

Acts 1 - Papendorf

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Welcome. It's good to see you. There's that awkward church. Good morning.! Well done, everyone. This is an exciting Sunday. Every Sunday is exciting. This one's particularly! We're starting our book study in Acts, which is going to span 33 straight weeks. Okay, so change your summer plans and, you know, lock in. We've done this a few times in the life of our church. Here we went through Genesis 12 through 50 and then all the way through the Gospel of Matthew.

Now we're going to study this book, The Acts of the Apostles. Sometimes we just call it Acts. And this book is familiar and unfamiliar. It makes a really unique contribution and a singular contribution to the New Testament and to the whole Bible. There's lots of stuff that happens in Acts that we don't hear about anywhere else. There's lots of unique stories and profound truths about theology. And Acts is kind of deceptively unknown, partially because we read the epistles and so we know what's going on with Paul. Paul is obviously and majorly featured in the book of Acts. But sometimes we can mistakenly overlook this beautiful message of theology that's here in this book and kind of treat it like the spackle of Pauline theology, you know, the stuff that fits it all together. We don't want to do that. We want to recognize this beautifully rich, trinity-shaped, paradigm-shifting book. So we're going to set the table to do that at least a little bit this morning.

There's two big things I want to do. Thing number one is I want to introduce the book of Acts and its theology. And thing number two is obviously to walk through our text, which itself is profound, exciting, strange, and all sorts of stuff. Get ready, that's what happens in Acts.

Now, you're looking at me and I know what you're wondering. You're wondering, can I do it in 35 minutes? It's a good question. My last sermon was 44 minutes, which means I went nine minutes over the prescribed limit. I am the vilest offender of them all. I'm the one who goes over time the most. Some of you are like, why are you doing this? This might make you go over time. Well, it's to publicly repent before you and to recognize that those stares that are now saying, give me back nine minutes of my life. Like, I am with you, but, you know, I believe in Jesus.

This moment, a pardon I do receive. That's a Fanny Crosby joke for you. You can look that up later. All right, we have these exciting stories and this exciting book ahead of us. Let's pray as we begin to meditate on God's word. Lord, we need your help this morning as we study. I need your help as I preach, a clay jar, a sinner. I ask that your glory would be made known through your scriptures.

[3:24] Grow us in your word, all of us, this morning as we read this ancient text for the instruction of your people. We ask this by the spirit that you so richly pour out through Jesus the Son. Amen.

Okay, note takers, here we go. There are six big theological ideas, six key points of theology in the book of Acts that are going to order a lot of what we say as a teaching team. Okay, so let's talk about all six of them. All right, thing number one, the book of Acts is triune-shaped. We recognize that word triune, trinity. The book of Acts is shaped by the activity of our triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Now, uniquely, the Holy Spirit is at work in the book of Acts, maybe most famously, but if we focus only and solely on the Spirit, we miss what Luke does, which is craft this triune-shaped narrative for us that goes something like this. God's plan is accomplished by the exaltation of his Son, Jesus, who sends his Spirit to empower his servants. That's awesome. The Father, Son, Spirit shape the events, the speeches, and the salvation in the book of Acts. So number one, the book of Acts is triune-shaped. Okay, number two, the book of Acts relates importantly to the gospel of Luke.

Luke. So Luke, the author of the gospel according to Luke, is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Okay, we heard read, there's a similar kind of introductory preface thing going on here in

Acts, and we want to recognize the relationship between the two. We want to recognize Acts' particularities and not mute them by Luke's patterns, but we want to recognize the cohesiveness of their theology because they are theologically cohesive, which is awesome. Thing number two, the book of Acts relates importantly to the gospel of Luke. Okay, three, the book of Acts outlines the main point of conflict within the New Testament Christian community. That main point of conflict is the Gentile inclusion into God's covenant promises. And this question is a question that like lives beneath a lot of what's going on here in the book of Acts, as well as Paul's letters too. But we want to recognize that, a main through line in the book of Acts. The speeches in Acts, there's lots of speeches in Acts.

