

Acts Highlights - Part 1

by George Verwer

The Book of Acts is a record of the spread of Christianity and the empowerment of believers through the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the importance of prayer, fellowship, and worship in fulfilling the calling as witnesses.

Duration: 25:34

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:14, Acts 2:41-42, James 1:22

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of four key elements in the life of a believer: gathering together, worshiping Jesus, breaking bread in communion, and prayer. These four elements are compared to the legs of a table, with the idea that all four are necessary for a strong and balanced spiritual life. The speaker references Acts 1:8, where Jesus commands his disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. The sermon also highlights the early church in Acts, specifically focusing on Acts 1:14, which describes the disciples meeting together continually for prayer. The speaker encourages believers to have dynamic prayer meetings like those seen in the book of Acts.

Transcript

Well, it's a great privilege to share with you there at the Zion Fellowship. It's always been a blessing to minister in your midst. And of course, a few Sundays ago, I shared the message, the seven pitfalls that we face in this pandemic.

Thank you for putting that on YouTube. So it's gone all over the world. This is a privilege now to have a Bible study on the Book of Acts, really, among surely my favorite books in the Bible that I've gone through hundreds of times, often on audio.

I did a series, and I was just relistening to part of it at the Christian camp many years ago, a much longer series. And then together with two other brothers, Paul Blackham and Richard Dewes, I did a television video presentation with the three of us interacting on the Book of Acts that maybe some of you have seen. So it's been a blessing to get afresh into the Book of Acts.

We're not going to attempt to expound every verse in this huge book of 28 chapters. And I think we can give this message the title of highlights. Highlights from the Book of Acts.

And I'm reminded that often it's referred to actually as the Acts of the Holy Spirit. I'm also reminded that it really is a Book of Action. Luke, the author who gave us the Gospel of Luke, gives us now the Book of Acts.

He was a doctor. He was a Gentile. He had traveled with Paul.

And of course, there's a lot about Paul, surely next to the Lord Jesus, the most influential person, biblical person in my life. So it's an exciting book. And I don't think I'm going to be bored studying it.

But I hope we'll keep in mind as we study, especially during these days when we're not able to easily get out and share our faith and evangelize. I hope we realize the danger that these things just get into our head and don't get into our lives. And I'm reminded of those words in James to not be hearers only, but to be doers of the work, to be doers.

So as we look at some of these passages, we need to ask ourselves, Oh, Lord, what would you have me do in light of this? We, of course, see the great emphasis on prayer in the Book of Acts. And it's my prayer that this study will increase your prayer focus, especially for the nations of the world, which we're going to be thinking about in a moment. But let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the privilege of getting into your holy word. We thank you that we have a variety of translations, giving us an in-depth understanding of what the scriptures are saying. And we commit this time to you that we might be diligent and have our Bibles, if at all possible, open.

And we pray, Lord Jesus, that our lives would somehow have the same reality that we see roaring through the pages of the Book of Acts. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some believe the Book of Acts was written about the year 60 AD. Some feel it was written earlier than that. And it was written by Luke.

And there's a great reference to Luke, of course, in the Gospel of Luke, where he speaks about the fact that he's writing this letter to Theophilus. And the Book of Acts is also written to Theophilus. Well, who is this guy? We actually don't know much about him.

But it does seem he was probably a Roman of some high esteem. And one theory, because Paul was in prison in Rome, and quite a few Romans were asking questions, and the faith was, of course, being attacked. This is the very earliest days of Christianity.

And so Luke wrote this Gospel of Luke to share the truth, the facts about the Lord Jesus. We were discussing the other day when Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke, did he realize this was going to become part of what would be our Bible? I'm not sure. I think God knew, and God was preparing his word through Luke and the Gospel of Luke, which is such an important part of the Scriptures.

And the same would be true of the Book of Acts. Let's start there in Chapter 1. I have many translations in front of me. The Authorized, The Message, the NIV, and this Bible that I'm probably going to use the most is the New Living Translation.

So it opens, Dear Theophilus, in my first book, you're referring to Luke, in my first book, I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he ascended into heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit. It's interesting, our timing in sharing this is that Ascension

Sunday has just taken place, and we're now looking forward to Pentecost Sunday. And in this first session, we're just dealing with the first two chapters, just highlights, and of course, it includes coming of the Holy Spirit, the day of Pentecost.

