

The Exalted King and the Extension of his Kingdom

Acts 1:1–11

The First Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles

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Imagine a bridge. In the water of Lake Geneva there is a castle called the Chateau de Chillon. The only way to get into the castle is to go over the bridge. Locally we have Coronado Island and the San Diego-Coronado Bridge to get there. What does a bridge do? It connects one side to another.¹ The book of Acts is like a bridge. Acts connects for us two vast worlds. It connects the Lord's work in the Old Testament in Israel with his continued work now in the New Testament throughout the world. It connects the work of Jesus in his earthly ministry in the Gospels with his continued work in the churches in the Epistles.

Tonight we begin a series of studies through Acts. Why Acts? Acts is the bridge that connects us as a local congregation here in twenty-first century north San Diego to the historic Christian church. And how we desperately need an historical, rooted faith and religion in our rootless world! Why Acts? We need to know that the same Jesus who promised to build his church in history is presently building this church. And how we desperately need to be encouraged that he is alive and active in our midst!

¹ I am indebted to my former professor, Dr. Dennis Johnson, for this illustration: *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1997), ix–xi.

In 1:1–11 Luke bridges the history of Jesus to the history of the apostles; and by the power of the Holy Spirit there is a bridge that connects us to them. Note here the theme of *the exalted King and the extension of his kingdom*.

1. ***The Action of the King (1:1–3)***
2. ***The Instruction of the King (1:4–8)***
3. ***The Coronation of the King (1:9–11)***

The Action of the King (1:1–3)

Luke writes to **Theophilus** about his **first book**, meaning, his Gospel. And he describes that book as being about **all that Jesus began to do and teach** (v. 1).² And if you turn back and look at the end of Luke, where does Luke end the story of Jesus? With the ascension. And so he picks up here in his second book, going back to **the day when he was taken up** (v. 2).³ After the resurrection but before the ascension there were forty days in which Jesus **presented himself alive to the disciples by many proofs** (v. 3).

What I want you to see here is *the action of the king*. If Luke's **first book**, the Gospel, is about what Jesus **began to do and teach** (v. 1), what is his second book, the Acts, all about? The church has traditionally called this book, "The Acts," or, "The Acts of the Apostles." But whose "acts" are really described here? Luke

² Calvin calls this "the sum of the Gospel." *The Acts of the Apostles: Volume 1*, tras. W.J.G. McDonald, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, Calvin's Commentaries (1965; repr., Eerdmans, 1982), 6:21.

³ I. Howard Marshall says verses 1–5 recapitulate Luke 24. *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 55.

truly is declaring to us that Acts is all about the acts the ascended King Jesus *continues* to do and teach from heaven by the power of his Holy Spirit through his apostles (v. 2). In Luke we have the beginning of Jesus's works and words in his state of humiliation, while in Acts we have the continuing of Jesus' works and words in his state of exaltation. In Luke Jesus received the Spirit at his baptism to proclaim the good news (Luke 3-4), while in Acts the apostles and the church receive the Spirit at the baptism of Pentecost to proclaim the works and words of Jesus.

This means that Jesus didn't stop working when he went to heaven! Just as he was active then so he is active now among us! We've lost a lot of people in the past several months; some have moved, some have moved on, while some have left the faith. Acts encourages us that the Lord is active among us. He is as active among us when we were well over 100 souls as he is now with well less than 100. He was active when the church was 3,000 no more than he was when it was 120 in the Upper Room.

The Instruction of the King (1:4-8)

Verses 4-8 turn us back to first disciples as Luke narrates *the instruction of the king*. Children, if you could sit with Jesus what would you want him to teach you? After his resurrection and before his ascension the disciples got to sit with

their king for forty days. What did he teach them? Luke tells us that he taught them **about the kingdom of God** (v. 3). Is that surprising to you?

“Now in this word,” John Calvin wrote, “he sums up the aim of the teaching of the Gospel, namely that God should reign in us.”⁴ And Luke connects the ongoing growth of the kingdom in Acts back to initial coming of the King in his Gospel: **And while staying 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; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”** (vv. 4–5).

And as they were waiting for this promise **they...came together** and asked Jesus, **“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”** (v. 6) Even after the resurrection of Jesus the soon-to-be apostles were still hoping for a geo-political kingdom on earth in this age (cf. Mark 10:35ff.; Luke 22:24ff.). As Calvin said, “There are as many errors in this question as words.”⁵ They were still thinking of what Jesus could give to *them*. Is it any different with us? Don’t we think of Jesus and belonging to his church in selfish ways? “What can I get out of it? How can the church satisfy my needs? Where can I go when someone does or says something I don’t like?”

And notice how the King mildly rebukes them for their false hope but re-directs their hope for a national restoration of the kingdom of God to an

⁴ Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles: Volume 1*, 24.

⁵ Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles: Volume 1*, 29.

international kingdom: **“It is not for you to know 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 they’re thinking, “Yes!” but Jesus goes on to say—**and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (vv. 7–8). Jesus is saying that his kingdom is not tied to any particular earthly kingdom in this age, including end-times scenarios about the nation of Israel. On the contrary, his kingdom is already present on this earth and is especially manifested in and through his church. Jesus even echoes the language of the prophet Isaiah who foresaw the Lord’s Servant who would bear witness to the nation of Israel (e.g., 43:10, 44:8). But Jesus says this was prophetic of the church being his witnesses to the world.

And note well that international theme and outline of **Jerusalem...Judea and Samaria...and the end of the earth**. This is the outline of the Luke’s second book as the apostles witness to Jesus in Jerusalem in chapters 1–7, in Judea and Samaria in chapters 8–12, and to the ends of the earth in chapters 13–28.⁶ In his first book, Luke traced the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem; now in his second volume he traces the journey of Jesus’ message away from Jerusalem.⁷ It’s a beautiful thing to see the church at the beginning in Jerusalem, the center of ancient Israel’s faith, but at the end of Acts Paul is in Rome, the center of the world according to the Romans. The church begins huddled in a room without power but it ends up in

⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (1954; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 36–37. Acts can also be summed up in two parts: the ministry of Peter (1–12) and the ministry of Paul (13–28).

⁷ Johnson, *The Message of Acts*, 14 n9.

Luke's description of Paul: confident!⁸ We exist tonight because Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit by the Word of God has brought us to life as a church!

The Coronation of the King (1:9–11)

Finally, Luke recounts *the coronation of the King*, bringing his Gospel and Acts together to launch forward from this great redemptive event. Luke says **as they were looking on Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight** (v. 9). This is not just a casual mention of clouds, but this is that glory of God known as the *shekinah*. We've seen it recently in the book of Revelation chapters 1 and 4, for example. What Luke is saying is that Jesus is now enthroned as King and Lord of the universe over his kingdom. And in the **same way as they saw him go into heaven** (v. 11) he will return again on the clouds of glory, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

As I began tonight in saying Acts is like a bridge, at the end of our passage we hear that the bridge between the apostles and us is Jesus Christ. I trust you are assured he is the exalted King over us tonight here in this place; I pray you go out in the world motivated that he will extend his kingdom through you tomorrow.

Amen.

⁸ For this great juxtaposition, I am indebted to Derek W.H. Thomas, *Acts*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2011), 3.