They show how it was always God's plan all the way back with the creation of the world and Abraham to bring Gentiles into the blessed inclusion of his people. The book of Acts outlines the main point of conflict within the New Testament Christian community, the Jewish Gentile question. Okay, thing four, how we doing? Excited, good. Thing number four, the book of Acts challenges our paradigm of generosity, hospitality, and belonging. Radical generosity is a virtue in the book of Acts. Expectant, excited, spontaneous, spontaneous hospitality is another virtue in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, so many people come to know their belonging in the church, maybe especially people who are often marginalized in society. We'll see that in case after case in the book of Acts, which is a word for us to hear and consider in 2026 as well. So four, the book of Acts challenges our paradigm of generosity, hospitality, and belonging. Five, the book of Acts positions the church, that's us, the book of Acts positions the church for a generous yet orderly pneumatology. Okay, that's the chewiest of all of them.

[8:02] I'll do that again. The book of Acts positions the church for a generous yet orderly pneumatology. Pneumatology means the study of the Spirit or the activity of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is active in Acts. We are going to see countless stories of people being healed. We will read about people speaking in tongues, people receiving dreams from the Lord, many other amazing evidences of how the Holy Spirit works in the life of the early church. The Holy Spirit sometimes works in these ways around the world now among our sisters and our brothers, and we can rejoice and praise God for the work of the Spirit in those ways and in the ways we see the Spirit so clearly active in our church, in our community. The book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament argue and frame the works of the

Spirit for us that they are to serve God, serve God's people, and build the church. So acts of the Spirit, serve God, give Him glory, and build the church. As a teaching team, we're going to argue together that miraculous works of the Holy Spirit in Acts are non-normative in obligation or occurrence.

Whoa. Okay. Non-normative in obligation or occurrence, which means that miraculous works of the Spirit don't need to happen for someone to be a genuine Christian, or for a church to be a genuine church, nor should they be expected to happen frequently or often.

You don't need to doubt your faith on whether the Spirit is present in your life because you haven't seen a miraculous thing. We should be confident. You should be confident in the way the Spirit works in your heart to convict you of sin. You see many gifted people around us in this church. That's the Spirit at work. The Spirit moves us to repentance. It grows us in our union with Christ. Acts gives us an opportunity to think about a generous yet orderly pneumatology, which is just great. All right, six.

And lastly, the book of Acts is a heavy hermeneutical lift. I almost said heavy hermeneutical heave, but that sounds a little, you know, melodramatic, so we're just going to say lift. Okay, the book of Acts is a heavy hermeneutical lift. Hermeneutics, principles of interpretation, right? When we study Acts, it's hard. We see how followers of Jesus understand the whole biblical canon in light of Jesus Christ. When you read the Psalms, do you see that as fulfillment of Judas's death? The apostles do.

[11:04] We'll see what they mean in just a second. Interpreting the Bible in light of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, promised return. That's what the apostles do. That's a heavy hermeneutical lift. We see how God's plan from the Old Testament stretches into the New Testament and progresses. That's called progressive revelation. Acts gives us a

picture of that, many pictures, and Acts positions before us an opportunity to carefully and critically think. How is this book descriptive or prescriptive? Is it describing what happens? Is it saying what should happen?

How do we measure those things? We'll look at that. The book of Acts is a heavy hermeneutical lift. Note takers. You're happy. You've got some bullet points. That's a good thing. As you read the book of Acts, as we study it together, keep them top of mind. Stay tuned. We're going to develop them. We're going to check back in with them. We're going to expand on them as we study this book, which brings us to our text, Acts 1. There's three big sections, and they're outlined really well in your Bible, in all likelihood. There's verses 1 through 5, which is our prologue. Verses 6 through, let's call it 11, it depends on who you ask, Jesus' ascension. And then 12 through the end of the chapter, a reconstitution of God's people. So this prologue, Jesus' ascension, and a reconstitution of God's people. All right, verse 1. In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up after he'd given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He, that's Jesus, presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Here, Luke references the first book, the Gospel of Luke. He assumes we know something about the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus that we have an idea of what's going on there, and we do as a church. Hallelujah. And so this little prologue here gives us kind of a bridge from Acts to Luke, reminds us of this background, and it gives us lots of interesting details. Notice, we have this idea that many proofs of Jesus' resurrection were observed by his apostles.

