

Resources for Finishing Our Lord's Unfinished Work, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 1:1–11

Code: 1700

INTRODUCTION

This and the following lessons are a study of Acts 1:12:13. Before we get into our study, I want to share some background information about the book of Acts.

A. The Writer

Acts 1:1 says, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." In an indirect way, that tells us who wrote the book of Acts. Luke 1:3-4 says, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed." Luke wrote his gospel for Theophilus. Then when he wrote a sequel, the book of Acts, for Theophilus, he referred to his gospel as "the former treatise" (Acts 1:1).

Luke is not mentioned often in the New Testament. He appears in three verses: Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11, and Philemon 24. Consequently, little is known about him. Colossians tells us he was a medical doctor. That is corroborated by the medical terminology he used in his gospel, as well as some of the situations he wrote about. Second Timothy says he was a companion to the imprisoned apostle Paul. The context of the Colossians reference suggests Luke was a Gentile--making him perhaps the only Gentile writer of the New Testament.

B. The Recipient

1. The purpose

The book of Acts was addressed to Theophilus. Because Luke referred to his gospel as "the former treatise," we can consider Acts to be the second volume of Luke's writings. In the gospel of Luke he told us about the works and teachings of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:1). Then in Acts he picks up where the gospel of Luke left off by sharing about Christ's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

2. The person

The name Theophilus is a combination of two Greek words. It means "beloved of God" or "friend of God." Little is known about him. Second-century sources indicate he was a wealthy, influential official in Antioch. Luke may have also been from Antioch, which would explain how the two men got to know each other.

Theophilus was a Roman citizen who was a believer. He may have been a high-ranking Roman official because Luke referred to him as "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). The term excellent is

also used in the Bible in reference to Felix and Festus, who were Roman governors (Acts 23:26, 26:25).

Is Christ's Work Finished or Not?

You'll notice Luke says in Acts 1:1, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach" (emphasis added). The word began implies that Christ's work on earth was not finished, yet in His high-priestly prayer to His Father 4 Jesus said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). When He died on the cross He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The reason Luke said Christ's work had begun is he was referring to the work of evangelism and teaching. Christ's redemptive work on the cross is done, but the work of teaching God's Word to all is not. We are to continue teaching the gospel message of Christ. That's why I titled this lesson "Resources for Finishing Our Lord's Unfinished Work."

As we study Acts 1:12-13, keep in mind that Luke is writing about a great transition. Jesus did almost all the gospel teaching up to the time of His death and resurrection. The disciples hadn't done much teaching; their experience was probably limited to the time Jesus sent them out in Matthew 10. But before Christ ascended, He gave to the disciples the responsibility of evangelizing the world. From a human standpoint, they weren't highly qualified individuals. But Christ is about to equip them so that they would be able to carry out His work.

In Acts 1 we see seven things that the Lord did to prepare His disciples for their work: He taught them (the proper message), appeared to them (the proper manifestation), empowered them (the proper might), hid a mystery from them (the proper mystery), commissioned them (the proper mission), gave a promise to them (the proper motive), and replaced a traitor (the proper men).

LESSON

I. THE PROPER MESSAGE (vv. 1-2)

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen."

A. Taught by the Example of Christ

1. Learning from Christ's teaching

To effectively carry on the Lord's work, you need to know the proper message. There's no sense in

sharing the gospel if you don't have the right information. Acts 1:1-2 says that Christ taught the apostles right up until the time He ascended into heaven.

Preparing for Ministry

If you are thinking about going into some type of Christian ministry or service that requires teaching or evangelizing, you need to be trained. You can't just say, "I'm ready; I'm going to go out into the world and tell everyone what I know about Christ." You will run out of things to say if you're not adequately prepared. I've known people who have rushed into some type of ministry and run out of things to do after a while. It's necessary to fill your mind with the facts before any kind of ministry can be effective.

I've had people ask me why I spent so much time in school before I became a pastor. Without that schooling I would not have been equipped to teach God's Word. Every year I spent in school and every paper I wrote contributed to my preparation for ministry. We need to know God's Word before we can share it with others; there's no substitute for that. Hosea said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6). One of the greatest problems in the church today is ignorance. There are some people who have gone to church for ten or twenty years but know next to nothing about the Bible. God doesn't tolerate ignorance; 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show thyself approved unto God."

