

50 Days of Wonder: Acts 1:1-5

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[0 : 00] It's great to welcome you. If you're new here, this is the second week in a little series that we're calling 50 Days of Wonder. Jesus ascended into heaven and the 50 days include the 40 days between when Jesus rose from the dead until he ascended into heaven and then the next 10 days when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost.

And last week we looked at three surprises from the end of Luke 24 and because CTC, the junior high youth group, is in with us over the summer, I gave them a little test to see if they could remember the points of the sermon.

And you may be interested to know that every single CTCer I asked after the service and I got to see quite a lot of them and during the week at the children's mission, the children's camp, every single one of them got every one of the three points.

So I think we'll do that for everyone next week. No, no, if you're here and you're a member of CTC this week, I want you to tell me and explain to me what the infection in the church is that I'm going to describe in a few minutes.

It's a bit harder, this one. Okay. So we looked at, you remember after Jesus rose from the dead, we looked at three surprises, the fact that he goes back and teaches them from the Old Testament scripture.

[1 : 24] He tells them to stay in Jerusalem. And then the same Jesus who walked and talked with them in Israel and rose bodily from the dead, the same Jesus ascended into heaven. Well, now we come to this very familiar passage, Acts 1, 1 to 5.

And if you would take your Bibles and open them, please. We're going to start here, but we're going to flick to a couple of other places because this is such a big passage. You know that Acts is the second volume written by Luke and it's the remarkable story of the birth of the church and how Christianity spread literally like a wildfire right across the Roman Empire and it ends in Rome. And in these few little verses, 1 to 5, Luke tells us that there are two things that spark the fire. The first is the ascension of Jesus, the going of Jesus, and the second is the coming of the Spirit, what we call Pentecost.

And they're the two points of the sermon. But why do you say, why is this even important? I'll tell you why I think it's important. It's important because there is this widespread infection in the church today and the main symptom is a kind of a careless Christianity.

Faith is one amongst many of my priorities, but certainly not the most important. Christian community, meh, if I get time. It's more important for me to be happy than to serve.

[2 : 53] And one of the most helpful diagnoses of this infection comes from the University of Notre Dame and the professor of sociology whose name is Christian Smith.

And a few years ago he published a research, an extensive research, on the attitudes, moral and religious pursuits of youth. It's called soul searching. Here's what's interesting.

And this is North America. He found across the board with youth from church backgrounds and from non-church backgrounds the same attitudes, the same basic worldview that he calls moralistic therapeutic deism.

Moralistic therapeutic deism. And all the studies since have shown that this is not confined to young people. This goes into adults as well.

What is moralistic therapeutic deism? It's moralistic because the idea is God basically wants us to be good, to be nice to each other. It's important to be good.

[3 : 59] Good people go to heaven. It's about being a good person. It's therapeutic because the central goal of my life is to be happy and to feel good about myself.

And God makes me feel good so that when things are difficult and when things begin to fall apart I turn to God he is there to help me with my difficulties. But when life is good I don't need him very much.

And it's deistic because this is the idea that God made things at the beginning wound them up like a clock but doesn't get involved along the way. So God only gets involved with our lives when I've got problems and I need help.

Otherwise he's not involved with me and I'm not really involved with him. See? It's moralistic. I'll be good as far as it goes. It's therapeutic. God is there to help me.

And it's deistic in the sense that God is at a distance just not particularly involved. And I don't think you could describe a better religious face for individualism and entitlement.

[5 : 03] And one of the most wonderful things about this little passage in Acts chapter 1 and the 50 days of wonder is it gives us a cure for the spiritual infection.

And there are two points Jesus going and the Spirit's coming let's look at them together. In verse 3 as I speak about Jesus going Luke gives us the clearest picture of what happened in the 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension.

Let me just read verse 3. Jesus presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs appearing to them during the 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Do you remember last week? Why didn't Jesus simply zip back to heaven after he rose from the dead? Because there were two very important things that he had to do. He had to appear and demonstrate the reality of his bodily resurrection and he had to teach.

he had to teach his disciples so that they might understand what the kingdom of God is all about. If you'd keep your finger in Acts 1 and turn right please to 1 Corinthians 15 here's our first flick.

[6 : 13] 1 Corinthians 15 You know there's quite a number of resurrection appearances in the New Testament.

At the end of the Gospels in Matthew 28 Jesus appears to Mary then he appears to the disciples up in Galilee on a mountain. In Luke's Gospel you remember last week he appears to two walking to Emmaus then he appears to the twelve in the upper room and then on the day of his ascension he appears to the disciples.

