

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 3rd May 2009 – 11:30am
Acts 1:1-11 – Laying the Foundations

Introduction

We are still in the period between Easter and Pentecost, so there is no time like the present to begin a series on the Acts of the Apostles.

The Gospels of the New Testament close with a weak, frail, doubting bunch of disciples, still recovering from the shock and bewilderment of the fact that Jesus had been crucified, and all their hopes for a restored Kingdom of Israel under the rule of King Jesus had been dashed.

So how did these weak frail disciples regroup sufficiently, or pull themselves together enough, to be able to get the Gospel across a Continent to major cities like Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse and Thessalonica? How did they manage to see people converted to Christ from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds? How did they plant new churches and come to have dozens of thriving churches alive and well by the time of the writing of the letters of the New Testament?

The Acts of the Apostles holds the answer, because the Acts of the Apostles is like a bridge between the Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament.

If we didn't have the Acts of the Apostles in our Bibles, there would be a great gulf between the Gospels and the Book of Romans and we would be left with an awful lot of unanswered questions:

Where did all these churches come from?

How did the Gospel get to these places?

Who took it there?

The Acts of the Apostles tells the exciting story of the adventures of these early believers – and how the church took its first baby steps in the world. It's not dull, dry, history – it's exciting, lively, fast-moving, and thrilling, as the Holy Spirit takes hold of 12 weak, feeble, ordinary men, and uses them so powerfully that it was said of them in Acts 17:6, that they were the men who had **'turned the world upside down!'**

Think about that – weak, insignificant, back-water Galilean fishermen – but they had turned the world upside down! No excuse for us then in Armagh!! It's about the same distance from Galilee to Rome, as it is from Ireland to Rome – and yet these early believers covered all of that distance with the Gospel! They had a big vision of a world in need – and they got on with reaching out to it, just starting where God had placed them.

How big is our vision this morning? Here we are in Armagh City – the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, not far from the border between North and South. There is no reason why we can't have an impact across this City, across this County, and indeed right throughout this island! And with the mission connections represented here this morning, and with the modern

technology of the World Wide Web, there is no reason why we can't be part of turning the world upside down in our day for the sake of the Gospel! The only thing that could limit us is our own lack of vision - because the God of the Acts of the Apostles is still our God today. He hasn't changed!

How were they able to do it? It was because God poured out his Holy Spirit on these disciples, to empower them to take the Gospel to the whole world. That's what happened on the Day of Pentecost in Acts ch.2, but we begin the story today in Acts ch.1.

First of all notice that 'the Acts of the Apostles' is a Continuation -
It's Part 2 of a two-part book.

So what was Part 1? Answer – it was Luke's Gospel.

Compare Acts 1:1 with Luke 1:4

Compare Acts 1:2 with Luke 24:50-53

Dr Luke wrote Luke's Gospel, and he also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. He says that in Luke's Gospel he recorded what Jesus **'began** to do and to teach...' So the implication is that now in Acts Jesus is **continuing** to do something. i.e. Jesus (although he is in heaven now) was continuing – and is continuing - to work here on earth through his disciples – and through us!

- He is no longer in His *physical* body here on earth,

- Now he works through His *spiritual* Body – the Church – you & me!

Jesus is still at work in this world – He is at work through His church – the body of Christ. Are you ready to be used in that great work of the Kingdom?

The Book of Acts tells the story of how that Church – the Body of Christ – came into being and then spread to the whole of the known world.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 – *'I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.'*

And so for 2000 years Jesus has been building his church. The Devil has been doing all in his power to stop it advancing, but the church is still alive and well around the world, and making more advances today than at any time before in its history! Jesus is building his church and he wants you and me to be part of the construction team – I hope you are ready and willing?

But before you build anything, you must lay a good foundation.

We can find the foundation stones of the Christian Church in Acts ch.1:1-11

1. The Sufferings of Christ
2. The Resurrection of Christ
3. The Great Commission of Christ
4. The Ascension of Christ
5. The Second Coming of Christ

Five essential foundation stones for the faith of the Christian Church – and the continued existence of the Christian Church: they're all rooted in Christ!

1. The Sufferings of Christ (v.3a)

Without Christ's death on the Cross there would be no church today at all. Without Christ's death no-one would ever have been saved, there would have been no believers; therefore there would be no church, because the church is made up of all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ worldwide.

That's why Jesus came into the world in the first place:

- *'To seek and to save that which was lost.'*
- *'To give His life as a ransom for many.'*

His perfect life and sacrificial death paid the ransom price for our sins. He came to set us free from sin, and by faith to give us peace with God. *'He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.'*

Only through the cross of Christ can we be saved from our sins, and by faith enter God's family – the church – made up of believers.

What does Christ's suffering mean to you?

- For you is it just a matter of history?
- Or do you realise it was personally for you that Jesus suffered?

2. The Resurrection of Christ (v.3)

If Christ had never risen again from the dead, the church would have been still-born – it would have been dead before it was even born! But because Jesus is alive, the church must be alive as well.

How did these early disciples know that Jesus was alive, that he had risen?

(i) They had seen him (v.3)

'He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.'