Time

magazine made up a questionnaire with Bible questions and the results showed how ignorant some church-oriented people are about the Bible. Here are some of the inaccurate answers people thought were right: Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers, Jezebel was Ahab's jackass, Eve was created from an apple, and Jesus was baptized by Moses! Take the time to get the facts straight--it's worth it.

2. Learning from Christ's actions

Having the proper knowledge isn't all that's necessary; you need to apply what you learn every day. Luke wrote his gospel to tell of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (emphasis added). The word do appears before the word teach. That's because you can teach biblical principles only when you are living them. You can't teach on a matter or subject that you have no experience with. If you want to carry on Jesus' work, you need more than an intellectual awareness of the facts; you need to be living out what you teach.

The religious leaders of Israel appeared to be the most righteous people of all, yet Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All, therefore, whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not after their works; for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:2-3). The Pharisees didn't live by what they taught. The same goes for today; there's a lack of powerful preaching today because some teachers are ignorant about what the Bible teaches or because they don't apply what

they know.

If your knowledge of God's Word isn't transforming your own life, don't expect it to transform the lives of others. There are ministers who preach the Word yet live in sin. When their sin is exposed, the congregation is in turmoil because they see the contradiction between the minister's words and his actions. Nineteenth century Scottish preacher Robert Murray McCheyne wrote this to a fellow minister: "Remember you are God's sword, His instrument.... In great measure according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God" (Memoirs of McCheyne, Andrew A. Bonar, ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1947], p. 95).

You must be living God's Word before you can teach it. Jesus did that up to the time He was taken up into heaven. Several times He said He would return to heaven (John 6:62; 16:28; 20:17) but before He did that, He carefully taught the disciples and showed them the divine pattern for living.

B. Taught by the Empowerment of the Spirit

Acts 1:2 says that Christ gave His commandments to the apostles "through the Holy Spirit." Although it was Christ--the second Person of the Trinity--who came to earth to minister to mankind, His ministry was accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ also said He came to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). So all three Persons of the Trinity were involved in Christ's work on earth. Yet the religious leaders of Israel didn't recognize that. After seeing Christ do the miraculous, they concluded He was empowered by the devil (Matt. 12:24). They were blinded by their sin. Jesus told them that if they spoke against Him they could be forgiven, but because they were denying what the Spirit was doing through Him, they had blasphemed the Holy Spirit and committed an unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:31-32).

Why did the Trinity choose for Jesus to be empowered through the Holy Spirit? I think because Jesus was setting a pattern for us to follow. All that we do for God, including teaching the gospel message, is to be done in the power of the Spirit.

C. Taught to the Elect of God

Acts 1:2 says Christ "had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen" (emphasis added). Jesus chose His own missionaries, taught them, and commissioned them with certain responsibilities. The same is true of all Christians: we are chosen by Christ. John 15:16 says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit."

To be an effective teacher or evangelist for Christ, you have to be saturated with God's Word. Nineteenth century English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon said that we might preach until our tongues rotted, until we exhaust our lungs and die--but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convert it. He said we're to eat into the very heart of the Bible until at last we come to talk in scriptural language and our spirits are flavored with the words of the Lord, so that the very essence of the Bible flows from us! I hope you are actively taking in God's Word and pouring it out to others.

II. THE PROPER MANIFESTATION (v. 3)

"To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

A. Christ Increased the Apostles' Faith (v. 3a)

Christ appeared only to His chosen ones, not to unbelievers. The purpose of that was to prepare the apostles for their ministry to unbelievers. Rather than try to work with unbelievers Himself, Christ empowered others to do the job, and that's what He does with us now.

It was important for the apostles to know that Jesus is a risen Lord. Who wants to go around propagating the gospel of a dead leader? Christ showed Himself to the apostles so they would know He had conquered death. One of the greatest proofs of the resurrection is the early church's boldness and commitment in preaching about Christ. The apostles were confident because they had seen Christ in His resurrection glory. Had that not happened, they would have gone back to the routine of life and quit advocating Christianity. But Christ appeared to the apostles repeatedly over a period of forty days to confirm He was a risen, glorified Messiah.

