

† The Church Alive

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ (Part 1)

Acts 1:1-3

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

For all you classical music buffs out there (and I know there are many), music students and scholars of the past (and sometimes even yet in the present) have often found fragments of musical pieces or symphonies of composers that for one reason or another are considered to be incomplete or unfinished.

The archetypal, or most common representative of such a score is Franz Schubert's piece, appropriately called the, “Unfinished Symphony” or according to Schubert's notation, “Symphony No. 8.” The score was written in 1822, about six years before his death. It features two fully orchestrated movements but symphonies commonly had four movements. Along with this score are simply sketches of how he intended to “finish” this piece. Therefore, we are left with an unfinished symphony, which interestingly enough became and remains one of Schubert's most popular compositions.

As we come to the book of Acts, we find before us the unfinished work of Christ. This is made very clear for us in Acts 1:1 where we read that the first account written by Luke, namely the Gospel that bears his name was merely the record **“about all that Jesus began to do and teach.”** It becomes obvious to the reader of the book of Act then that this second account or work of Luke seeks to record all the Jesus continues to do and teach.

However, in Acts 1:9 something extraordinary happens. Before the eyes of the apostles, Jesus is lifted up and taken to heaven. The Lord who began the work has left terra firma and the great task of finishing the unfinished work He started falls into the hands of His apostles, and, as we come to see in the book of Acts, is the very call and duty of the church, the body of Christ.

There is a sense then in which the cross of Jesus Christ is the grand marker the lies between the work that Jesus Himself accomplished on this earth and the work Jesus will accomplish from heaven through His body the Church. The Gospel of Luke records the three and a half year ministry of Jesus before the cross; a ministry that served as the training ground for the disciples as they learned from Jesus concerning Himself, God, sin and the cross. The forty days after the resurrection was the preparation for the disciples to be informed and equipped in order that they would carry on the work that Jesus started; to complete the unfinished symphony of proclaiming to the nations salvation in Jesus' name. This beloved was not only the purpose given to the apostles, but, as we come to see throughout the book of Acts, is the very purpose given to the church; to carry on and complete the work of proclaiming Jesus to all the nations; to all people; to your families; to your friends; to your neighbors; to your coworkers and even to strangers on the street. This was Jesus' intent, that the work, which He began, would be carried out by His followers. Consider some familiar passages concerning Jesus' charge or commission to His disciples remembering that all of these occurred during this forty day time period between the Resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Mark 16:15

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”

Luke 24:45-47

45 Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

In applying this principle from the book of Acts to our lives, we must see that we also have been called to carry out the unfinished work of Christ, proclaiming the gospel of salvation in His name. Now I know that the word “unfinished” has a seemingly negative connotation, as if to suggest that Jesus was somehow unable to do this, which we know is not the case. And so, we might prefer to say that we have been called to carry out the continuing work of Jesus. What Jesus taught in the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we have been called to know and proclaim in our present day and circumstances. In this sense, the book of Acts continues today, right here in the midst of Hope Community Bible Church and it is to continue as you leave this place, to be gospel-minded, Christ-centered, intentional about speaking to others concerning all that Jesus commanded. So then, let me state my thesis again; *namely that we have been called to complete the unfinished work of Jesus Christ on this earth.*

If you will recall as we began this study two weeks ago, we find an interesting statement made by Luke in the opening verse of our text. He wrote in verse one, **“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach”** (emphasis added). What is interesting about this statement is that word, began. This word implies that the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth was not yet finished. You may recall back in John 17:4, in His high-priestly prayer to His Father Jesus actually said, **“I have finished the work which You gave Me to do”**. And from the cross itself, Jesus cried out in John 19:30, **“It is finished.”**

So then, what did Luke mean when he wrote of **“all that Jesus began to do and teach”**? I bring this all up again because of how important it is that we do not confuse the work of Christ on the cross for our sin as, in the words of Hebrews 10:10, by the will of God, **“we have been sanctified [made holy and right before God] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”** Truly, the work of salvation is finished. So again, we must ask, “What did Luke mean by speaking of **“all that Jesus began to do and teach”**?” Beloved, the work of salvation is completed, once and for all by the cross of Jesus Christ; but the work spoken of here in Acts 1:1 is not that of salvation, or of redemption, but rather here we have the work of evangelism. And just what is the work of evangelism? The work of evangelism is the proclaiming, declaring and teaching of who God is and what He has accomplished for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world. To say it another way, the redemptive work of Christ is finished; but the teaching work to which the church, you and I have been called to, this work

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continues. It is the work of evangelism that is unfinished and in Acts 1 we see Jesus preparing His disciples for this work.

Why did Jesus need to prepare His disciples for this work of evangelism? He had to prepare them because after all that had transpired with the cross, death and resurrection Jesus, Jesus wanted them to know what was necessary in order to carry out the work of evangelism. Seeing then that we are called to complete the unfinished work of Christ by proclaiming the gospel, we, like the disciples, need to know how this work is to be done. Acts 1:1-8 speak to us of such things. In these first eight verses we find the necessities of effectively continuing with work of Christ in our lives. We will spend the next few weeks examining these necessities.

This morning then I draw your attention again to the first verse of Acts 1 and invite you to see with me the first necessity for completing the unfinished work of Christ. This truth, alone with the others we will study, must be in place if we are to be effective in bringing the message of Christ to people. If we are to be effective in completing the unfinished work of Christ...

1. We must grow in the knowledge of Jesus

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach...

As we look at the first verse, having already considered Luke as the author and this man name Theophilus to whom he addressed the account, we are immediately introduced to the grand subject of the book of Acts. The first account, the Gospel of Luke is about Jesus and the implication here is that this second account is also about Jesus.