This establishes credible witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, and Jesus will teach more and has taught more on the kingdom of God. We need to talk about Theophilus for a second here. Theophilus, great baby name, just in case you're curious, or in the market, I don't know. Theophilus means loved by God. That's what the name means, loved by God. Now, historically, Christian interpreters thought that Theophilus was a rhetorical tool. Theophilus was not a historical person, but is a symbolic character. That the book is written to anyone who's a lover of God, or to anyone who will become a lover of God by seeing God's plan through the church. In ancient literature, sometimes names or symbolic characters are a literary device, so many Christians thought that could have been the case. More recently, commentators, theologians are inclined to think that Theophilus is a historical person, like a patron of Luke, maybe someone who funded Luke's work. Luke collects lots of sources. He does some historical stuff, so maybe Theophilus is paying for that or helping Luke along the way. Maybe a friend of Luke, someone lacking assurance, and Luke is providing assurance to him and his readers.

I have a lean in one of those directions, but it really doesn't matter all that much. What we see here in this prologue is that Luke has a purpose for his readers, and we are to take assurance from the way that God works in this book. And verse 4, let's move our attention there, gives a recapitulation of the last scene, or one of the last scenes in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' instructions to the disciples. The disciples wait for the promise of the Father, which is the Spirit. Okay, so the Father has a plan. The Son announces the plan, and that plan will be enacted through the Spirit triune shape, if you're with me there. The table is set here in this prologue for us to see God at work. We are invited as readers now reading the book of Acts. We can be assured that God's plan was not derailed when Jesus was executed like a criminal. He was raised from the dead, and he didn't just leave, he gave a commission and power. And that was God's plan through the Son. Be assured, have assurance.

[16:34] Now, we look back on the book of Acts with a lot more historical distance than maybe its original readers, yet the purpose is the same. Be assured, God is at work. Okay, speaking of the ascension, Jesus ascends in a cloud. In verse 6, there's a dialogue first between Jesus and the apostles, and there's a familiar question from the apostles. They ask Jesus in verse 6, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? That's a good question. Sometimes we do this thing where we wave away the questions of the apostles, like these guys don't know anything.

Okay, sometimes we're meant to do that. In this case, they're asking a good question, and beneath the question is a good assumption. Jesus, you are the king. You have been raised from the dead. There are promises for God's people. How do we think about that now? And Jesus answers, not as

a wave away or with frustration. He's not chiding or anything, but he kind of answers indirectly. Jesus said to them, verse 7, it's not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Whoa. The apostles will do this so we get a sense that they understand what Jesus is saying here, despite not knowing when. They do have some geographical markers, some concentric circles. You're going to start here in Jerusalem, then to Judea, then to Samaria, then to the ends of the earth. The gospel will spread to the ends of the earth. Beyond the initial imagination of the apostles who are thinking about this Israel thing, Jesus says yes and to that. We're good Bible readers here at HCC, and I can just tell on all of your faces, you're going, oh, Isaiah servant commission, aren't you? You guys are wishing for Daniel Bear right now. I know it. I can tell. That's what I can tell by your faces. Luke does this really amazing thing here, which is that he echoes in numerous tones what we hear in Isaiah. There's a servant in Isaiah, remember him? A servant who is meant to proclaim salvation that goes to the ends of the earth. Yeah, servant who will be persecuted. Guys, that's Jesus. And Jesus says, that's you, apostles. Wow. Heavy hermeneutical lift for sure. The apostles are commissioned or recommissioned as an echoing of Isaiah's servant. In fact, if you're reading Isaiah and Acts, wow, good for you, you'll recognize parallels for sure.

[19:46] And this Isaiah servant language underscores the big thing, that thing back in verse 7 and 8. Is it time for you to restore the kingdom to Israel? Yeah. And everyone else is included.