In John's Gospel he appears to Mary Mary Magdalene to Joanna to Salome to the other Mary. He also appears to the disciples when Thomas wasn't there and then when Thomas was there about eight days later and at the end of John he also appears to the disciples beside the Sea of Tiberias the Sea of Galilee.

Have a look at these words in 1 Corinthians 15 I'm going to read from verse 5 Speaking about Jesus' resurrection after he died then he appeared to Cephas that's Peter then to the twelve then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time most of whom are still alive though some have fallen asleep in other words go and ask them if you like then he appeared to James then to all the apostles and last of all as one untimely aboard he appeared also to me now if you go to Acts back to Acts 1-3 it implies that there are other appearances that are not recorded and each time Jesus gives them convincing proofs in other words compelling data like having fish barbecued by the sea in Galilee or asking Thomas to touch his hands which means they're not visions and they're not hallucinations this Jesus has defeated death it's the same he's the same Jesus who died he's risen again but don't you feel even as we read through that list of appearances they're very encouraging and they strengthen our faith but they don't create faith the resurrection of Jesus by itself has no power to create faith if we want faith to be born and to be created we must listen to Jesus teaching particularly the teaching of God in the Old Testament we must hear the voice of God before we believe in the resurrection do you remember back in Luke 16 don't turn to it back in Luke 16 the story Jesus told about the rich man and he had a poor man called Lazarus who lay at his gate the rich man had everything in this life except true faith and the way he showed that was he failed to love the poor man at his gate and after his death as the rich man suffers in hell he asks Abraham if he can go back into this world because he's got five brothers still living and warn them to avoid his fate do you remember what Abraham says he says no they've got they've got the Old Testament scriptures that should be enough and the rich man says to Abraham no no no but if someone should rise from the dead then they will believe and repent and Abraham says no if they will not hear the voice of Moses and the prophets neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead that is why over the 40 days

Jesus gives so much time and attention to teaching from the Old Testament coaching and training his disciples so that they can see that he is the fulfillment and in verse 3 Luke summarizes the teaching of Jesus by saying he taught them about the kingdom of God the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God has everything to do with the ascension the day that Jesus was taken up from earth into heaven and seated at the right hand of God the Father that's the day when he was made absolute king with all authority power dominion over all things on that day Jesus became king of kings and lord of lords in other words Jesus' death and his resurrection is not the end of his work our sins have been paid for in his death in his resurrection he shows that he's conquered death but it's only when he moves from this reality into the heavenly reality that he takes up his rule as king of the kingdom it's only then that he stands in our place at the Father's right hand and pours out his Holy Spirit see so that little phrase that we go through in the creed it is the watershed moment it's the watershed moment in Jesus' ministry in life and for us as well it's what the gospel ends with it's what the acts begins with

[11:10] Jesus' ascension is not just to bring to end his resurrection appearances but it is the beginning of the new stage of Jesus' rule from heaven it's not just Jesus sort of disappearing up into the skies but he moves from this earthly reality into the throne room of heaven to be given all authority from the Father this is very very very big so I want to look at a couple of verses that explain something of what happened at the ascension so turn with me right to Philippians 2 for a moment Philippians 2 very familiar words I think James you read these at the beginning of the service thank you so in Philippians 2 verse 9 what happened at the ascension well after the cross you see at the end of verse 8 therefore God has highly exalted Jesus highly exalted and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven on earth under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father that is absolutely mind-blowing it shows how different Christianity is from moralistic therapeutic deism to the centre of our faith is the man Jesus Christ who died and rose again and has been exalted to God's right hand and at that moment history has now been changed it means the purpose of your life the purpose of this world the purpose of my life the purpose of the universe everything under heaven actually everything on earth and under the earth and over the earth is this it's to bow our knees to Jesus Christ as Lord and confess with our tongues that he is Lord of all some of you I know are very familiar with this and you say okay let's move on to something else well here is here is something perhaps we may not be so familiar with turn right again to Hebrews for a moment Hebrews chapter 9 let me start in verse 11 when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come then through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation what's he talking about let's go down let's go down to verse 24

Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands which are copies of the true things but into heaven itself now to appear at the presence of God on our behalf that is when Christ ascended he went to a place that's not part of this creation cannot be explained by the laws of thermodynamics or relativity or whatever it's beyond our experience he went to the place of God and what that means is this world the form of this world is now passing away it means there is a change in heaven for the first time the man Christ Jesus sits at the right hand of the father it means there's a complete change in the destiny of the world everything now revolves around Jesus Christ and what he is doing and next week if we get time I want to explore a little bit from the scriptures what it looked like from heaven's side when Jesus returned let's go back to Acts it's why you see Jesus going is so important it's not just the end of his earthly ministry here it's the beginning of his rule of the kingdom of heaven so just look at the first two verses in the first book of Theophilus

