

The Church Alive

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

The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ (Part 2)

Acts 1:1-3

[slide 02] 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.

This morning I would like to get right after our text; diving in as it were before we even know if the water is hot or cold, because we have much to consider. I was asked earlier this week at what pace I am I intending to work through the book of Acts. Perhaps the question is being asked because we have already had two sermons and we have yet to make it out of verse 1. My response was simply that there is so much good foundational material in these opening verses, that we will seek to know that foundation so that the rest of our study becomes as fruitful as we can make it. As we work our way into the narrative portions of Acts, I suspect we will move along at a faster pace.

Now then, last week we came to our text and I asked you to look at these opening verses in two ways; first, as seeing Jesus preparing His disciples for the great work of evangelism, of communicating the wondrous and powerful work of God through Jesus Christ to save sinners from their sin and to make them fit for heaven. The first lesson then is the preparation of the disciples for evangelism.

[slide 03] The second way I would like you to see these opening verses is as an outline presenting to us the necessities for effective evangelism. You see, what Jesus began in His own earthly ministry; of proclaiming the truth of God and the way of salvation; He then commanded the disciples to do at the beginning of the church (as we will see in Acts 2) and then what the church is commanded to continue. We are to carry on what we have called the unfinished work of Christ. And remember that by "unfinished work" we are not referring to the work of Christ for our redemption from sin; that has been finished by Christ on the cross. But there is a work of proclaiming the truth of this redemption that belongs to us – to the church- to each and everyone who trusts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In Acts 1:1-8 then we have a number of necessities; things that must be true for you as an individual and for us as a church if we are to carry out effectively the work of Christ on this earth.

[slide 04] Last week we looked at the first of these truths; perhaps one of the most basic and yet the primary starting place; namely that we must "know" and "grow" in the knowledge of Christ. As Acts 4:12 so succinctly puts it, **"there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."** Salvation is from, by and through Jesus and therefore we need to know Him, know what He did and know what He taught so that we might rightly speak to others concerning His greatness. The second necessity that we glean from these verses if we are to be effective in carrying out this unfinished work of Jesus is that...*[slide 05]*

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

2. We must be obedient to the commands of Jesus

...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...

Reading the rest of verse one and into verse two [see above]. From this statement we learn that all that Jesus did and taught; from the beginning of His public ministry up until the day He was taken to heaven were given as orders. The word “**orders**” in our text speaks of a charge or command – something that is to be carried out to its end. What did Jesus order the apostles to do? Remember in the Great Commission of Matthew 28, believers are commanded to be “**teaching [learners of Jesus Christ] to observe or obey all that [Jesus] commanded...**” What did Jesus teach and command? Jesus uses this very same Greek word for “**orders**” in John 15:14 and 17 where we read – *[slide 06]*

14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. . .17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Beloved, these are orders from our Lord and Savior. These are orders from the King of kings. And we know that Jesus “**orders**” much more than this. If you want to see the kingdom of God, then we must “**be born again**” according to John 3:3. If we are to enter the kingdom of God, we must “**repent**” – turn from our sin and turn to God in surrender and obedience to Him, according to Matthew 4:17. All that Jesus taught – what did Jesus teach that we are called to obey? If we are to obey the commands of Jesus then we must, in the words of Luke 9:23, “**take up [our] cross daily and follow [Jesus]**”. Of course the list goes on, which takes us back to the first point, that we must be “growing in the knowledge of Christ” so that we can more obediently follow our Commander’s orders.

Before we apply this thought, I would have you notice that these orders are divinely received – they are “**by the Holy Spirit**” – or through the working and ministry of the Spirit of God. These orders are not only divinely received by the apostles or by believers; but even by Jesus Himself. For while Jesus is truly God and had every right to give orders to His apostles, He is also man; and as man, He teaches us to be constantly dependent upon the Spirit of God to work in us and through us; guiding us through His word to live lives effective in proclaiming the gospel.

By way of application then, let me ask you, “Have you obeyed the orders of the Lord Jesus Christ?” Have you first and foremost been born again? Have you repented of your sins and confessed your need of Jesus to be your Savior? Have you daily taken up your cross, meaning, have you been dying to self; to live for self; to simply please yourself so that you may follow Jesus and go however and wherever He commands? And as you live for Christ, are you seeking to do so “by the Holy Spirit” – in the power of God; or might you be trying to live for and please God in your own strength, in manner merely comfortable, convenient and conducive for yourself. Beloved, a life lived by the power of the Spirit is a life lived in antithesis of the world – a life that is seen as going against the flow of culture’s current. It is this kind of life, one lived by the Holy Spirit and that strives to obey the orders of Jesus that becomes increasingly effective in carrying out the unfinished work of Christ. Will you be such a person?

