

## Acts 1:1-12

### The Ascended Jesus

**Introduction:** The book of Acts opens with these words, **“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day that he was taken up...”** The author, Luke, has written a two volume work, what we know today as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, to Theophilus, most likely a new convert to Christianity. This is how Luke Begins his Gospel - **“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.** So we could really call this book The Continuing Acts of Jesus the Risen and Ascended Lord through his Church by the Power of the Holy Spirit. No wonder we stuck with just calling it Acts. Luke writes his two volume account to instruct Theophilus in order that he might have certainty concerning what he had been taught about Jesus.

#### 1. Christianity is True.

1. Luke is showing Theophilus and any other reader that Christianity is true. Notice the language he uses in verse 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.”**
2. That Christianity is helpful many people don't deny, that it can give you a good compass on how to live morally, give you community, a sense of purpose - most people might agree; but that it is true? Not so much. The virgin Birth, the feeding of thousands with a few loaves and fishes, that people are raised to life... But this is the claim again and again of the N.T. Christianity has always been hard to believe. People were not more stupid in ancient times, they were just as skeptical as we are today. It's even recorded in the Gospels that in the many times that Jesus appeared, some believed, and others doubted.. he had to prove that it really was him..he had to be touched, he had to eat food to prove he wasn't a ghost, share things

that only Jesus could know...they literally couldn't believe their eyes....True ancient peoples did believe more in the spiritual realm than we do in our secular age, but they did not believe more in resurrection! The claim of the NT is that Jesus did not just come back from the dead but that he resurrected, with a new Body, that was still flesh and bone but not subject to boundaries like ours are.. Again this has always been hard to believe, but the resurrected ascended Jesus is the only adequate answer for how the early church triumphed under the tyranny of Rome and how something as small and weak as the beginnings of Christianity could change the world. As we journey through this book we will see this unfold.

3. All this to say, we believe the claims of Christianity because they are true not because they are relevant, or because they make us happy.. as Lewis said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."— C.S. Lewis. Choose to follow Christ because he is true, and you will find that it is extremely relevant, helpful, and dare I say it will not make you just happy, but joyful...

## **2. The Message of Acts**

1. The next thing we see in this text is the message of the book of Acts. What was it?
2. John Stott writes in his commentary - "It appears that Jesus' two main topics between his resurrection and his ascension were the kingdom of God and the Spirit of God. It seems probable that he related them to one another - Just as the prophets do. When God establishes the kingdom of the Messiah, they said, he will pour out his Spirit; this generous effusion and universal enjoyment of the Spirit will be one of the major signs and blessings of his rule; and indeed the Spirit of God will make the rule of God a living and present reality to his people."
3. As Jesus is continually talking about these two things the Apostles ask - ok then, does that mean that you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel? The Apostles are still thinking nationalistically. They are thinking politically in terms of overthrowing Rome and a restored kingdom of David.... Jesus doesn't deny that that will come

- eventually. But he says their concern is with the Kingdom of God which concerns the whole earth and all peoples, not just Israel.
4. What the disciples still didn't realize is that their scope was too small. Jesus is not simply the king of Israel, he is the King of all and this "good news" of his cosmic reign is to be proclaimed to all, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading from there to the ends of the earth.... This is where you have to step back and see the big thrust of Luke's two volumes - we really have a message of God being King through Jesus and that kingdom coming into conflict with the kingdoms of this world - depicted in the world power of Rome...as Luke's Gospel account unfolds we see through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the overthrowing of the powers that rule the world and the establishing of God's kingdom then in Acts we see this proclamation of God's rule (The Good news) going to the ends of the earth and at the end of Acts it is being proclaimed under the nose of the Emperor in Rome, the seat of the Empire. Listen to the closing words of Acts... **“He (Paul) lived there (Rome) two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance....** The word of the Gospel (God is King, Jesus is Lord) is going forward and it is unhindered.... Nothing can stop the advancement of the Kingdom of God!!
  5. The continual message through Acts then is that Jesus is Lord. Whether it is Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost, Paul speaking to philosophers on Mars Hill, or everyday Christians literally "gossiping" in the marketplace, this is their message. One of the great things about Acts is that everyone who is a Christian spreads this message.. it doesn't matter who they are or what their credentials might be, A table servant (a waiter), like Stephen or Philip or an Apostle like Peter.
    1. The Co-Mission of Jesus - To Take the message of Jesus' Lordship to the ends of the earth until he returns. -**“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.”**
    2. Leslie Newbigin says -“The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move - hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all

men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one...It cannot be understood rightly except in perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological.”

1. The Implication is -we have got to get this message out to people near and far..The closing chapter of Acts is open ended on purpose..implying that it is now our turn (The present Church) to take up this co-mission and get this message out to the Nations.. we will talk so much more about this in the weeks and months to come. What we need to focus on this morning is how this is possible. How could christianity triumph, how could ordinary people accomplish such amazing tasks, and have such great faith...How can we rise to the call of Jesus? How can we do evangelism in the secular west? How did they do it and how can we? The answer - the Ascension.