There is a list of all the people Christ appeared to in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8. Those appearances convinced Christ's followers that the Lord had indeed risen. When the resurrected Christ asked His disciples to dine with Him at the Sea of Galilee, "none of the disciples dared ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21:12).

B. Christ Increased the Apostles' Knowledge (v. 3b)

What did Christ do when He appeared to the apostles? He spoke to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Before Christ died, He taught frequently about God's future kingdom, and did the same after His resurrection. That must have encouraged the apostles because now they knew for certain that the promises regarding God's future kingdom would come true. If Christ had never risen, they would have thought there was no hope for a future kingdom. They would have wondered, How can there be a kingdom someday when the leader of that kingdom is dead? But Christ arose, and that restored the apostles' confidence in preaching about the coming kingdom.

How does Acts 1:3 apply to us? We have not seen Jesus with our eyes, but He has manifest Himself to us. The apostle Paul didn't see Christ physically, but in 1 Corinthians 9:1 he said that He saw Him. How? With his spiritual eye. Jesus said in John 20:29, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." We don't need to see Jesus with our physical eyes; we can see Him with the eyes of faith. I'd rather have Christ present with us spiritually than physically. In a physical body, Christ was limited to doing His work in the locations He traveled to. But with His Spirit inside us, He can work through all Christians everywhere. First Corinthians 12:3 says, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit." It's the Spirit who reveals Christ to us. Jesus told the disciples, "When the Comforter [the Holy Spirit] is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). Christ is present in your life, and He manifests Himself through you so that you might know He's alive. His presence gives us confidence when we preach about Him. First Peter 1:8 says we love Him even though we can't see

Him. Christ is real to us.

III. THE PROPER MIGHT (vv. 4-5, 8a)

A. The Petition (v. 4)

"[Christ] being assembled together with them [the apostles], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard from me."

Even though the disciples had been taught by Christ and knew He had risen from the dead, they still weren't ready to go out and win people for the Lord. Christ had told them to go out and teach all nations (Matt. 28:20), but in Acts 1:4 He added that they shouldn't yet depart from Jerusalem. He said, "Wait for the promise of the Father, which ... ye have heard from me." Jesus said the same thing in Luke 24:49: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

What was the "promise of the Father" that He had told them about? The gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the apostles they would receive the Holy Spirit after He left them (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 20:22). Acts 2:33 confirms that the Father sent the Holy Spirit once Christ was at His right hand in heaven.

1. The necessity of Jesus' departure

Jesus told the apostles in John 16:7, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." The Spirit couldn't be sent until Christ returned to heaven. The disciples had to wait ten days between the ascension and the day they received the Spirit, the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Pentecost is Greek for "the fiftieth day." It was when the Jewish people celebrated the Feast of harvest, and fell on the fiftieth day after the Feast of Passover. It also refers to the fifty-day period between Christ's resurrection and the sending of the Spirit.

2. The necessity of the Spirit's arrival

Since the apostles had to wait to receive the Holy Spirit before they could do the Lord's work, that shows us it's impossible to carry on His work in our own power. You can make elaborate plans for ministry and give eloquent sermons, but without the Spirit's power, your work will be fruitless. The apostles themselves knew they needed the Spirit's power. When Christ first commissioned them to spread the gospel, He said, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:20). In Luke 12:12 the apostles were told there would come a day when the Spirit would speak through them. John 14:17 says that the Holy Spirit was already with the disciples, but that later on He would be in them. (Prior to the sending of the Spirit in Acts 2, people weren't indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Instead, God sent the Spirit on specific occasions to do a special work through someone. For example, the Holy Spirit descended on King Saul [1 Sam. 11:6] and departed from him [1 Sam. 16:14]).

B. The Prediction (v. 5)

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Before Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist said of Him, "I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.... he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bore witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:26, 33-34). Jesus is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and the disciples had to wait in Jerusalem until He sent the Spirit from heaven.

