

This is our first Sunday in Acts, and we'll be spending the summer here. **** Slide 1 *****

We have a very unique set of texts in Luke – Acts : two volumes / with one author.

The Gospel gives us the story of Jesus life.

The Acts give us the story of the early Church – the continuing life and power of Jesus / expressed in the world - by the Spirit / and through God's people.

SO Acts - is Luke, Volume II. /

How does volume 1 finish?

The Gospel of Luke ends much the same as the Gospel of John - Jesus stands among his disciples, breathes his peace on them,

Tells them that they will be his witnesses,

But then tells them they must wait / until they are clothed with power.

We are going to see in very clear and powerful ways,

That to be a witness to the life of Jesus / is to be a witness in the power of the Spirit.

And that as Jesus promised,

we will not be orphans. He remains with us in the Spirit.

The book of Acts, written as a separate document, starts where Luke ends.

The disciples are told to wait for the Father's gift –

The Holy Spirit.

We HEARD all about the Spirit in John 14-17, and now we are going to SEE

What the power of the Spirit is like in action. /

In most of my teaching since January / I have tried to emphasize a couple of things:

I have emphasized that the Church is a sent people –

We exist to Know God / and to make Him known.

So point one – we are a sent people, a people with a mission.

Point two is that the Gospel / is the Gospel of the Kingdom.



The most narrow definition of the Gospel / is personal salvation.
But the wider purpose of God / is to redeem all things..

Ephesians 1 “things in heaven, and things on earth”

God’s purpose is this: Rev. 21:5 “Behold, I make all things new.”

Or as Paul likes to put it, in 2 Cor. 5 “If anyone is in Christ, new creation!”

Creation, fall, new creation.
That is the flow of the story God is writing.

The story of God - is about God’s rule coming to earth, and the breaking in of God’s kingdom.

When God’s kingdom comes, we live in shalom.

Shalom is God’s word for salvation, peace, healing, harmony, justice, restoration -- **life!**

***** **Slide 2 *****

The third point I try to make is that none of this happens /
apart from the work and power of the Holy Spirit.

We are an Easter people – the people of the resurrection, the new creation –
God’s kingdom comes / in the presence of the Spirit.

So what I want you to hear is this:

In Scripture / the presence of the Spirit / shalom / and the kingdom of God /
are nearly synonymous.

So here we go in chapter one. //

One biblical scholar says that Acts was written to answer a very specific question:

Why is the kingdom of God delayed? / Why is the kingdom of God delayed?

Makes sense -- because it is the first question that is answered here.

Or maybe -- it is the first question that Jesus does NOT answer. /

But it isn’t quite that simple.

SO Acts begins with a memory.

Luke tells us about an occasion sitting with Jesus after the resurrection.

The Gospel of Luke ends / with Jesus telling the disciples / that they will be his witnesses.

Jesus tells them that it will start in Jerusalem / and then go to all nations.

And then he promises the gift of the Spirit – “power from on high.”

And then comes their question. They ask him this:

“Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

To understand this question, remember what I said a few minutes ago.

The Spirit, the Kingdom and Shalom – in Israel this is the heart of the Gospel.

Scripture always links these things together.

So when Jesus talks about POWER from above, and the PRESENCE of the Spirit,

The disciples know the Scripture.

They are immediately thinking / about God’s rule and reign.

They think that Jesus will set himself up / as King in Jerusalem.

The last days have arrived! We’re saved: Hallelujah!

But NOT saved out of this world.

That idea would NEVER have entered their heads.

Rather, the unjust rule of Rome will end.

God will heal all things – put all things to rights.

The new millennium will begin immediately, with Jesus as king.

Well – they are only partly right.

And now we get to see what it really looks like.

Because we start out this book / learning again what Jesus taught in many of his parables.

The kingdom of God is present –

But the kingdom of God is delayed. It’s still future.

And we live in this strange place between the times.

It’s like the time between D-Day in 1944 and VE-Day in 1945.

The soldiers have landed. The Axis lost the war.

But there are still battles to be fought. V-Day hasn’t arrived yet.

But we live in the present reality of the future victory.

There is a second thing we should take from Jesus response though.

Because usually - when the disciples are making a mistake,

We have made the same one.

The disciples want Jesus / to spread out the chart that shows how it all goes.

They want Jesus to be Hal Lindsey or Tim LaHaye or David Jeremiah.

Jesus says, "that's the wrong question."

He says instead, "*you will be my witnesses in all the earth.*"

SO he is saying – "keep your eyes on the goal."

"Put your eyes on the harvest field."

"Don't worry about the times and the details – that will distract you.

Instead – "follow Me. Work with me. Walk with me."

"I will take you out into all the world as my witnesses."

You don't need another Bible study.

You need to "follow Me."

