

Monday - Week Thirty-one

The Book of Acts: An Introduction

Summary: Luke wrote the book of Acts to Theophilus to show him how the Christian Church advanced from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Background and Comments

- The plan of the book of Acts is found in chapter 1 verse 8: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* The church gradually grew from Jerusalem (chapters 1-7) to Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 and 9) to the ends of the earth (chapters 10-28). Keep this outline in mind as you study this book.
- Luke was an objective writer. He didn't only write about the successes of the early church he wrote about the scandals, the sins and the arguments in the church. What might we think if Luke hadn't written about any of those things?
- A good map will be an asset to your study of Acts!

Lessons for Today

- Luke was a careful historian. He even switched his vocabulary to reflect the region he was reporting about (when he reported events in Greek lands Luke used classical Greek; when he reported events in Judea Luke used more Hebrew phrasing). Luke's fine eye for detail can be seen again and again in Acts. Why do you suppose God used Luke to write the only inspired history of the early church?
- The book of Acts is a textbook on how God's Church works. We see how the church grew, the struggles it endured and the heroes who shaped it. As you read the book of Acts try to make applications to your own church.
- As you read the book of Acts work hard to put yourself "back in the action" of the years after Jesus' ascension. These early Christians faced tremendous odds. It's a miracle that the Church survived at all ... much less thrived. Try to find people that you can relate to in the early history of the church. What lessons can you learn from them?

Read: Psalm 130; 1 Peter 1.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the history of my congregation. By Your grace we have held fast to the truth of God's Word. Bless my study of the early church. Let me apply the lessons I learn. Amen.

Tuesday - Week Thirty-one

Acts 1: Setting the stage

Summary: God set the stage for the miraculous advances the early church would make. Jesus visibly left them and a new disciple was chosen.

Background and Comments

- In Acts 1:1 Luke told Theophilus that in the book of Luke he began to tell him everything Jesus did and taught. In the book of Luke he would continue to tell Theophilus everything Jesus did and taught. Sometimes we forget that Jesus is still intimately involved in His Church. Indeed, Jesus is still at work in His Church to this day!
- The early church cast lots to decide who would take Judas' place. God guided the lot casting (roughly like drawing straws, etc.). We don't have such a promise that will guide the casting of lots.
- Prayer had a prominent role in the history of the early Church. It seems that every time the church did anything they prayed first.

Lessons for Today

- In verse 6 we see that the disciples still thought that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom. Only later did they realize that Jesus' kingdom was in their hearts and would reach fulfillment only in heaven. Our lack of greater spiritual understanding doesn't have to cause us to despair. Even the apostles had to grow in their understanding!
- In verse 24 the group said that God knew people's hearts. Literally they said that God was a "heart-knower". God is still a heart-knower today. When you pray to Him realize that He knows everything that is in your heart. Don't try to hide anything from Him (He knows everything anyway!); pour out your heart, admit your sins, share your hopes and fears with Him.
- Peter quoted the Bible time and time again. The apostles' grasp of the Bible is astounding. Pray that God will bless you as you study His Word.

Read: Psalm 131; 1 Peter 2.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, when Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples learned that He would be with them all the time ... in their hearts and in the world around them. Reinforce that lesson for us. Jesus still plays a huge role in our lives every day. Lord, I put myself at Your disposal; let me be Jesus' hands and feet in the lives of others. Amen.

Wednesday - Week Thirty-one

Catechism Review

Read Questions 258-264

1. How would you explain to a child what happens when a person dies?

2. If a person goes either to heaven or to hell when he or she dies what is going to happen to them on Judgment Day? Will they be judged all over again?

3. As you read through questions 262 and 263 write a little essay about what heaven might be like. Be creative. Dream a little (or a lot).

4. One way to look forward to heaven is to work as hard as we can in God's kingdom while we are here in this world. Imagine, in a short time we will be "resting" in heaven. Now is our time to get to work. As you think about the remaining years of live that God will give you what are some things that you would like to do to serve Him. (Again, dream big!)

Read: Psalm 132; 1 Peter 3.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to look forward to heaven. Amen.

Thursday - Week Thirty-one

Acts 2: Pentecost and Beyond

Summary: The Holy Spirit turned the disciples into powerful preachers who were not afraid of anything.

Background and Comments

- Peter's Pentecost sermon was filled with references from the Old Testament. Peter understood that Christianity was nothing new; it was the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- God gave the apostles the ability to speak in other languages so that people would pay special attention to them. God's miracle certainly got everyone's attention!
- Are things "destined" to happen or do they happen because of the free actions of people? Peter says both are true! In Acts 2:23 Peter said that Jesus was handed over by God's set purpose AND that he was handed over by the Jews and their leaders. We humans love to argue about such philosophical problems; God rides right over them.

Lessons for Today

- Peter told the crowd that they had put to death God's Son, the Messiah. We would think that would have turned the crowd off to Peter's message. Instead the opposite happened. The people were cut to the heart and became even more interested in what he had to say. Sometimes we are afraid that God's law will simply turn people off to our message. In reality it's just what unbelievers need to hear. Without the law they have no reason to listen to the gospel. Don't be afraid to confront people with their sin and God's law.
- Acts 2:42 shows us what the early church was all about. They were devoted to the Word of God (the apostles' teaching), to getting together with each other (fellowship) to communion (the breaking of bread), and prayer. Is your church devoted to the same things?
- Verse 47 tells us how the church grows: *the Lord added to their number*

Read: Psalm 133; 1 Peter 4.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please help my church to grow - to grow in depth of faith as we study the Word of God together and to grow in numbers as more and more people come to faith. I put my church into Your hands, Lord. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Friday - Week Thirty-one

John - Lesson Two: The Prologue of John (1:1-18)

1. Whole books have been written about "the Word". In the Old Testament we often read, "The Word of the Lord came to...." Luther put all of this in a rather deep way: "Thus God, too, from all eternity had a Word, a speech, a thought, or a conversation with Himself in His divine heart, unknown to angels and men". (page 9) Can you put Luther's words into your own?
2. Verse four introduces us to two important concepts in John's Gospel: life and light. Jesus can give life (physical & spiritual) because life is in Him. How is Jesus the light of men?
3. The Greek word translated "understood" in verse 5 can also be translated "overcome". Jesus is still shining in this dark world. How has our dark world neither understood nor overcome Him?
4. John was not the light (v 8). Like John, we only testify to the Light. What will that mean as we witness to people?
5. Verses 10 & 11 are horribly ironic. Why?
6. Verse 16 literally says, "From His Fullness we all receive grace upon grace". John was saying, "Jesus radiated grace". John and the rest of the disciples got to see Jesus live every day. One thing that stuck in their minds was that Jesus was full of grace. Who are some people whom you would describe as being "full of grace?"

How can you be more "grace-full?"

Read: Psalm 134; 1 Peter 5.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, make me a "grace-full" person. Amen.