I realize that I may not need to prove this to you; but let us see from the gospel accounts that Jesus is the subject of all that was written before! Turn with me the gospel of John 5:31-47. In this account we find Jesus in a debate with the Jews concerning His equality with God; namely that Jesus is both divine and human. The Jews had taken issue with Him on this and after some discussion on Jesus' part, Jesus then appeals to the testimony of witnesses. We pick up the account in verse 31 where Jesus says, **“If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.”** This seem a rather odd statement, for is it not true that everything Jesus says is true? Of course it is. But according to the Old Testament Law, the testimony of just one person alone was not sufficient to make any legal judgment. In Deuteronomy 19:15b the law states, **“on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”**

So if Jesus was to confirm that He was both human and divine, but man and God, He would have to legally have more testimony than simply His own. Therefore, in John 5:32 Jesus speaks of the testimony of the Father saying, **“There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.”** But the Jews were not ready to hear this just yet so Jesus, before appealing to the testimony of the Father, reminds them that they have the testimony of John the Baptist. In John 5:33 we read, **“You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth.”** And what was John testimony? We see it in part in John 1. Hear the testimony of John the Baptist:

John 1:6-7

6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.

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John 1:15

John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

John 1:29-30

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'

John 1:32-34

32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

This is the testimony of John, a reliable witness. But turning back to John 5, listen to how Jesus speak beginning in verse John 34 and following:

34 But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35 He [John] was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish — the very works that I do — testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me. 37 And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. 38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.

So then, Jesus has reminded them of the testimony of John and has shown them the testimony of the Father, but He does not stop there, but reveals that not only the Gospel accounts which reveal His words, but in fact the entirety of Scripture is about Himself. We read in John 5:39; 45-47

39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me. . .45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?

In other words, all of Scripture from the words of Moses beginning in Genesis and on through to the Gospel accounts are about Jesus. We could look at many more evidences that the Scriptures are about Jesus, but let me show you just one more from the Gospel of Luke since it is Luke who is telling us that his previous work and subsequently the book of Acts is all about Jesus. Look with me at Luke 24:25-27. The scene of course is Jesus with the two men on the road to Emmaus. We read what Jesus says to them:

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

25 And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

So the Gospels and indeed everything up to the point of Luke’s writing Acts is about Jesus. And we come to see that nothing changes as Acts presents Jesus as the subject. Let us quickly see this to be so. Who is the subject of Peter’s first sermon on the day of Pentecost? Jesus. We read in Acts 2:22, **“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...”**

Turn now over to Acts 3:1-6 and notice to whom Peter points in his encounter with the lame man:

3 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. 2 And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. 4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” 5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!”

In Acts 3:16 and Peter’s second sermon he speaks about Jesus and how Israel had **“disowned the Holy and Righteous One.”** In Acts 4:12 we read, **“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name [but the name of Jesus] under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”**

In the prayer of Peter and John after having been rebuked by the Jewish leaders for preaching Jesus pointed to Jesus saying in Acts 4:24-28:

24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? 26 ‘THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.’ 27 “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Turn to Acts 8 and let us note whom the subject of Philips preaching and teaching was?

Acts 8:5

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:35

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

In Acts 17:3 we read of Paul who was, ***"explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'"*** In Acts 18:27-28 we see Jesus to be the very subject of the teaching of Apollos;

27 And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Time does not permit us to look at all these references, but turn to the last chapter of Acts; Acts 28 and read with me verses 30-31.

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

All of these point us to the truth that the church, the body of Christ, is to be busy about the unfinished work of Christ, that is proclaiming and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the subject of our lives. He is our life. When Jesus gets a hold of a heart; that heart is transformed; that heart learns to hate sin and to love the righteousness, the holiness, the purity of Jesus all the more.

The more a heart is fixed on Jesus, the less fixated that heart will become on things of the world. Are you struggling with a particular sin? Pray and then strive to learn more about Jesus. Come to understand and see Him more vividly as the one against whom your sinning against; see Him more vividly as dying horrifically on the cross for your sin; see Him more vividly as gazing upon you from that cross with eyes of compassion, love and mercy; some to see Him in the beauty of His holiness so that sin might become in the words of Romans 7:13, ***"utterly sinful."*** How did the author of Hebrews express it? In Hebrews 12:1-2 we read:

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Church Alive

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This is a call to know and to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. It is almost too embarrassing to confess how often I find myself fixing my eyes on too many other things than Jesus. And you do it too, right? When we come face to face with a problem, we are so easily to fix our eyes entirely on that problem...right? Or at times we find ourselves "fixating" on the issue at the expense of everything else.

Let us be wary of fixing our eyes on "ME" and our own desires and comfort and then being consumed with what will make ME happy and accomplish MY goals.

The author of Hebrews, just as the Gospels and the book of Acts, reminds us that that the only way we can persevere and finish a life of following Jesus is to keep Him as our focus; for Jesus to be the subject of our lives. And just how do we do that? The author of Hebrews gives us the answer when he describes Jesus as the one who endured the cross and all its humiliation because of the joy and exultation that awaited Him as He would sit down at the right hand of the throne of God in glory. What is described here is the Gospel - plain and simple.

Beloved, would you commit to constantly remind yourself and preach to yourself daily something concerning the beauty of person of Christ and the wonder of the power of what Christ accomplished on the cross and of His resurrection. This will keep you focused on Him. Remember that the Gospel is not just for us when we first come to Christ, but rather the Gospel is for our faith everyday as Christians.

In the manner of the book of Acts, we began with Jesus, but we must also continue with Him and we continue by meditation on Him through His word; through prayer; through fellowship; through simply striving to do everything in a manner worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

Soli Deo Gloria

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