

Flashback



Acts 1:1-5

As citizens of the United States of America in 2021, many of us have felt like we needed to review what the founding fathers placed into the constitution concerning our rights as citizens. I believe that really soon we are going to get back to a new normal. I don't know about you, but I'm not really excited about rushing back to the old normal. Honestly, there are some things that Covid and the restrictions interrupted, but there are a few things in my life that got disrupted. To be totally honest, it was a blessing, a blessing that I didn't realize. I hated it took what it took to get me to see some things that in my life, perhaps, were not the way they were supposed to be. We are getting back to what I hope is a new normal. Some of those things that were good in our lives that got interrupted, we can't wait to get back to them. I think there are some things we were probably doing that we may not need to go back to, not just as Christians, but as a church. As we get ready to adjust back to a society without any restrictions, we aren't going to focus on the constitution of the United States. We are going to

focus on God's Word and try to establish new normal based on what God pictures for us about His Church. We are going to do that from a study of the book of Acts.

Before we begin, Celisa has discovered a new show on television that she has fallen in love with. Normally, what she falls in love with I have to fall in love with too, because we are one (I try to be a good head). We have discovered UP TV, and it has this show called Heartland. Season 14 begins on May 6th...this week. However, because Celisa just recently discovered this, we are actually now watching season 2. We're on episode 3, which means we have five days to finish season 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 so that we are ready on May 6th for season 14! Celisa saw season 1 but I didn't, so there are times when we are watching season 2 together when I have to say, "I don't get it." She will say, "You missed it because you didn't see season 1." Let me tell you what the producers of the show do, and a lot of shows do this if it is a continually running show. When the show first comes on, they show you something you've already seen from a previous episode. Generally, it is from the episode right before, but sometimes Heartland goes back two or three episodes because they know that whatever they're going to show on this episode is connected to something that has already been shown. If you saw it, you need to be reminded, and if you didn't see it, you need to see it so you will know why the plot is developing the way it is. That is genius!

I think those of you have been with us at Hardin for a long time understand that I watch a lot of late night TV, and because I do, when we are doing verse by verse studies of God's Word, at the beginning of the sermon I will actually review what we said the week before, depending on how connected the verses we are going to talk about are to the verses in the previous studies. I didn't just get that from TV, I actually got that from a guy named Luke. We believe, because the early Church fathers believed, that Luke wrote the book of Acts after he wrote the book of Luke. What we are going to do in this lesson is look at the first five verses of the book of Acts, and we are just going to get a flashback. There is nothing new going to be taught to us in this book that was not already taught to us in the first book.

Luke's Historical Account of Jesus and His Church to Theophilus

Here is what is neat...Luke is going to actually write one thousand and seven verses, but five of them are going to be a flashback to all of the verses that he wrote in the Gospel of Luke. I know the early Church didn't put our Bible together in this order, but it would have been so neat if Luke and Acts had been combined. I encourage you, sometime, to read the Gospel of Luke, and before going to John or another book of the Bible, follow it up with the book of Acts. That was Luke's intention; for a man named Theophilus to have a brief history, the known history, of Jesus Christ and His Church. He covers about sixty-five to sixty-six years of history, from somewhere around 2 BC through around 62 AD. He is not just writing from a perspective of history, he is weaving theology into his history. Luke not only wanted Theophilus to see Jesus, he wanted him to see Jesus' Church. That is what we want to do through this sermon series. We want to see how Luke presents the Church, and possibly, hopefully, let the book of Acts be our guide as we begin to navigate life post-Covid. And for many of us, to not go back to an old normal, but to establish a new normal, being wise to ascertain what in our lives just got interrupted versus what in our lives got disrupted, and actually needed to be disrupted.

Scripture

"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 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.

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."

Look at how Luke begins the book of Acts. He says. *"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up..."* "The first book," that is the Gospel of Luke.

Now, let's quickly look back at the first four verses of Luke 1:1-4, *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 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, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."*

After giving that introduction to his gospel, Luke immediately launches into giving an historical narrative, an historical fact of what God began to do during the days of Herod, king of Judea. Then, he mentions a certain priest named Zachariah, who was from the division of Abijah. This is what Luke is referring to in the book of Acts. "In this first book" that he wrote, he was writing it to the same man he is writing this book to, Theophilus.

The name, Theophilus, literally means 'God lover.' Many scholars, many pastors, and many students of the Word therefore believe that because this man's name was Theophilus and it meant lover of God, he must already be a Christian, possibly. Or possibly, his mother just wanted to name him 'lover of God,' hoping he would live up to his name. Here is what we know...this man has come under the hearing of the gospel. He could be a high ranking Roman official because in the book of Acts this title, "most excellent," will be used for Roman rulers, Felix and Festus.