That's how it is always meant to be. Verse 9, Jesus says these things, and he's lifted up with a cloud, and this cloud took him out of their sight. That's weird. Everyone say weird. Okay. Now you're worried.

You're worried you're going to get struck by lightning by saying an important Christian truth is weird. That's probably the right reaction. Jesus leaves. Jesus has a body. Jesus has been spending time with these people. They have eaten food together. Some of them touch him. This is not some weird spirit Jesus. This is a resurrected, glorified body Jesus who is taken up into heaven in a cloud. There's not a lot of explanation as to how that works, but sometimes we can gloss over how amazing, wild, wild that thing is. So we get it. Verse 10, the apostles are looking up. They had not seen this happen before. And as they look up, these two angels appear, men clothed in white, and they nudge them and say, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Did you hear that? That Jesus will come back in his glorified, resurrected body. He is ascended, really enthroned as the king, as Lord and Messiah.

Peter will say that next week in his speech. Importantly for us as Christians now, this gives us hope. It reminds us, Jesus has not returned. Some people in Thessalonica are worried about that.

[22:02] Paul writes to them and says, Jesus has not returned yet. When he does, you will know. It will be loud and exciting. Here we get another dimension of that truth. Jesus will come in his body just like he was raised up. There's great hope. This is a push onto ministry for the apostles. That's what these men are trying to nudge the apostles in the direction of, and it is for us too. Jesus is enthroned, just like the apostles. We are sent. We can be servants too. Eschatology fuels gospel. Okay, all that is awesome and exciting. And then we have this strange bit at the end of chapter one. I'm calling it the reconstitution of God's people. So the disciples, they go back from this mountain. They go back to Jerusalem. There's a bunch of them gathered together. It says 120 of them. We see their names.

There are women who are included. Luke always wants us to know and see that. And Peter gives a speech. Get used to that. In Peter's speech, well, here's the gist. Here's what Peter says. He says that it's a fulfillment of scripture that Judas betrayed Jesus and died. And going forward, it is a necessary fulfillment of scripture to find another person to take his spot.

It fulfills scriptures that Judas betrayed Jesus and was killed, fulfillment, and it fulfills scriptures to have a number of 12 apostles, which is, I don't know, maybe not exactly the way that we think all that often, so we can break it down just a bit. Peter says that there is fulfillment in these events.

He shows that Judas, Peter shows that Judas is an example of how opposition to God's plan and to Jesus as king will be met with judgment. That's how it works. That's how it's always worked, Peter argues, that when you oppose God, his plan, and his king, judgment follows, or there's expected judgment to follow. Here's what Peter's thinking. He says, the Bible teaches this. Look at Psalm 69. David says, may his camp become desolate and let there be no one dwell in it. That's verse 20 of our chapter, and it comes from Psalm 69. In that Psalm, David is in the wilderness and his enemies surround him. And David says, may his, that's his enemy, may his camp become desolate and let no one dwell in it.

[25:10] In other words, judge your enemies, God. I am wanting to serve you. That's what happened. That's what happens with Judas. Peter is saying, just as it was then, so has it happened before our eyes. This is God's plan.

Judas' death fulfills this passage because Judas is an enemy of God's king and meets justice. Maybe a little more strangely, Peter says, it's important that one of the 12 of us who went out is replaced by another one so that we have 12. That might seem strange, but it's not, and it shouldn't be.

When we read the Gospels, there's something very important about the number 12. Of course, we know that it's because there are 12 tribes of Israel, and that's not just like a quirky, cool, fun, apostle thing. Like, guys, 12, 12. No. There is theological meaning and significance about God's purpose and mission. 12 is not just a random number. Okay. Jesus is king. He announces his kingdom, and Jesus speaks in his ministry about how he, Jesus, fulfills the law and the prophets.

