

Introduction to Acts: *Bringing Down the Gates of Hell!*

Text: Acts 1:1-11

Introduction:

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).

"Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession..." (Ps. 2:8).

"It is too light a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Acts 49:6).

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel" (Lke. 2:29-32).

"And Jesus came and said to [His disciples], 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:18-20).

"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 end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Redemption is God's story; it is the story of this world; it is the central theme and storyline that encapsulates the very purpose of our existence, particularly in a fallen world, created by a God, who desired to be glorified in such a creation....it is God's story. And when

we search the Scriptures, we find this theme to be the silver lining, which borders and upholds every concept and principle laid down therein.

We exist for Christ; this universe and everything in it exists for the glory of Christ! The Father has this plan, the Son fulfills this plan and the Holy Spirit applies the fulfillment of this plan. Beneath the trappings of everyday life, in America, in the year 2012, with all of the hustle and bustle of life and politics and leisure and moving up the corporate ladder; with all of the busyness of life as we have defined it in our culture, God is working out and unfolding His glorious plan of redemption; the plan that matters, the plan that is paramount to Him, to His Son...and which therefore ought to be paramount to His church. And that plan is His glorious plan of redemption, where God is invading our fallen world, from every corner of the globe, with the message of redemption; the message of repentance unto the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, in Christ!

The world is fallen; it has been since the beginning, when our first parents disobeyed God, plunging every successive generation into sin. The world is dark; and light came to the Jews especially, for generations, through Patriarchs, through Moses, through the trappings and oracles of the Old Covenant, until the Christ should come. But the Christ is so glorious; the Christ warrants a reception of universal proportions; and so, as spoken of by the prophets, the light of God's grace would shine far beyond Israel, and to the ends of the earth, as God would call a people; *His* people, unto Himself in Christ. The world moves on and on, but God is redeeming; Christ is saving; the Holy Spirit is quickening with life, and the will of God is unfolding, right according to plan.

We look to the Gospels, and we find that a great Cornerstone has been laid; a spiritual temple is being built; and the main cornerstone has been laid in Christ! He has accomplished eternal salvation for a people from all nations; a welcome mat is put out for all to come and to take of the water of life freely in Him! A Cornerstone is laid for a spiritual building; for a people of God to be joined together as one body, under the headship of Christ! And so, Christ sends out His Apostles with the great commission, to now build on that Cornerstone. They are to preach the Gospel to all nations; they are to attest to the reality of the Gospel, with signs and wonders, striving to build the foundation of the church, so that a healthy infrastructure can be added on for all generations, until the Christ should return, and close up history as we know it. "Go therefore

and make disciples...baptize...bring them into the body, and teach them to observe My commands...build My ever-growing church!" "Tear down the gates of hell...and go!"

The Book of Acts takes us to the laying of the foundation of the church; the cement is being laid on the Cornerstone, as Christ, by His Spirit, continues to work, through His Apostles and prophets, setting the stage for all future generations! There is a uniqueness attached to this stage of church history; for, the laying of the foundation will only take place once. But there is also much to be taken and laid hold of, as governing principles for all future generations...for us. The foundation sets the tone for the rest of the building.

And brethren, herein lays the main purpose for my desire for studying this Book with you. Acts speaks to the life of the church; what she ought to look like; how she grows; what her mindset ought to be like; how she ought to live in the world, while yet remaining seated in heaven with Christ. As we continue to build the infrastructure on the foundation laid there in the first century, it ought to behoove us to look at the original pattern, to discern what is and what is not relevant for our present practices, and to draw principles from the whole Book, which was written for our good. From the perspective of the year 2012, Acts (and all of Scripture) was written particularly for us! And I believe that this Book can do much good, brethren, to cause us to evaluate our present practices and daily living; in order to see if we indeed have the mind of Christ and His apostles, as we trek through life, seeking to carry the torch of the Gospel to our own generation. Is God's plan our plan...or have we adopted another plan? Where do we go from here?

I. The Driving Theme of the Book of Acts

Luke, the beloved Physician, who has accompanied the Apostle Paul on some of his missionary journeys (seen in the Book of Acts, when "first person" perspective begins to be used) is the author of the Book of Acts, and he continues to address Theophilus ("lover of God"), whom he has been addressing in the Gospel of Luke (Lke. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). Luke is providing an historical account of the testimony of Jesus, and then His Apostles, so that Theophilus would have "certainty concerning the things [he has] been taught."

Acts continues right where the Gospel of Luke left off, moving from the earthly ministry of Christ (His life, death and resurrection) into the Spiritual ministry of Christ, who continues to work, by His Spirit, unto the building of His church, through His holy Apostles. And so, as would be expected, Luke begins his second Book with Christ's ascension and departure, to the right hand of God, as He commissions His disciples concerning their present responsibilities in laying the foundation of the church. And these first several verses set the tone and main theme for the entire Book.

Vs. 1-2: Explanation of first Book's contents. What Jesus *began to do and teach* until the day He was taken up (ascended), after He gave commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. [Reiterated in verses 3-11]

-He began to do---is still doing. He began to teach---is still teaching. Jesus, by His Spirit (who has a predominant role in Acts---"I will send a Comforter" Paraklete), is the active power and force behind everything the Apostles do and teach. ("Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *Me?*") The Acts of the Apostles are really the Acts of Christ; they are merely the visible outworking of all that He is doing. He chose them for this purpose.

Vs. 3: "He presented Himself alive *to them after His suffering* by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

-It was critical that His apostles were eye witnesses of both His death and resurrection. By them, the truth of His redemptive success would be established. They would be given the ability to perform signs and wonders to further confirm their testimony. Being a "witness" is a predominant theme in Acts. They received His instructions; they had His message; they witnessed His death and resurrection; they would be given power, especially in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost...so that they could testify of the risen Christ.

Vs. 4-5: The fulfillment of John the baptist's prophecy would now take place. They were to wait in Jerusalem for the coming promise of the Holy Spirit, who would empower them for their mission.

Vs. 6-7: They are still confused as to the will of God in the building of His church. Jesus corrects this confusion and prepares to redirect them toward their primary mission now. The return of Christ would come later, after the church is complete.

Vs. 8: This verse carries the main theme of Acts. The apostle's obedience to this command is the content of Acts. From Jerusalem-->all Judea-->Samaria-->the end of the earth. When they received power at Pentecost, they were to witness, especially to the resurrection of Christ. Takes on different forms for Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 17), but same ultimate mission.

Vs. 9: Jesus ascends in a cloud.

Vs. 10-11: "Get a move on it! He will return in like manner. Build the church!"

Conclusion: The Book of Acts takes off right here, in fulfillment of vs. 8 and in anticipation of vs. 11. Our primary focus should be here as well...in an infrastructure sense.

Jesus is building His Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it! By means of the churches' witness, the gates of hell are torn down, and light reaches the whole world, unto the salvation of God's elect!

Amen!!!