so many people think, unfortunately, because many times a poor example has been sought for that, but many people think that Christianity is about opposition to certain things, when in fact it's about the great love of God.

So great that he came to rescue those who had turned their backs on him, suffered in their place, redeemed them to himself, offers adoption for the low, low cost of run to him, cry out for mercy.

That's what we're about. So simply asking, because that's not what the world thinks Christianity is about, is it? That's not their opinion of Christians.

is it? And so you can simply ask the question, what is it that you've been told that Christianity is all about? And then if their answer has more to do with what the world thinks than what the Bible says, say, hey, I wouldn't be super interested in that either.

Can I share with you what we are actually all about? Now, as we draw here to a close, I want to ask, does this matter?

[27:31] Does this change it? Because all of this has been mindset stuff, right? All of it. I've been asking again and again, do you really think that God is alive and active?

Does just your mindset, does that change stuff? Right? Does whether you believe God is active in the world today, that the gospel was just the beginning and that he is still active in the world, does that matter?

Does that change anything? Absolutely. Because we decide, we organize our lives, we make choices based on what we believe is important.

on what we believe is possible. Right? We decide on our calendar based on what we believe. Right? So when sporting events and social events or whatever compete with gathering for worship on a Sunday morning, well, if God doesn't really move in power, we're just, you know, if he's not, like, this is just a ritual we do on our way to heaven, then who cares if we pick other activities?

[28:54] But if God does things in and among his saints, as they lift their voices together, as they pray together, as the word is opened together, if you believe that, you'll change your attitude and your choices about your calendar, won't you?

We decide whether we practice the spiritual disciplines based on what we believe about how active God is. If God doesn't really do anything when we pray, if God doesn't really speak into this world, or in his word, if the word isn't alive and active, there's just a nice record of the good stuff he's done. But if it's not vibrantly alive, and if he doesn't work through it, I mean, I won't open my Bible. I won't pray. But if I have the glad expectation that God has given me all the wisdom I need for true spiritual life in his word, I'm going there.

If I believe my prayers truly reach the throne of heaven, and my Father is there, I'm going to him.

Right? We decide how to live in Christian community based on what we believe about this, too.

Right? Let's say you're in community group or another setting where you share prayer requests with one another and seek out spiritual counsel from one another, from your brothers and sisters in Christ.

[30:40] What will you decide to share? If you don't believe that God really does much in the world, if he doesn't really answer your prayers, if his word isn't really active in your life, this is just culturally what we do as Christians, and not much more than that, you'll never share more than just what's appropriate to share.

Whatever keeps the conversation moving. But you won't ask for prayer for something risky, for something deep, for something challenging, or inconvenient, or potentially embarrassing.

You just won't. Why would you? There's no point in opening up if there's no upside, if there's no real power here. If God's not really at work through the wisdom of his saints, through the shaping influence of his word, and through the power of his Holy Spirit at work in his people through prayer. If God isn't doing anything, why would we risk? Why would we risk it? Sharing the tough stuff. It is only when we believe that the Lord works in his people that you will risk asking for prayer for something hard.

The fears that you have deep down. The sin that you still love. The doubts that you can't shake. And it is then that God moves among his people.

[32:22] God and so the depth of our spiritual vitality, the amount of spiritual help we receive, they depend on whether we believe God acts.

We decide on our calendar based on what we believe on this. We decide on the spiritual disciplines, whether we practice them or not, based on what we believe. We decide how to live in Christian community based on what we believe about this.

Is God active in the world and in our lives? We set all our priorities based on that, actually. So yes, this matters quite a bit.

We live out of what we believe. And here at the outset, on the very, very first verse, the book of Acts, Luke is saying to God's people, God is alive and active and present in his world, and he works through his people.

And he says, I've written a whole book about it. Let me show you. So friends, that is the journey we're about to embark. Let me encourage you today to see that God is living and active in your life, that he has been and that he continues to be so.

[34:02] And we are going to see that over and over again in so many dimensions as we walk into and through the book of Acts. So friends, let's be encouraged. And now let's go to our living God in prayer.

Lord, it is so good to entrust ourselves to the God who formed the world, who is so active in the life of his people that, Lord, you stepped into this world to rescue and redeem us.
And thank you, Lord, that you, from the very first verse of the book of Acts, are declaring, are promising, that you will remain active in the life of your church by the power of your spirit.
And so, Lord, will you do the work of transforming us into people who eagerly anticipate and therefore live out of what we believe that you are living and active each and every day of our lives. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.