### 3. The Ascension

1. We often talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus but often leave out the ascension.. but the ascension is really the piece that is of outmost importance for our lives today. Why? What does the Ascension mean. The Bible teaches that Jesus didn't just disappear, or go up into the clouds but that he has gone back to heaven, to the presence of his father and is seated at God's right hand. The ascension means that Jesus now sits in the place of ultimate power over the universe.
2. Jesus ascension means at least these three things for his church:
  1. **Absolute Presence**
  2. **Absolute Power**
  3. **Absolute Persuasion**
3. **Absolute Presence** - Jesus Promised the Disciples that when he went away he would send another comforter - the Holy Spirit who would be with us always and would guide us into all truth. Jesus actually says that if he doesn't go away (The Ascension) he cannot send the Spirit.
4. Then there is that moment after Jesus has resurrected and he meets Mary in the garden and she doesn't recognize him until he says her name.. and at the sound of his voice she wraps her arms around him probably so tight.. and what does Jesus say? **“Jesus said to her,**

**“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” - John 20:17**

5. Mary is clinging so tight to Jesus she doesn't ever want to lose him again... But Jesus is telling Mary that she has to let him go so that he can ascend to the Father and send the Spirit and that way she WON'T ever lose him. If Mary just tries to hold on to Jesus physically, she will lose him, but if he ascends, he will send the Holy Spirit, then no matter what happens, even if she is locked in the deepest darkest dungeon, he is still with her, even through death.
6. “An awareness of the resurrected Christ banishes meaninglessness - the dreaded sense that all our life experiences are disconnected and useless. It helps us to see our lives as one piece and reveals a design never perceived before. He goes on, “A hard day, yes. Rattled and unglued, yes. Unable to cope, no. How does the life-giving Spirit of the risen Lord manifest himself on days like that? In our willingness to stand fast, our refusal to run away, and escape into self destructive behavior. Resurrection power enables us to engage in the savage confrontation with untamed emotions, to accept the pain, receive it, take it onboard, however acute it may be. And in the process we discover that we are not alone, that we can stand fast in the awareness of present risenness and so become fuller, richer, deeper disciples....The Lord might lead us into things we believe unbearable..and yet it may happen in these most desperate trials of our human existence that beyond any rational explanation, we may feel a nail scarred hand clutching ours.” - Brennan Manning
  1. This is one effect of the Ascension - the absolute presence of Jesus with us wherever we go, even through death. As Jesus said, **“behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**
4. **Absolute Power** - The ascension means that Jesus is on the throne of the universe and that he controls all things.
  1. Listen to these verses from Ephesians:
  2. **“having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who**

**believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” - Ephesians 1:18-22**

3. God’s control over all things is a huge biblical theme seen in stories like Joseph, and ultimately seen in Jesus -how God uses everything in our lives, good and bad, for his ultimate glory and our good. Which means that we don’t have to fear anything because God is in control of all things. A theme again that we’ll see throughout the book of Acts - the Kingdom of God is an unstoppable force, nothing can stop it, not the wicked political schemes of Herod or the Jewish leaders, not the beheading of the Apostles, not the prejudice and racism of the Judaizers, not the lynching mobs, not imprisonment, not shipwreck or vipers, or stoning.. nothing can stop the promises of God, in Jesus, from getting out to the world he so dearly loves!

## **5. Absolute Persuasion**

1. When Jesus ascended to the Father not only did he go to the place of absolute power he also went to the seat of judgment - the cosmic court room if you will. In ancient times the seat of power was also the seat of judgment - the division of powers is a unique and relatively new form of government.
2. The scripture tell us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and that he ever lives to make intercession for us.
3. Listen to Hebrews 7, **“He is able to save to the uttermost<sup>[b]</sup> those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” - Hebrews 7:25-26**
4. And 1 John 2 tells us, **“if anyone (christian) does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the**

**propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

1. The ascension means that Jesus is 24/7 in the presence of God, the righteous judge, (The cosmic court room) pleading our case - that we are guiltless of sin, and that we are clothed in Christ righteousness. Jesus work on the cross, means, that those who believe in him, their debt of sin has been paid in full, and the righteous life that Jesus lived has been credited to their account. God now sees you as absolutely spotless and beautiful in Jesus.
2. We talk often about this idea here at Refuge - justification by faith in Jesus means that the only one in the universe that matters (God) thinks you are amazing, spotless, and beautiful.. What does it matter what other people think about you? Only once this truth has sunk into your heart (by the working of the Holy Spirit) and freed you from the opinions and judgments of others, or even your opinion of yourself, will you be free and truly living under the rule of Jesus as King.
3. Augustine said, “Only love of the immutable can bring tranquility.”
4. “There is only one thing that is immutable. It is God, his presence and his love. The only love that won’t disappoint you is the one that can’t change, that can’t be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God’s love is the only thing like that. Not only can your poor performance not block it, but even the worst possible circumstances in this life - sudden death - can only give you more of it.” -Tim Keller
5. “God alone is the place of peace that cannot be disturbed, and he will not hold himself from your love unless you withhold your love from him.” - Augustine
  1. It was only because of the Ascension that the early church was able to do the amazing things that they did. They knew Jesus was with them by the power of His spirit, they knew that he controlled history and their lives for his glory and their good and they knew that they were dearly loved and accepted by the Father, through Jesus Christ.
  2. Church -Think on the ascension \_Presence, power and persuasion and all that it means for you until the joy breaks

into your heart and watch how God will make you a witness of His kingdom and Lordship.