The Church Alive

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3. We must be chosen by Jesus (we must be true believers)

...whom He had chosen...

[slide 07] This brings us to the third necessity for living out an effective proclamation of Christ. We must be chosen by Jesus; or to say it another way, we must be true believers in Christ). Our text is very specific here; namely that the disciples, being prepared and called to the task of evangelism had been personally, purposely and particularly chosen by Jesus Christ. This is perfectly consistent with what Jesus had already taught to His disciples back in John 15:16 - [slide 08]

1 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

The verb "choose" [exelexato] – means to make a personal and free choice apart from external influence. [slide 09] Jesus said in effect, "You did not choose [exelexato] Me by any agency of yourself; by any means available to yourself and because of any insight of benefit to yourself; but I choose you by Myself; by My own agency, purpose and benefit; apart from any influence or insight into what you would or would not do. And by this unilateral choice, I also "appointed" – I ordained, determined, laid out and set forth your purpose; that purpose being a life that bears fruit, lasting fruit, meaning and purpose to the glory of the Father.

This was spoken to the disciples; at the time of both John 15 and of Acts 1, to eleven disciples. The question for us is this; is the principle of God's choosing by Himself, for Himself and to Himself a people for which He determined their purpose a principle of Scripture. In other words, was Jesus being consistent with being God in choosing to Himself these disciples? I submit to you that we see this glorious principle of God's choosing to Himself a people and then appointing them to bear fruit as a most prominent theme of Scripture. So then, let me walk you through this as this has a bearing upon how we see our salvation and our call to carry on the unfinished work of Christ in evangelism.

The Choosing and Appointment of Adam

[slide 10] Consider first of Adam. Who chose, called and determined Adam's course of being and life? Did Adam choose to be created? No, in fact we know that God choose Adam over other creatures and that Adam had no say in the matter of being the pinnacle of creation. In Genesis 2:7 we read: [slide 10]

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

God chose Adam to impart to him life. And then, with that election in hand, what did God call Adam to do? What fruit did God determine for Adam? In Genesis 1:27-28 we read of the call: [slide 10]

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and

The Church Alive

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multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The Choosing and Appointment of Abraham

^[slide 11] Do you see the correlation between God's choosing Adam and then appointing him to bear fruit; or in this case to "be fruitful and multiply"? And this is not an isolate case. Let us consider Abraham. Listen to the words of Nehemiah 9:7-8 who best summarized this choosing aspect of God: ^[slide 11]

7 You are the Lord God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham. 8 "You found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give him the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite — to give it to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous.

There is the call to Abraham, which of course took place back in Genesis 12 and listen now to the call to be fruitful as I read from verses 1-3: ^[slide 12]

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; 2 and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; 3 and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The Choosing and Appointment of Jacob

^[slide 13] We see this pattern of God's choosing and then a call to be fruitful throughout the Scriptures. We see it in God's choosing Jacob over Esau. In Romans 9 the Holy Spirit devotes an entire chapter to demonstrating that God's choice is His own, apart from anything that either Jacob or Esau had done (for they had not been born yet) or even what they would do. To Jacob was imparted the call to carry on the promise to Abraham. Romans 9:11 says, ^[slide 13]

11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls...

And then in Genesis 35:9-11 we read once again of the "fruit" that is appointed and expected of Jacob: ^[slide 14]

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. 10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel. 11 God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you."

The Choosing and Appointment of Judah

The Church Alive

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[slide 15] And then we must ask the question as to why did God choose, of all the sons of Jacob, Judah to be the line through which Messiah would come. Did God do this because of something Judah had done or would do? The story of Judah and his daughter in law Tamar is anything but a story of great virtue. Yet we read in Genesis 49:8-10 these words: [slide 15]

8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. 9 "Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? 10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

The principle of God's choosing by Himself, for Himself and to Himself Judah is clear and the appointed fruit is that Judah would destroy the enemies of God and God's people and be the great ruler of both his "father's sons" as well as possessing the "obedience of the people."

The Choosing and Appointment of Israel

[slide 16] We see the same principle in the choosing and calling of Israel as a nation. When Israel departed their bondage in Egypt, the great hope of the people was not necessarily to be some great nation through which God would shine forth the truth of the gospel, rather they were just wanting out of Egypt. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8 we see God's choosing by Himself, for Himself and to Himself; not for any other reason than His own purpose and promise: [slide 16]

6 For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

And with the choosing always comes a calling, a calling that is summarized in verse 11 of Deuteronomy 7, [slide 17] **"Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them."** And just what is the fruit of this calling? We see that in part back in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 where we read: [slide 18]

4 Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

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The Choosing and Appointment of Believers in Christ