I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach that's the gospel until the day when he was taken up in other words the gospel's about what Jesus began to do and teach until his ascension and now that he has ascended Jesus is going to continue to do and teach but now from heaven by his Holy Spirit it's not that the first volume was about Jesus and the second volume's about us it's the same Jesus and it's two stages of his ministry he began to do and teach and now he continues to do and teach so you trace that through the book of Acts I encourage you to do it see where Jesus is working who is it that saves from heaven in chapter 2 it is the Lord Jesus who is it that heals the man in the temple in chapter 3 it is in the name of the Lord Jesus who is it that grants repentance and forgiveness of sins who opens hearts it is the Lord Jesus Christ and as this happened we read that the word of the Lord increases and multiplies and spreads so this is what

I'm saying this is my first point that the going of Jesus is not some little low piece of action you know just to complete his death and resurrection it's the moment when he takes all his life and all our hope and all that he's done in his death and resurrection into heaven with him and he begins a new stage in his ministry which means that our lives if they're caught up with Jesus are caught up with something vast and cosmic that our lives are not about believing in ourselves or even pursuing happiness nothing wrong with happiness but they're about Jesus Christ and you remember we looked at this a few months ago if we're united with Jesus we die with him we rise with him and we ascend with him spiritually now that we are seated at the right hand of the father and therefore we seek the things that are above which means doing the absolutely ordinary normal garden things that every Christian should do loving one another serving one another praying for one another and it means that he is involved in every circumstance of our life not for therapeutic reasons only but because his very life and glory depend upon it that's Jesus going now how can all this be true for us well

[17:31] Jesus going leads to the coming of the Holy Spirit and this is the second point that I have for us to look at this morning it's a briefer point did you notice as we read through as Carolyn read through these verses that Luke zeroes in on one teaching thing one thing that Jesus teaches and that is that they must wait in Jerusalem for the spirit verse 4 while staying or eating with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the father which he said you heard from me John baptised you with water but you'll be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now now last week and we'll see next week the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit is to help us speak boldly for Christ apart from the Holy Spirit we can't even speak for Christ let alone make any effect or do any good for others but here it is about much more than the power to witness

Jesus speaks about being baptised with the Holy Spirit that's the word for flooding drenching immersing soaked and this is absolutely essential and basic to the Christian life Christian life is not so much morality or it's not God at a distance uninvolved but it is God himself coming to dwell in our hearts by his Holy Spirit giving us a new heart flooding our hearts the New Testament view is that we can't even believe in Jesus unless we are baptised by the Holy Spirit and the key to understanding this is that Jesus says he says this gift is the promise of the Father so we have to look back to the Old Testament to see what the Father promised we're going to flick again everyone still with me let's turn to Ezekiel 36 I want to hear flicking please much flicking pages turning that would please me

Ezekiel 36 page 724 thank you in the Old Testament you know that God sometimes sent his Holy Spirit on special people for special tasks but it was temporary it wasn't permanent the Spirit would come and then leave after the task was finished now we pick up an Ezekiel currently my favourite Old Testament book and it's about 600 BC and the context is the judgment of God God's people have failed him miserably they've gone after other gods with spiritual adultery and idolatry and God has judged them and they are in exile in Babylon and Ezekiel the prophet is in exile in Babylon and God in his great kindness speaks to his people again and at the heart of the book of Ezekiel is chapters 36 and 37 where God promises a special gift and there are two pictures of the same gift let's look at the first picture verse 36 22 therefore say to the house of Israel thus says the Lord God it is not for your sake O house of Israel that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name which is such a great relief which you have profaned among the nations to which you came I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations and which you've profaned among them and the nations will know that I am the Lord declares the Lord God when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes that's his motivation so what's he going to do I will take you from the nations gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land I will sprinkle clean water on you you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all the idols I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules you shall dwell in the land that I give your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God it is just stunning the people of God had failed so miserably just just as we do they were completely unable to see God's truth and when they saw it they didn't like God's truth they had been unable to trust God or love him and their hearts were stony hard and spiritually unreceptive to his word God says you need something deep and radical he says I will sprinkle your hearts with clean water and I will give you an exchange a spiritual heart transplant I will take the dead stony spiritual heart out of you and