What we know is that Theophilus has come in contact with Luke and Luke has come in contact with him. Luke is writing to him to give him an historical account so that he can know the things he's hearing, and hopefully, the things he's believing and trusting in are true. Luke reminds him that many people have felt led to write an account of the life of Christ, but he is letting Theophilus know that he also feels led to do that. He is letting us know that the basis of his writing and his sources for all of the

information he will put in the book are from eye witnesses. Some of the eye witnesses are the people who actually preached God's Word and were actually with Jesus during His earthly ministry. He has been working on this for a while, and he is now confident that everything he's writing to Theophilus is historical and it's true.

Reviewing the Life of Christ

So, when Luke says, "in the first book," he is talking about the gospel he has already written to Theophilus, and he is now going to review that book. Now remember this; when the producers of Heartland do that flashback for about thirty seconds and quickly show about five scenes, they are only doing it for one reason, which is to take us back because it is tied to what they're going to reveal in the next episode. They are not just killing time or introducing a story. There is a motivation, a purpose. It is significant.

I believe we need to slow down a little bit, because these things Luke mentions in the life of Christ, we will see in the life of the Church. Has it dawned on any of us lately that we are Christians? That should not only mean to any of us that when we die we're going to Heaven and we won't go to Hell. What that means is every moment of our lives, in every relationship we have, our lives should mirror the life of Christ. If I can just be blunt, I think the pandemic has revealed to many of us some things that were in us that are not like Christ, and there have been times it has just come out. As Christians, we praise God that we've been blessed with the gift of living in the greatest country on the face of the earth, but loyalty to God and His Word and to His Son is our first loyalty. We are Christians who God has placed in America to bear the image of His Son for others.

Luke says, *in the first book, I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach...* he didn't say 'did' and 'taught,' until He ascended. Look at it; it says all that He "began to do and teach." Do you find that odd? If I am reading this right, under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, Luke is telling us in the gospel that Jesus began to do and teach certain things. He did this, the beginning of them, until His ascension. If I were writing a book about somebody and all they had already done while they were here on the

earth, I would not talk like this; I would put it in past tense. What is Luke telling us? Why is he flashing back to the things Jesus began to do and teach? It is because He is still doing them; He's just doing it through you and me. He's doing it through us. Jesus isn't finished showing Himself to the world. He showed Himself to the world through a body in the gospels, and He is showing Himself to the world through a body in the book of Acts. We are His body. You and I are a part of His body, and we ought to feel the weight of this. With every conversation: husband/wife, child/parent, friend, church member, non-church member, known, and unknown, in these situations we should desire to do what Christ did. Do you think during the pandemic, Jesus would have acted the way you acted in every situation? I hope you can say yes. When this pandemic comes to an end, will we do what Jesus did?

The Acts of Christ

There is this debate over this book, the book of Acts. Some call it the Acts of the Apostles, some want to call it the Acts of the Church, and some want to call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit. I don't have the right to put a title on a book that is in God's Word, but if I am understanding what Luke is saying here, he believes the book of Acts is still about the acts of Jesus, except His acts are being acted out in your life and in my life. We represent Him. That is what we will learn from this book, not just what He began to do, but what He began to teach. If you look back in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus did a lot of neat things, but Luke emphasized what He began to teach. Jesus began to teach some things, and when He ascended back to the Father's right hand side, those teachings of His didn't stop. Those were the teachings that we are still teaching today. I just want to prepare you for this...as we begin to live in a society that becomes more and more Godless, more and more Christ-less, we, the Church, will teach some things that are not going to be popular, but we can't compromise. In teaching the things that we must teach, we must teach them as Christ taught them from a heart of compassion and concern. We must teach from a heart that wants those who are rejecting His teachings to come to a place to understand and repent, and come to know Him in a personal way.

Those are the things we are going to see in the book of Acts. The book of Acts will be dominated by sermons. We will hear sermons from Peter, sermons from Stephen, and sermons from Paul. We will also hear some wisdom from the world that we will not feel like is too wise. But they will be examples to us to see how God intended for His Church to react when being persecuted, when their rights have been taken away, and when people just outright believe differently than the early Church believed. Why are we going to see this? It is not for historical narrative, but so we, as the church at Hardin, can be encouraged to know that every morning when we get up, we get to live out the acts of Christ and the very teachings of Jesus to others. Wow!

The Commands of Christ

Do you see what I see here? That little word 'began' is so vitally important, and Jesus continued to do it until His ascension...*"until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen."* I think there is a sense in which we can go back through the Gospel of Luke and see a lot of commands that Jesus gave His apostles. To me, it just seems like as the Gospel of Luke comes to an end and the book of Acts begins, that Luke is reminding us of those last commands that Jesus gave the Church, commands He gave from His resurrection to His ascension, those last things He taught the Church. Matthew summarized them this way: "Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them [His Church] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

You have heard me say this before, but when we look at this, there is only one verb in that command, and that is to make disciples. All of those other action words are participles. I love participles because participles are verbal modifiers. They describe the action of the sentence. What are we supposed to be doing? We are supposed to be making disciples. We are supposed to be bringing people the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We're supposed to be encouraging them in their relationship with Him, to be a follower.