Israel's history is reenacted in a faithful way in Jesus's ministry. Jesus crosses water. Jesus is in the Jordan River. Jesus faithfully lives and faithfully lives out God's covenant in a faithful Israel way, in the way that the Israelites don't. And that numbering of 12 is important to show and to embody that God's plan is not sidetracked. It's made full.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in the way that he selects and sends his disciples, in the way that he ministers, this Israel parallel is powerful. And the most important thing about it is that it confirms continuity. Okay. Just as there were 12 tribes, there are 12 apostles.

[27:38] Just as God spoke in the law and the prophets, so does God speak now by his son. Just as there were servants of Israel who spoke God's word, so now are there servants of King Jesus who speak his word by the Spirit. 12 matters. It shows continuity.

Okay. Psalm 109, let another take his office, has a similar dynamic. Okay. David is saying about his enemies, one of them needs to be replaced. I want a good guy in place. And the apostles say, yeah, same.

Okay. That's what we have going on in these citations, which maybe seem a little strange or different to us. And maybe one more thing to mention in this section in verses 18 and 19, there's an account of Judas's death.

Okay. We heard the Matthew version of that read on Good Friday. Maybe that's familiar to you.

Okay. And the details are not in conflict with one another. Matthew and Luke have different purposes in talking about Judas's death or the details around it. For Matthew, Matthew wants to show that the Judas is remorseful. Here in Acts, our author, Luke, is concerned about judgment. So that makes sense of how he lays out details. Okay. And these are not at odds with one another. We can talk about that if you're interested in just a few minutes after service. Okay. Then the disciples pick another guy and cast lots. Maybe that's not exactly what we would do. I want to suggest it's kind of exactly what we would do. Verse 23. They put forward to Joseph called Bersabbas, who was also called Justice. Wow, lots of names. And Matthias. So we need a 12th because we need to demonstrate continuity with God's word and his plan.

That matters. So we need a 12th. Here are two people who we think could do that. That's a good strategy. Finding people who are reputable, who were there during Jesus's ministry, who served to step into that role. That's smart and strategic and God honoring. When we plan, that's good. When we overplan, maybe that's another question. They say these two guys could do it. And verse 24, they pray.

[30:17] Another good thing to do. You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship. So they get together. They think, you two guys

could do it. Let's pray about it. And they ask the Lord to reveal that. That's good. Now in verse 26, they cast lots. More on that in just a second. The lot falls on Matthias and he was numbered among the apostles. Christians have thought a variety of different ways about this passage throughout Christian history. In Leviticus, in a few different places, also in Deuteronomy, as well as in Proverbs 16, there are instances where it is a wise thing to seek the Lord's counsel by casting lots. Okay, lots or casting lots is a way to kind of determine or pick someone. There's various cultural expressions of how that can be done. Many Christians have wondered, well, we don't hear about Matthias anymore after this and they're casting lots. Is that like gambling or something? No, it's not. In fact, there's a positive redemption of casting lots. Who are the other people that we know that cast lots? The soldiers for Jesus's clothes. Here, his disciples are doing a faithful thing. Luke gives us no indication that this is bad whatsoever. There's a restoration of this new symbolic Israel with these 12 people. As we enter into this, like I said, 33-week, that's exciting, 33-week study in Acts. And as we close our study of this passage, we should be encouraged. We should be assured in our faith from these events, from Acts 1. We can see God, who is Father, who sends his Son, and enthrones him as the Ascended One, who will send the Spirit. So God's plan is on course, Acts 1 tells us. It's well underway, as God promised. We'll see the Spirit at work in this book, even as we see it now in our church. We'll meditate on these as Christians like us wondered about when Jesus would return in bodily form. We have evidence that God's plan will not be thwarted.

Get ready for more. Luke wants us to see and hear that in the life of the church. And we'll see how God's plan in the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament, climaxes in Jesus, is in continuity with it.

God's promises of that plan are extended to us as a church, Christians now, in the resurrection of the Son, and the Son's sending of the Spirit, and his promise to return, and in the confirmation of victory over his enemies. Remember, that victory sometimes looks like weakness, but is not. It is so that the surpassing power and glory is with God, not with us. So let's look for the return of the Son. Let's live in the power of the Spirit and know that sin and death will be defeated. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Amen.