^[slide 19] We could go on, but let us see if this principle of God's choosing by Himself, for Himself and to Himself is what is also true of believers in Jesus Christ. In other words can it be said that we did not choose Jesus but Jesus chose us and appointed us to bear fruit? We begin in Ephesians 1:3-6 where we read: ^[slide 19]

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Clearly it is God who has chosen us. The word "**chosen**" here is the very same verb used by Jesus in John 15:16 concerning His disciples and the very same verb used by Luke in Acts 1:2 - *exelexato*. We can safely say that we have been "chosen" by God, to God and for God. And now the question for us is this; what are we chosen to? Has God called us to any fruit? Of course the answer is yes, but let me show this to you from a familiar passage but perhaps a passage you have not considered in this light of being chosen by God and appointed to bear fruit. Look with me at Ephesians 2:8 ^[slide 20]

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

In this verse, the emphasis is on grace; salvation is "**by grace**" – by God's unmerited, unearned and undeserved kindness and mercy; to do for us something we have no right or claim to. And what is this undeserved kindness? It is, in the text, "**salvation**"; the being reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And how is this grace recognized and this salvation realized? Ephesians 2:8 declares it is "**through faith.**" Beloved, faith is not the cause of salvation, but rather is the conduit through which the source of salvation, namely the grace of God is experienced. Let me illustrate it like this; if grace could be likened to a cold drink in a cup; then faith is the straw through which the thirst-quenching refreshment of grace is experienced. It is not that faith that has the power to refresh any more than it is in the power of a straw to refresh. Rather it is the grace flowing through faith that brings the refreshment of salvation. Faith is absolutely necessary and required for the experience of salvation for without faith there is no realization of grace; but grace is what makes saving faith possible. By grace then a person is chosen by God and enabled to experience that grace by granting faith. We see just one example of this in Acts 16 in the life of Lydia where verse 14 says that "the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Things that brought her to salvation. We see this again back in Acts 13:48 where we read, "and as many as were appointed to eternal life [graciously chosen by God] – believed [experienced that grace through faith]. This faith that a conduit for the grace that saves is truly the gift of God as Ephesians 2:8 declares and is not the result of our doing as we read in ^[slide 21] verse 9, "**not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

The Church Alive

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So then, we have God graciously choosing in verse 8, but what of the call to bear fruit. Do we see an appointment to bear fruit like that which we read in John 15:16? ^[slide 22] Yes, for look with me at verse 10 where we read, **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."** This is the appointment to bear fruit. Beloved, God has laid out, mapped out, masterfully planned for the fruit, or good works, that are to be manifest in your life. And whatever those good works might be, they include the desire and intention to carry out the unfinished work of Christ in proclaiming salvation in His name. If you have been chosen by Jesus, then you have been chosen to represent Him before anyone and everyone in your life.

I doubt that there would be anyone here who would not desire to be more effective in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet the confession for many of us is that we are not very effective at sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is the remedy for this? Beloved, be diligent, be purposeful, apply maximum effort to the task of knowing Jesus personally and intimately, of obeying the orders of Jesus intentionally and knowing that as you pursue such things, you will be demonstrating your position as being chosen by God and called to this purpose of completing the good works that God prepared in advance for you to walk in.

Turn with me to 2 Peter 1 where we see all of this brought together in summary form. We have read these verses before, but hear them with this principle in mind, that Jesus has chosen you for Himself, to Himself and by Himself and appointed you to bear fruit to the glory of the Father:

2 Peter 1:1-10

1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant [slave] and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord [knowledge]; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence [knowledge]. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. [Obedience] 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble...

Do you want to know that God has called you and has chosen you? Then do you see the fruits of verses 5-7 in your life? Are they not only yours – that is, you see them in some form in your life; but are they also as verse 8 says, "increasing" – that is, do not let your diligence grow stagnant. If we are to be effective in carrying on the unfinished work of Christ – of proclaiming

The Church Alive

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salvation in His name, then we must know we have been chosen and we know we are chosen as we see these qualities of 2 Peter 1:5-7 increasing in our lives.

If we find ourselves coming up short in these areas, let repent; let us fervently beseech God to empower us by grace to know Him, to know His word, to delight in salvation to see our lives reflect the attributes of one who is chosen by God and appointed to bear fruit. I love the way the apostle Paul spoke this same truth to the Colossians in Colossians 1:9-10 saying, ^[slide 23]

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...

^[slide 24] Beloved, let us recommit ourselves to knowing and growing in the knowledge of Jesus, of obeying His orders and of being diligent to make certain of His calling and choosing of us by possessing and increasing in those noted characteristics that reveal the working of God in our hearts. Then we can be increasingly effective in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that needs to hear of Him from the testimonies of our own mouths and lives.

Soli Deo Gloria

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