It's about life -- not about better information -- and not about last days charts.

After this we get a couple of short stories, and then we are in chapter 2

-- the big event that opens this book: *the coming of the Spirit.*

The coming / of the Promise of the Father.

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together
in one place. Suddenly a sound / like the blowing of a violent wind /
came from heaven / and filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

*They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire
that separated and came to rest on each of them.
All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in other tongues
as the Spirit enabled them.*

And it's a shock - because people of different languages and dialects

Are all hearing the gospel *in their own language*.

But some people are confused / and accuse the speakers of being drunk.

So Peter stands up to make a defense. And he quotes from Joel

He quotes the prophet Joel – that this is a *fulfillment of the Promise* for the last days of God's coming rule. **** Slide 3 ****

“ ‘In the last days,’ God says,
‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

‘Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

...

And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

WOW.

These are incredible events.

And they bring this all home to us -- here and now.

What is Pentecost about?

- * It's the birth of the church / **Bosch or Newbiggin Def*
- * It's the renewal / of covenant /
- * It's the end / of Temple worship /
- * It's the fulfillment / of centuries of promise. It's all this .. and more.

But like so much of the New Testament,

Reading this story is like starting a book in the middle.

You need to know the back-story,

And you need to know some of the main characters.

Without this,

Pentecost then / and Pentecost now / don't really make sense.

Because we stand / literally / on the shoulders of God's work in Israel – /

So here is the shorthand for the Jewish calendar.

First - Passover – the celebration of God’s delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Remember the story? **** Slide 4 *****

Every Jewish family took the blood of a spotless lamb

and smeared it on their doorpost / so that the angel of death would “pass over” them.

The Egyptians weren’t so lucky.

Two thousand years later,

Passover and the Exodus / still define what it is to be Jewish.

Passover is the meal Jesus celebrates with his disciples in the upper room,

and where he takes the cup and offers a new meaning –

“this is the new covenant in my blood.”

And fifty days after Passover / we have Pentecost.

And it all began back in the Exodus story.

Pentecost, fifty days after the crossing of the Red Sea,
was when the law was given.

Fifty days after crossing the Red Sea,

Moses came down from the mountain, his face shining like the sun,

carrying God’s law, chiseled by God’s hand, on tablets of stone. /

In Israel – that is Pentecost.

So Dr Luke knows all this background, but MORE than knows it..

He has lived in it.

This is at the very heart / of Jewish culture in the first century.

Did you have a father or grandfather who told you stories?

Do you still remember them?

Jewish children grew up / with stories of God’s deliverance,

Hoping and praying / that God would deliver them again.

Moses led Israel to freedom from Pharaoh and Egypt.

And now Israel is waiting for deliverance from Caesar -- and Rome./

Waiting – and waiting – /

They have been waiting for four hundred years.

The last prophetic voice was Micah.

You have to wonder if they just figured God had given up on them. /

But then comes Jesus. SUDDENLY / he is on the scene.

And right from the beginning there is something different.

It's like a new wind is blowing.

And not just a wind -- it's a hurricane!! Force 4.

And stuff is breaking loose -- and there is lightning everywhere,
and rumors of angels..

From the first chapter of the gospel of Luke -- things are going nuts.

Old men are having visions and prophesying..

and old women are having babies.. REALLY old women.

it's like-- creation itself has become pregnant / and EVERYTHING is about to change.

SLIDE 5 ** Headline News

So that's how Luke begins the story / and if he were a newspaper reporter

it would be this huge headline:

But here is where the back story becomes important.

For Luke, Pentecost is the day of fulfilment / and renewal /
for the two great Jewish institutions:

There are only TWO.. the Torah – meaning Law - and the Temple. /

And in Israel – renewal of Torah and Temple / means a renewal as well
in the **presence / and power** / of the God of Israel. /

If you read the back story first,

the giving of the law in Exodus 19 and following, and then read Acts 2,
it's obvious this is the background.

But what does renewal of Torah / have to do with the Spirit?

We think of the law as something bad – a list of dead rules.

But for the Jews / Torah was LIFE –
Ro. 8:12 “the law is Holy and good”

The Law was instructions on maintaining relationship with God.

It became a dead religion/ because they lost their way
and lost touch with God’s heart.

They began to TRUST – in the Law – rather than in God.

But here is the story.

Moses went up Mount Sinai / and came down with the Torah,
to be the *way of life*

for the people God had already RESCUED / from SLAVERY in Egypt.

The Jewish feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover,
was the feast – the celebration - of the giving of the Law;

Now when we arrive at the story Luke tells in Acts,

We need to hear this parallel to the Moses story. Here it is --

Jesus has ascended to heaven, and instead of sending down the law /

He sends the Holy Spirit /

to be the way of life / for God’s redeemed people.