These verbal modifiers tell how we do that. How do we do that? We do that as we're going. So many of us in the Church have misunderstood this to mean we are supposed to get up and go somewhere. You may be supposed to get up and go somewhere, but the point is as you are going in your daily life, as you are walking about, you are supposed to be making disciples. We are supposed to baptize; identify those who become followers of Christ with Christ in believer's baptism. We baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That is their identity marker. Then, they are supposed to be taught all things, not just some things. And then, Jesus' promise to us is that as we, the Church, are engaged in keeping this great commission, this great command, He will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

There was the early Church who was with Him at the beginning of the Church Age, and there are those of us now who may be closer to the end of the Church Age, and Christ is still with us at Hardin today just as He walked with that first church in Jerusalem. His purpose wasn't just for the gospel just to go to Jerusalem, to Rome, and all points in between, but to break outside of Rome and eventually come to the United States of America and a little place called Hardin! God had us on His mind! Is that not just amazing? In Luke 24:44-49, Luke talks about how at the end, after the resurrection, Jesus actually opened up the Scriptures and pointed out all of the places in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms that prophesied about Him. In particular, that He would suffer and rise again, and repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be preached to all the nations. That is the command that we take the gospel to everybody. We can't just be concerned with those who live in our family, next to our family, or associate with; we must have a heart for the people of all the nations.

Through the Holy Spirit

Watch this; this is so important. Jesus gave the commands through the Holy Spirit. I want to make sure you understand this. Jesus Christ was the perfect man. Luke tells us throughout the gospel that the perfect man did what He did and taught what He taught under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit. If Jesus did what He did under the anointing of God's Holy Spirit, by God's Holy Spirit, and through God's Holy Spirit, how much more do we

imperfect men need to be under the control of God's Holy Spirit. How dare we do something in the flesh! Let me speak to those of us who are older for just a moment, especially the females. Do any of you females remember when you would get ready and then ask your husband "Is my slip showing?" You wanted that slip under your dress not to show. Some of us need to ask ourselves this question, "Does our flesh show?" The book of Acts is written to get us as a Church to understand we can't do what we do by earthly means. We can't do what we do in the flesh. Just as Jesus did what He did through the Holy Spirit, you and I, the Church, must do what we do through the Holy Spirit as well. When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we're not just talking about a church when we all get together. We're talking about each one of us as a body part of the Church, wherever we're at during the week, in whatever relationship we're in, making sure our flesh doesn't show, and what shows is the Spirit of God in our lives.

If you go back to the Gospel of Luke, Luke lets us know in the beginning Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. At His baptism, the Spirit of God descended on Him. Then next encounter after He is baptized, Luke says, "Jesus, being full of the Spirit..." and then the Bible tells us the Spirit hurls Jesus into the wilderness for forty days. During those forty days in the wilderness, He is going to be tempted by Satan. Jesus goes into Galilee and the synagogue; that is going to be His custom. He is always going to gather with God's people. When it comes His time in the synagogue, He will take the scroll and read. When He puts the scroll back down, He will say, "Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing," after reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord has appointed me." He names what the Spirit of the Lord has appointed Him to do, and in Jesus' ministry, He will do all those things.

Some of us are so longing to get to life without masks and social distancing, or washing our hands after shaking someone's hand. We are going to study the book of Acts because we want you to long for something else. That is for the Spirit of God who birthed you, the Spirit of God who took up residence in your life to be in full control of us during every moment of every day for the rest of our lives so that we can do what Jesus did. That is to teach and stand for what Jesus stood for because we

recognize we are His body. What Jesus began to do, He is still doing; He is just doing it through us.

Notice what Luke says in the last part of verse 2, "...through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." Luke didn't have to say that. Why does Luke say that? We know that Luke came under the teaching of Paul, and we know he was with Paul later in life, even when he was in house arrest in Rome. Luke heard this man preach to Roman soldiers he was chained to, he heard this man preach the Word of God. What Luke knew from this and what he wanted God's people to know is God didn't have to save you. The primary reason you are in God's Church is because God has made a choice of you. He chose you, just as He chose those apostles. He wants us to be a part of His body. What a privilege to know that!