See 1 Corinthians 15:4-8

John 20:10ff – He appeared to Mary

John 20:19ff – to the disciples

John 20:24ff – to Thomas etc

John 21 – to the disciples out fishing, especially to Peter.

(ii) He gave them 'many convincing proofs that he was alive.' (v.3)

See Luke 24:37-43

v.39 – 'Touch me' – 'flesh and bones' – not a ghost!

v.41-43 – He asked for, and ate, a piece of fish in front of them!

These men were in no doubt that their Lord had risen from the dead. The resurrection was central to the message of the early believers.

- Some had claimed that the body had been stolen by corrupt disciples wanting to deceive the world (Matt 28).
- So the disciples had to refute such claims and give clear evidence that Jesus was alive.
- It was at the heart of their Gospel message.
- They were witnesses to the Resurrection as well as the cross (1:22)
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 – It's the keystone of Christianity.
- Romans 10:9-10 – anyone who denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not 'Christian' in any Biblical sense of that word.
- Their spiritual power depended on it.
- Otherwise they were just another Jewish sect.
- But Jesus was alive!
- So they could rely on his strength as they went out in His name.

I hope to keep the resurrection central to my message as I preach here in Armagh. Yes, I will 'preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified' but I will also put the stress on the fact that He has now risen from the dead, and He is alive to be the Saviour of anyone who will put their trust in Him. We have a living faith, not a dead leader. Let's always remember that and make it clear!

3. The Great Commission of Christ (v.5-8)

...and very closely tied in with this point is of course the Holy Spirit.

These disciples had received the **Promise** of the Holy Spirit:

- From God the Father (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 1:7)
- From John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11)
- From Jesus Himself (John 15:26-27)

They were now to receive the **Power** of the Holy Spirit, in order to:

- Serve the Lord
- Do His Will
- Be His Witnesses – i.e. to help them fulfil the Great Commission (See Acts 1:8 & Matthew 28:19-20)

N.B. Zechariah 4:6 – the Church's power comes from the Holy Spirit, not from any man! Not from your new pastor, or anybody else.

- *'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord.*
- That means that ordinary people can do extraordinary things by the power of the Spirit, in order to fulfil the Great Commission of Christ.

We are **all** called to be disciples, so we are **all** called to be witnesses of what Christ has done for us personally.

You might not know all the theological answers, but you know what Jesus has done for you, and that's what you are called to be a witness of – Jesus! Begin at home – Jerusalem – for us, here in Armagh City and District. But let's not forget the rest of this island and indeed the rest of the world. The distinction between home and foreign missions is secondary. If you understand the Great Commission properly, you will see that the command we are to obey is to make disciples, wherever we go, at home and abroad. That involves, baptising, and it involves teaching them all that Jesus has commanded us from His Word. So we are called and empowered to make disciples – that's what this church is all about, and that's what mission is all about – making disciples at home and abroad. So start here, and then go wherever God leads you in the days to come. And according to Matthew 24:14, when the Gospel has been preached as a testimony to all nations, then Jesus will return from heaven.

4. The Ascension of Christ (v.9)

We believe that Jesus is in Heaven right now (v.9)
He returned to heaven so that the Holy Spirit could be sent to empower the church, as we have just seen. (cf John 16:7)
Jesus is praying for us there in Heaven right now. (Hebrews ch.9:24-28)
But even though He is in heaven, he is continuing to work in us, with us and through us to reach the world (Mark 16:19-20).
He's in Heaven today, but He's coming again one day – it could be soon!

5. The Return of Christ (v.10-11)

How will Jesus come again? (Look at v.11)
*'This **same** Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the **same** way you have seen him go into heaven.'*

How?

Physically – not spiritually – This same Jesus will return as the Risen Lord!
Visibly – not secretly – 'every eye will see him.' (Rev 1:7)
Triumphantly – not sheepishly – 'on the clouds' (Rev 1:7)
Suddenly – He left suddenly, so He will return suddenly – at any moment!

This should be an incentive for us to live holy lives now (2 Peter 3:11)
This should be an incentive for us to evangelise now (Mark 13:10)
This should be a warning for us all to be ready (Matthew 25:13).

Are you ready? – He suffered, He rose again, He commissioned us, He ascended into Heaven, He's coming again from Heaven for His own. Are you looking forward to seeing Him? Or are you dreading his arrival?

Conclusion

Those 5 foundation stones are the bedrock of the Christian Church. I'm sure those who set up this church over 90 years ago, believed in them absolutely. We too in our generation must believe and proclaim...
That Jesus died for our sins – according to the Scriptures – **to save us**.
That He rose again from the dead - **to be our Saviour**.
That He commissioned His Church to take the Gospel to all nations – **that they might be saved**.
That He ascended into Heaven, and is seated there now – **able to save** completely all who come to him in repentance and faith.
And that He's returning again some day - **for all who are saved** - to take us to be with Him forever.

Are you sure that you are one of those saved people this morning?
Are you sure you are a child in God's family?
Are you sure you belong to the Body of Christ, the Church, this morning?

Well then, today let's rededicate ourselves to fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ – at home and abroad – witnessing for Jesus, making disciples for Jesus, and then building them up in their faith until Jesus comes again to receive His Bride, the Church. Amen.

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