I'll replace them with living beating hearts of flesh hearts that respond to
[22 : 47] God and beat in time with God's and the way I will do that God says is that I will put my spirit within you my spirit I will come and dwell in you says God God himself promises that he will take residence in the hearts of his people that's what Jesus is talking about in Acts 1 to be a Christian is to have a different heart it's to know new desires and new loves and the wonderful thing is God does this not because we deserve it or don't deserve it he does it because of the holiness of his own great name and then the second picture is in chapter 37 very famous dry bones passage I was hoping the choir might give us a dry bones recital this morning but they were hard hearted about it no they were I didn't even ask you know 37 and Carolyn has read it for us Ezekiel is taken to a massive dusty dry valley and it's full of bones human bones

God commands Ezekiel prophesy to the bones and there's this rattling as the bones come together and they grow sinews and flesh skin and then the valley is covered with dead human corpses and in verse 9 God commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath and he does and they stand up and they live and then God explains he explains what this is about verse 12 of chapter 37 prophesy and say to them thus says the Lord God behold I will open your graves and raise you from your graves O my people I will bring you into the land of Israel and you shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and raise you from the graves O my people you got the point and I will put my spirit within you and you shall live and I will place you in your own land then you will know that I am the Lord I have spoken I will do it declares the

Lord that's it that's what Jesus is talking about in Acts chapter 1 I will put my spirit within you the very life of God is promised to come into our hearts you see the going of Jesus and the coming of the spirit belong together and Jesus holds back his going back into heaven at the ascension for 40 days so that he can tell the disciples something of the explosive significance of what is about to happen that as he ascends to the right hand of the father and he pours out the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit will make us alive cleanse us from sin give us new hearts and God himself will come and dwell in us you see that's why the ascension is so important through his death he's cleansed us from sin through his resurrection he now offers us a new chance a new life but he cannot come and dwell in us until he ascends to that different place into heaven see even after his resurrection he was still in a human body he could only be in one place at a time he could not come and be with all of us all the time everywhere that's why at the end of John's gospel when Mary Magdalene sees him in the garden and she tries to grab a hold of him Jesus says do not cling to me I've not yet ascended to the father go to my brothers and say I'm ascending to my father and to your father to my God and to your God but when he ascends into heaven he passes from this reality into the reality and to the place of God and when he sends his spirit to dwell in us now Jesus Christ is available to dwell in the hearts of every single one of us no matter where we are doesn't matter if you're locked in prison cell doesn't matter if you're on top of a mountain or sitting somewhere he is present to all who trust in him and we are present to him so Jesus going and spirit coming is full of significance for us there's tremendous application from this I'm just going to spend a minute more or two on this see it means from the moment Jesus ascended into heaven this earth and God's place of heaven are bound together more tightly than they ever have the ascended

Jesus brings humanity to heaven the coming of the spirit brings something of that God the reality of God into our world that was never there before this is the cure for moralistic therapeutic deism means our lives are about much more than being nice they're about pleasing Jesus Christ I mean in terms of niceness he's lived the perfect life he is now at the father's side making us more like himself each day Christ isn't there just to make us happy though he will he makes us happy in the deepest most profound way but to transform us by his holy spirit so that in all the circumstances of our lives be they desperate or wonderful people the spirit of god keeps keeps willing us to be filled with himself this new heart and he is not distant but present to us and i think at the most basic level this changes our hope it means here is something i can give myself to that's more important than anything else in life god wants much more than our morals he wants our love and our worship he's given the life of his son who died and rose again and ascended and from heaven christ has poured out his holy spirit he wants much more for us than just a happy life he wants us to be caught up in the kingdom and all the things of the kingdom he wants to fill us constantly with his spirit so that he would be our god and we would be his people he wants to be present with us in all the circumstances of our life and you may feel stuck and stalled as a christian things have become complicated and you feel your own drift or you may feel yourself stretched very thinly spiritually and

you know your heart is beating slowly and you feel very weak you may have never stepped across that line you know you haven't made a spiritual start in this way and you know you want a heart of flesh and for

[29 : 14] God to put his spirit within you the thing is it's not complicated Jesus is Lord and what we need to do is we need to bow the knee to him and confess him as Lord to the glory of God the father and if you ask him he will fill you even now this moment because the same God who made us is the same God who can make dry bones live who can make our hearts soft and responsive to his word and you will know the spirit's work in this way but you will begin to see God as father and Jesus Christ as Lord and you'll have this strange sense that the kingdom of God and its concerns are more important than the other things in life and that what I do today must be seen in relation to him and that his reputation and his name are more important than everything else and I'll have this strange desire to be with other Christians and to obey God that's why we're here so let's bow our heads and pray as I finish all so let's shall install him up him to him