

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

The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ (Part 5)

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.

I know that we have been thoroughly, meticulously and perhaps painstakingly working our way through the first three verses of Acts 1. We have been laying down for ourselves the very framework upon which we will need to best understand and apply the lessons from the book of Acts. Let us rejoice in grasping these truths. We come again then to what we have called the necessities for effective evangelism. There are certainly more than the five or six necessities that we will have considered from our text, but these are the most crucial for us to know and practice if we would be prepared, even as we see Jesus preparing His disciples here in our text, for effectively sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that others will come to embrace Him as Lord and Savior.

In no way do I wish to be inappropriately redundant, but let me remind you of the first four necessities we have studied before I introduce to you the next one. We have already noted then that "to be effective in speaking to others concerning the work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ...

1. We must know and grow in our understanding of Jesus

"about all that Jesus began to do and teach..."

The book of Acts as well as the entirety of the Bible is about Jesus. How well do you know Him? You cannot effectively tell others about anything or anyone you do not know. So practically speaking, how is your intake of God's word; your prayer life; and your fellowship with other believers who can challenge and sharpen you in the faith? If we are to be effective in speaking to others about Jesus...

2. We must strive to live in obedience to the commands of Christ

"...after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles..."

Jesus said to the disciples in John 14:15, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* And so I asked, "Does your life, your thought life, your attitudes, your actions reflect a willing and delighted compliance with the commands of Jesus? If we are to be effective in speaking to others about Jesus..."

3. We must be certain of Christ's choosing and calling you to His service

"...the apostles whom He had chosen..."

Acts 1:2 tells us that Jesus "had chosen" by Himself, to Himself and for Himself those whom He would impart the duties and responsibilities of beginning the work of the church. How did they know that they were chosen? We read an expansion of this truth in John 15:16, ***"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appoint you that you would go and bear fruit, and***

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that your fruit would remain... To be chosen by Jesus; or as we see in the rest of Scripture, to be chosen by God is to be given life, a life that is fruitful, evidently fruitful for God. And so we asked the question, "Do you see the fruits of salvation in your life; not just a transformed life, but a life that is in transformation; seeing less and less of the world in and through you and more and more of Christ?" (see 2 Peter 1:3-10). If we are to be effective in speaking to others about Jesus...

4. We must proclaim the reality and wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

"To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs..."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very core of our message. To proclaim with reality and wonder of the resurrection means to stand in awe that Jesus died for your sins and that He was raised from the dead to newness of life; a newness we are to experience now and will fully experience in the Day of Resurrection. This is our proclamation – that a man died, according to the Scriptures, for the sins of His people, never to die again; residing in heaven even now; one day to return to this earth to gather His people to Himself and grant to us the blessing of eternally experiencing what He is currently experiencing in heaven; the glory of the presence of God.

5. We must live as citizens of the kingdom of God

"...appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."

All of this brings us to the next necessity I have gleaned from these first three verses of Acts 1 and share with you; and it is namely this; that if are ever going to be truly and most effective in speaking to other about Jesus Christ so that they might come to recognize Him as Lord and Savior, *we must live as citizens of the kingdom of God*; we must live as citizens of the kingdom of God. We must live; that is, we must behave, act, conduct ourselves and operate according to the reign and rule of God. When people see us, our lives are to be governed in such a way that others would know that this world's system, this world's way of thinking and acting is not becoming of us; that the rule of heaven is our home, our source, our focus and our guide.

To ask this in the form of a question, are you conducting your life in manner consistent with the rule of heaven? What did Jesus tell us we ought to pray in Matthew 6:9-10?

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'"

To be a citizen of any nation or kingdom implies that you are striving to obey the rules and live within the rights and privileges of that government. As citizens of God's kingdom, we are to strive to obey His rule and live our lives in light of the rights and privileges that our ours because of Christ. For it is by living according to God's rule that those who merely belong to the fallen realms of this world will begin to see the wonder of citizenship in God's kingdom.

Our text says at the end of verse 3, that Jesus was ***"appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."*** There is no question concerning the subject matter Jesus considered important enough to speak about for the forty days between His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven. Luke is plain. Jesus spoke ***"concerning [or about – in explanation of] the kingdom of God"*** and did

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so throughout a forty day period. That Jesus would speak on this is not a surprise, for the theme of the kingdom of God was frequent during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus' first words were, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Matthew 4:17). In Matthew 4:23 we are told that **"Jesus was going throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom..."** And, in the course of time, as Jesus called and then sent out the twelve disciples, we read in Luke 9:2, **And [Jesus] sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and perform healing."**

But why so much teaching on the subject of the kingdom of God here in Acts 1:3? It must be not only because of its importance, but also because it is potentially easy to misunderstand what God intends by way of revealing His kingdom. We need to do some digging and understand what Jesus and the Scriptures teach concerning the kingdom of God so that we can rightly live according to its rules and rightly live out its precepts before the kingdoms of this world. What did Jesus teach concerning the kingdom of God? While our text does not tell us specifically, we know that whatever it included, it was consistent with everything else that was taught in the Scriptures concerning the kingdom.