This story of Pentecost / is the story of the fulfillment of the Torah, the Law.

Jesus / is the fulfillment of the Law / for us who believe! /

But with THIS difference. //

The original law was written on tablets of stone;
the new law, the law of the Spirit /
is written on human hearts.

*The Spirit transforms the heart, so that we begin to change /
from the inside out. //*

So point ONE- Pentecost / fulfills the Law. * SLIDE 6 *****

The second point – just as important -- *Pentecost renews the Temple.*

Pentecost fulfills the Law – and Pentecost renews the Temple.

But in a way most Jews did not expect.

This back-story begins in the book of Kings about 1000 BC.

In chapter 8 of 1 Kings, all the elders and priests
come up to Jerusalem to dedicate the Temple,

and the Temple was filled / with the cloud which veiled God's presence.

The priests couldn't stand, because God's glory filled the whole house.

Many years later, Ezekiel's vision of the restored Temple climaxes /

in the glory of the Lord returning to the house,

sweeping in from the east / with the sound of many waters,
illuminating all the earth with its glory.

But when Jesus arrives it hasn't happened/ they are still waiting --
and many first-century Jews are grieving –

Because the once glorious Temple is more like a tomb-
empty and cold stone.

But now Luke, telling the story of the day of Pentecost,

Is shouting **HERE IT IS!!**

God is filling the Temple!! Our time of waiting is over!!

The pillar of cloud and fire has returned / to lead us thru the wilderness!

He describes the rushing of a violent wind
that filled the house where the apostles were sitting,

and flaming tongues of fire came to rest on each of them.

Luke is saying --

This is the restoration we've all been hoping for!

The Old Testament prophets spoke of the day
when God would restore Israel --

when he would cleanse and rebuild the Temple,

On that day, they said,
the nations would flock to Zion / to hear the word of the Lord.

Yes, says Luke, *and that's precisely what's happening:*

Parthians, Medes, Elamites and all the rest,
all coming to Jerusalem to hear God's word. /

Pentecost wasn't just the fulfilling and renewing of Torah.

It was the fulfilling / and renewing of the Temple.

And almost unbelievable -- we have to just shake our heads --

The disciples / themselves /

are constituted as the new, true Temple: /

not a building of stone and timber / of bricks and mortar,

but as a community / *of living, breathing / worshipping human beings.*

What a SHOCK!!

//

For the early church Torah and Temple come together *in Jesus himself,*

and now, by the Spirit, miraculous -- they came together,

*in the persons and community
of the surprised early Christians themselves.*

With Pentecost the one true and living God,
the creator / of heaven and earth,

has come to live in / and amongst / those who believe in Jesus,

Creating a NEW and LIVING temple.

A people / on whose hearts / the Law/ has now been written.

SLIDE 7 *** 1 Peter 2: 4- 6

*As you come to Him, the living Stone—
rejected by human beings / but chosen by God / and precious to him—
you also, like living stones / are being built / into a spiritual house
to be a holy priesthood / offering spiritual sacrifices /
acceptable to God / through Jesus Christ.*

For in Scripture it says:

***"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him / will never / be put to shame."***

WE – are the living stones / of a living Temple. //

Then finally, Pentecost renews the covenant.

*It fulfills the promises of God / to bring a completely new covenant,
one rooted in His faithfulness / and not in ours;*

rooted in God's ability to create / and recreate / a holy people.

Paul writes: *It is GOD who justifies. Who can condemn?*

The law is written on human hearts / instead of tablets of stone.

So that the words of Jeremiah are fulfilled: ***** SLIDE 8 *****

31 "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel / and with the house of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors /
when I took them by the hand / to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to a them,"
declares the LORD.

33 "This is the covenant / I will make with the house of Israel /
after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they / will be my people.

Those are the words of God. / Is this true in your experience?

It won't matter if you are wealthy / or poor..

Homeless or housed..
Educated or unschooled..

Male or female..
Black or white..

Our Father gives good gifts to his children!
God gives His Spirit to those who love him.

It won't matter if you live in a mansion, or sleep in an orchard.

When the Spirit comes

those who were nothing / *really become something*

And the old religious system that depended on priests and sacrifices

Simply falls down – like the walls of the Temple.

And through the church, the living body,

God's Kingdom / breaks into our world.

Klassen – *Veni Sancte Spiritus*

On the last and greatest day of the Festival,
Jesus stood / and said in a loud voice,

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me,
as Scripture has said,
rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John 7:37-38

Lord, each of us has come here hoping to meet with you.

We confess that we need you Lord.

Renew your Spirit in us. Refresh us.
Teach us and lead us.

Reveal Christ to us, in us and through us.

Heal us – and all the earth.

May Your kingdom come. May your Name be Holy.