Jesus Appears to Many

Then Luke talks about Jesus' forty days after His resurrection and that He presented Himself alive with many proofs. That changed everything. It changed the lives of those three ladies who went to the tomb that morning. It changed the life of Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb. It changed the life of Peter. It changed the lives of those eleven (first to the ten who were there, then to the one who wasn't there). He then appeared to all eleven. He appeared to seven who went fishing, then appeared back to the eleven. Then He appeared to five hundred, then to James. Aren't you glad He appeared to James? Then He appeared to the eleven again. Why? He wanted them to know He wasn't dead; He is alive! Why is this important? Why in five verses that will introduce the next one thousand and two verses, why is that important? Here is the flashback...Jesus is alive and we are too! I don't believe there was any doubt that Jesus Christ got up out of the tomb, walked on the earth, and was alive, amen! Luke says He proved it, many times. So here is what the book of Acts is going to be about. It's going to be about you and me proving that we aren't dead, but we are alive from the dead. Just as Jesus proved it to His apostles and to those He appeared to, you and I ought to have that same sense, a compulsion to want to let people know we are not spiritually dead. If you don't believe my profession, just look at my life. My life ought to prove to you that I am alive to God and dead to sin.

Forty Days of Preparation

Look at what Jesus did during the forty days. Now, I don't know if this is important or not, but before Jesus began His public ministry, He spent forty days in the wilderness. We have the term forty days used a lot in the Old Testament for some significant events. That forty days was a time of testing, a time of preparation. Catch this...as Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness getting ready for His ministry (even though He has taught His disciples for three years), after His resurrection, He spent forty more days with them. Why is this significant? It is because Luke is trying to tell the Church that we are ready to do what God has called us to do.

Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God. After three years, and after forty days, they still struggled, just like some of us still struggle with the Kingdom of God. They had such a background of Judaism, had so read their Old Testament that they were looking to a territorial domination where the Messiah ruled, physically. Yet Jesus had been teaching and continued to teach that the Kingdom of God is not a territorial rule. The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of people, His people. Before there will ever be a physical aspect of the Kingdom, there must be that spiritual aspect and you must enter the Kingdom, and the only way you can enter it is by being born again. As you are born again, God takes up rule in your heart and life, and He begins to reign over you.

Jesus taught us something really important during the gospels. He taught that if He is casting out demons by the Spirit, it means the Kingdom of God is in the midst of us. [The Pharisees had said it was by Satan that Jesus cast out demons. Jesus said if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself.] Jesus went on to say if you are going to cast out demons, Satan has to be bound first, because if you are going to break into someone's house and rob him of his contents, you have to first deal with the strong man. If you break into my house, you have to deal with me first. Jesus is teaching that He has dealt with Satan; he's been defeated!

During those forty days, Jesus teaches the Church about the Kingdom so that they will know we are in the Kingdom Age, the Church Age, and Satan has been defeated. He is bound to where he cannot deceive the nations anymore, so we can do what God has called us to do, and that is, confidently, to live out the gospel and live out the gospel to all the nations!

Jesus Encourages the Church

Then Jesus encourages us. He says, *you have heard me say this, as John baptized with water, I'm going to baptize with the Holy Spirit.* I still remember getting saved on March 24th, 1974, and two weeks later going to Flint Baptist Church and getting baptized in water. I cannot tell you how excited I was as a thirteen year old kid to let everybody there know my faith was in Jesus Christ! That was my identity marker. Yet, there is another baptism. It is not just water; there is a baptism with the Holy Spirit. To be baptized means to be immersed, to be plunged, or to be dipped. Just imagine being dipped in water, but greater than that, imagine being dipped in the person of the Holy Spirit of God. You are immersed in Him! You are plunged into Him! He influences every ounce of your being. They have been given this command to go out into the world, but Jesus is going to say, *Hey, hold up! Don't go yet. Wait until you get what I've promised you. What I've promised you is the promise of the Father. When I get back to His right hand side, we will send to you the Holy Spirit, you will be immersed in Him, you will receive power, clothed with power, and you will be my witnesses!*

We know that the resurrection gave validity to the death of Christ, but it is the ascension that gave validity to the resurrection. The presence of the Holy Spirit of God in us reveals to the world that Jesus is who He says He is! There is nothing that can account for the transformation in our lives other than that we've been born of God and are part of the Kingdom of God. We are under the rule and reign of God! I pray that during this crisis of the pandemic, we find that the Church of Jesus Christ never arose to fleshly means...That we never let our flesh show, and what people saw and continue to see is the Spirit of God in our lives, and that ultimately by seeing that, many will come to know Jesus as we know Jesus.

Because my wife knows she is cold natured, she takes a coat or a blanket with her every place she goes. She just knows when to put that coat or blanket on. That is Luke's picture. Jesus is saying He will clothe you, coat you, with His Spirit. Can you sense Him? Can you feel Him? Let me ask it this way. Can you tell when He is not clothing you? Are you are cold, rather than warm with His presence? We need to be ready to see Jesus in action through His empowered witnesses, and we are His empowered witnesses.