Let me state upfront that I see taught in the Scriptures that one day, Christ will establish on the earth a perfect kingdom in fulfillment of Old Testament promises and covenants of God. This future earthly kingdom will stand in contrast to the men called before Christ to mediate God's rule on earth. There will be a future earthly kingdom that stands in contrast to other kingdoms of this earth through which God mediated His rule; and this future earthly kingdom will be the literal fulfillment of God's promises to various individuals and to the nation of Israel as found in the Old Testament.

This belief in a future earthly kingdom in which Christ will reign as a geo-political King over the nations is called premillennialism. That big word simply speaks of Christ coming before, the prefix "pre" the millennium. The millennium comes from a Latin word *millie* meaning 1000; for in Revelation 20, in reference to this coming reign of Christ on the earth, it is said six times to be 1000 years long. This is called the millennial kingdom, the literal, earthly 1000 year rule of Christ upon this earth.

Before I go any further, let me clarify an important truth concerning the kingdom of God. Whatever Jesus was speaking about for forty days, it had to include aspects of what we find in Scripture concerning this subject. There are in the Scriptures two distinct yet related aspects of the kingdom of God. The first and most broad understanding of the kingdom of God is that it is universal – God's kingdom is over all. We are to understand from the Bible that God is absolutely sovereign over all His creation. From Genesis 1 through the end of Revelation, there is God's kingdom, God's rule, God's reign. We see this throughout the Old Testament. Let us consider a few references. In Psalm 103:19 we read:

The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.

In 1 Chronicles 29:10-12, as David thanks God for all the materials supplied for the building of the temple, we read this concerning the nature of God's universal kingdom:

10 So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness

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and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. 12 Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone."

It is God who rules over all times, all people, all creation. And one last reference we can look at is Psalm 145:10-13 where we once again see this broad, overarching reign and rule of God:

10 All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, And Your godly ones shall bless You. 11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom And talk of Your power; 12 To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts And the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

These verses speak of the universal nature of God's kingship. We read that God sits on a throne in heaven and is ruler of all. Not to leave the New Testament out, look with me at 1 Timothy 1:17 where we see this universal aspect of God's kingship:

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the universal kingdom of God. But we also learn in the Scriptures of what we call the mediatorial kingdom. What do we mean by a mediatorial kingdom? A mediatorial kingdom is God manifesting His heavenly rule over a specific people through a mediator or representative here on earth for a period of time. To say this another way, a mediatorial kingdom is an earthly, geographic, political, kingdom in which God rules His people through a mediator. I will share some verses that reflect this mediatorial aspect of God's kingdom in a moment.

Now, in the Bible, both the universal and the mediatorial kingdoms are known by various names, such as "*the kingdom of heaven*," "*the kingdom of God*," or simply "*the kingdom*." Generally, the context determines which of these two kingdoms (universal or mediatorial) the author has in mind. So, when it is said that Jesus was speaking to the disciples concerning the kingdom of God, what did He have in view? What was Jesus communicating to them on this matter? If we jump down to Acts 1:6, we find the disciples asking Jesus this question, "*Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" What are they asking? They are asking in essence, "Lord, are you going to re-establish the nation of Israel to its former and intended role of being the mediator of your truth and light to the nations? Are you going to use Israel as the conduit through which you physically, literally and presently reign and rule on the earth over the nations?" Jesus had just taught them about the kingdom and their natural question was, "Is this next phase of God manifesting His rule on earth going to take place now?" What is the basic answer to their question? I would have you see that it is not "No." Jesus did not in any way correct their understanding here that there is to be no earthly manifestation of God's kingdom. He did not say that He was going to fulfill all the promise of the kingdom in the Old Testament

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from a throne in heaven. Rather we find Jesus saying in effect, "Not Yet" – ***"It is not for you to know time or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."***

So it would seem that what is in direct view here is how God uses human representatives to live out or manifest His rule. This is a repeated means that God has used throughout human history – using a divinely-chosen mediator through which to manifest His reign and rule upon the earth. We see it first in the very life of Adam, who, according to Genesis 1:26-28 was to be God's representative king over creation. There we read:

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 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 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."

Adam was to have dominion on the earth; He was to fill it and subdue it, but through his fall into sin, he forfeited that position to Satan. It would be the Second Adam who, in the Millennial Kingdom, that expected, future, earthly kingdom in which Christ accomplishes what Adam could not; taking dominion over the earth.

Another example of God's manifesting His rule through a mediator is in the life of Moses. God revealed His kingship and authority over Israel through Moses. Yet Israel would come to reject the words of Moses. In Acts 7:35 we read,

This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

But someone greater than Moses would come and rule over the people of Israel in just as physical and literal a way as Moses. In Deuteronomy 18:18-19 we read the words of the Lord who said,

18 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.

Jesus is this Prophet, but He has yet to rule over Israel. He has brought deliverance through the cross, but He has not yet been seen as Ruler over Israel.