The disciples were going to receive their baptism in ten days (Christ's command for the disciples to wait for the Spirit was given on the day of His ascension, which was forty days after His resurrection. The Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, which was fifty days after His resurrection, thus making the wait ten days.) Now that doesn't mean a person receives the Spirit ten days after he becomes saved. The situation in Acts was unique; Jesus hadn't ascended to heaven yet to send the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, every believer receives the Spirit the moment He receives Christ as Savior. Romans 8:9 says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." A person without the Holy Spirit isn't a Christian.

C. The Promise (v. 8a)

"Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you."

Prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles were powerless to carry out Christ's unfinished work. The Greek word translated "power" (dunamis) is where we get the English word dynamite. Every Christian is packed with power--for the Holy Spirit is like dynamite!

Some Christians feel they are lacking in power. If you feel like that, it's not God's fault. The power is within you. All you need to do is turn on the ignition switch. How is that done? Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." A simple way to illustrate the filling of the Spirit is with Alka-Seltzer tablets. Within each tablet is a concentrated form of medication that is released when put into a glass of water. Likewise, the Person of the Holy Spirit is like a concentrated form of energy within you. The power is in you, but you need to release it and allow it to permeate your life.

To live a Spirit-filled life means to yield yourself to the control of the Spirit. In the Bible, the word filled is primarily used in connection with a particular attitude. It is used to speak of being filled with rage, anger, sorrow, or faith. Whatever the person is filled with overrides other emotions or attitudes. Someone filled with sorrow is overwhelmed with sorrow. Someone filled with the Spirit is allowing the Spirit to control his life. It's one thing to possess the Spirit, yet another to be filled by it. How Can I Let the Holy Spirit Fill My Life?

The answer is in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Being filled with the Holy Spirit and letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly are synonymous because they produce

the same results. When you are filled with the Spirit, you will have a song in your heart, be thankful, love your spouse and children, and serve your employer well (Eph. 5:19-6:9). The same is true for letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col. 3:16-4:1).

To let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly is to be preoccupied with the presence of Christ. The more you saturate your mind with what you learn about Him from the Bible, the more He controls your thoughts. By yielding yourself totally to the Word of God and letting it permeate your life, you'll be controlled by the Spirit's desires and not your own.

God can do great things through you. Ephesians 3:20 says the Lord is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." The power is in you; it just needs to be released. You do that by yielding every aspect of your life to the Spirit's control.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was Luke's purpose in writing the book of Acts (Acts 1:1)?
2. What work has Christ already finished? What work must we continue to carry on?
3. Why is knowledge of Scripture so important for ministry?
4. What does knowledge need to be supplemented with?
5. Why is there a lack of powerful preaching today?
6. To be an _____ teacher or evangelist for Christ, you have to be _____ with God's Word.
7. Whom did Christ appear to after His resurrection? Why?
8. What did Christ do when He appeared to the apostles after His resurrection? What effect did that have on the apostles?
9. What command did Christ give the apostles in Acts 1:4? Why?
10. What does Romans 8:9 say about a person in relation to the Holy Spirit?
11. What does every Christian possess?
12. What does it mean to live a Spirit-filled life?
13. How can you let the Holy Spirit fill your life?

Pondering the Principles

1. What are you doing right now to assure that you develop a thorough knowledge of God's Word? The range of possibilities is wide: You can commit yourself to a daily Bible-reading schedule, take notes during Sunday services or Bible study meetings, read good Christian books, be discipled by a mature Christian, take classes or a correspondence course with a Christian college, subscribe to a Christian magazine, or listen to good Christian teachers on television or radio. Make sure you are receiving nourishment daily from God's Word using one or more of those avenues for learning. The best way to make sure you make progress is to meet regularly with a good Christian friend to share with each other what you're learning so that you may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

2. Christ came to earth to reveal God to mankind. He did that not only through His words but His actions as well. Get together with a Christian friend and discuss what practical applications you can make for our own attitudes and actions based on Christ's example: Mark 6:34, John 17:20-23, Philippians 2:5-8, and 1 Peter 2:21-23. When you follow Christ's pattern in your life, you will be rewarded with the blessings that come from living in accord with God's will!

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