In 2 Samuel 7:8-16 we see God making a covenant with David, establishing a dynasty with him through which God would rule His people. From that time on every king over God's kingdom would have to be from the line of David. Listen to this promise of the Lord to David:

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10 “I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you. 12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

In this declaration we find the promise of land; physical earthly land, **“that they may live in their own place”**; we find the promise of posterity; of a descendant who would be raised up after David, the throne of whose kingdom would be forever; and blessing; that during this glorious kingdom, the people would **“not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly.”**

The throne of this descendent of David would be the throne that is established by God and would endure forever; meaning that it would never be replaced or usurped by another kingdom. The prophet Daniel makes reference to this final kingdom of kingdoms in Daniel 2:44 saying

In the days of those kings [the end of a revitalized Roman Empire] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

It is this future kingdom, this kingdom of kingdoms in which the king of kings will be the mediator of God’s rule upon the earth that the apostles were asking Jesus about in Acts 1:6. That they asked this question does not seem to imply, as is the suggestion of some, that they had failed to understand what Jesus had been teaching them for forty days. If Jesus had walked them through the Scriptures, they would have been expecting this earthly manifestation of the kingdom.

We have more to understand about all of this, but let’s wrap things up and make some application. To sum things up; the Scriptures clearly teach that God has established, from the beginning of time through the end of time, His universal, sovereign rule. All things are subject to His will, His intentions, His purposes, and His goals. In the course of human history, God has established and, even as we have seen, makes promises yet to establish an earthly, physical, literal kingdom in which His divinely appointed mediator communicates and executes His reign upon the earth. At current, we are not under any earthly, mediatorial expression of the kingdom of God. We are in the church age; the time in which God reveals His reigning and ruling not through a physically present kingdom and ruler on this earth, but He reveals His reign and rule through the hearts of His people; through those who have entered into the universal kingdom of God by faith in Jesus Christ; by believing that the one who is to be King over all the earth in the coming Millennial kingdom; a time when the whole world will know and acknowledge Him as king, is the one who first offered Himself to God as our Savior, to be our Ransom and our Redeemer,

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buying us back from the realm of sin and of darkness by dying on the cross for our sins. This is what Jesus spoke of in Luke 17:20-21 where we read:

20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

The kingdom of God is "in your midst" or "within you." In other words, entrance into God's kingdom does not come by simply being present when the King arrives. Rather, entrance into the kingdom of God begin within you; when you come to see and experience God's rule and reign over your life from within.

Have you experienced this reigning and ruling of God in your life? Have you become a member of God's universal reign through faith in Christ. The New Testament teaches us that we are citizens of "the kingdom." In Colossians 1:13 we read, ***"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."*** While we are awaiting the next mediatorial manifestation of God's kingdom through the physical, literal, geo-political Millennial kingdom mediated by Christ Himself; we are to be ***"looking"*** in the words of Titus 2:13, ***"for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."***

In Philippians 3:20 we read this, ***"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."*** Beloved, Colossians 1:13, Philippians 3:20 and other such verses are what we call "positional" truths. A positional truth describes that which the believer possesses but does not experience. Thus, even though we still live in this sin-darkened world, and Christ's kingdom has not yet been established, we are free from the power of sin and are citizens of Christ's kingdom positionally.

And while we await the coming king, because of this positional truth of being citizens of heaven and therefore of heaven's coming kingdom, our lives are to lived in accordance with this kingdom's rules, rights and privileges. Are you doing that? Are you living as a citizen of the kingdom of God? What are the attitudes and actions of a kingdom citizen? We read of such in Matthew 5-7 but is summed up well in this one verse; Matthew 5:16, ***"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is heaven."***

Let your life be clothed in the garbs of Christ's righteousness, reflecting Him in all you do. Let your speech be continually seasoned with the grace of the Lord Jesus; speaking to others those things that Jesus would speak to them if He stood before them. Let your heart and attitude toward others burn with compassion, love, care and concern for others; for other believers that they might walk in a manner worthy of the gospel; and for others who do not know Christ, that they may behold the wonder of a life being constantly, wonderfully and gloriously transformed by the work of Christ in you. This is in part how a citizen of the kingdom of God lives; as a representative of the King, and in our case, as representatives of the coming King who will bless those who believe in Him with eternal life and curse those in unbelief with eternal damnation.

One thing that is certainly true in the book of Acts is that those who long for the kingdom of God; true citizens of the kingdom, long for the salvation of those who have yet to see Christ as

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Savior and Lord. Let me close with this quote from Charles Spurgeon, one we have now on a couple of occasions, who said:

"Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that. The saving of souls, if a man has once gained love to perishing sinners and his blessed Master, will be an all-absorbing passion to him. It will so carry him away, that he will almost forget himself in the saving of others."

"He will be like the brave fireman, who cares not for the scorch or the heat, so that he may rescue the poor creature on whom true humanity has set its heart. If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies."

"And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."

This is in part the heart of a kingdom citizen. If you will live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, will you exercise a passion for lost souls; that they may come to see Jesus as wondrous Redeemer and Savior as well as glorious Lord and King?

Soli Deo Gloria

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