We'll look at that in a few moments. But here we have that important explanation from our writer, Luke, that this is a follow-up. This is a follow-up on what he wrote in the Book of Luke, and it's being addressed to this same person.

And then we come to this verse that is really, for me, the key verse in our first session today, Acts 1.8. The Father set those fakes, he replied, and they are not for you to know. This was in answer to the question of when he would return. I think it's an important exhortation because all through history, different people have tried to set dates for when the Lord would return.

One very extreme person, sorry to say, from my own state of New Jersey, had a huge radio audience. And then he began, he went more and more extreme, turning against the church, giving the idea that he was the main one that knew the truth. And he convinced, this is some years ago, his radio audience that Jesus would be coming back on a certain date.

It's such a sad, sad story, such an attack of the enemy. Because in one nation in Asia, one unique people's group where there are many believers, they were into his radio ministry. This was a communist country.

And on the day the Lord was, in their mind, going to return, they went to this mountain. And of course, the local authorities wondered what was going on. And so they attacked those people, and many of them were slaughtered.

And we're just reminded of the ugliness of extremism, which is so prevalent in our day. And the enemy uses it. So Paul deals, I mean, Luke deals with that question, before he goes on and gives us that famous word right from the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power, and will tell people about me everywhere, Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. I think the author says, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall be my witnesses. I like that, you should be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

One of the commentaries I was reading, actually in Spanish, in preparation, again, brought out the fact that not everyone is called to publicly preach, but all believers are called to be his witness, to be his witness. And it's exciting that in this C-19 virus across the world, I've just had some more emails from India, that many of the Lord's people, millions, millions of the Lord's people throughout the world are his witness, feeding programs, including right here in Bromley, this borough of London. I was on the phone with someone this morning, and what the churches are doing here in Bromley to help people who are suffering is quite amazing.

And we can multiply that right across the world. In our Ministry of Operation Mobilization, we've just had the report of the first death. A brother in Africa has died from this terrible C-19.

And that, of course, brings grief to our hearts, but believers are ready to go. Believers are ready to go. And our bigger concern, which is the core of these final words of the Lord Jesus, are those who don't know him.

I think reading and studying the Book of Acts is going to help us make a greater commitment to reaching the nations of the world. I think surveys would show that people in their own country, like the people of Britain, their main concern is their own country. We've seen this, especially during the days of this pandemic, in connection with the news.

I think 95% of everything British people do or American people do, 95% of all their money, all their time, all their effort, a lot of it good, is for their own country, because they're nationalistic in their thinking. Of course, they love Jesus. That's in the equation.

We're not saying we can figure that out. But my plea is that you would be an Acts 1-8 global person. That you would be concerned at this time for Yemen, a nation suffering way beyond, way beyond anything we know.

Almost anywhere in Europe, that's for sure. You'd be concerned about this ongoing, horrendous crisis in Syria and in Iraq and Afghanistan, where we do look a little more carefully into the news. Some networks are way more global than other networks, and I try to watch those.

We realize the suffering goes on, and now this C-19 is on top of already existing suffering. How can we not be more global in our thinking? Of course, many of you listening to me are from India. If you're concerned about India, that is natural.

You had an advantage, really, because India is like 15 or 20 different nations, all those different languages. We should be thankful that India has, with all of its struggles, held together as a democracy, perhaps in difficulty now. But I think the positives of India, even now, outweigh the negatives.

Let's be praying for people that we know, and being in touch with as many as possible, right across the boundaries. Again, in India, Telugus are mainly interested in Telugu people, and the Malayalis are interested in the Malayalis. Only radical Christians who imbibe the message of the Book of Acts are going to reach out.

That was the message of OM when we first went to India in 1964-65. I preached all over the country. It was to launch a missions movement, which had already begun in a small way.

To see men and women from Kerala launching out to UP. To see men and women from Tamil Nadu launching out to Rajasthan and to cities like Calcutta. We celebrated tens of thousands, not speaking just of OM, but of the church in general, and different fellowships like Hebron.

And together with Buck Singh, we sort of spearheaded this out of Hebron when I lived in India in the 60s. And we need to understand there are a lot of workers in India now, and they need our prayers, and they need our support. This is going to be a much more difficult time for them to raise their support.

Of course, I could easily take all of our time up speaking about this great Acts 1.8 passage, but it is important because it's the final word. It's the final word of our Lord Jesus before he ascended into heaven. One of the verses that's always been very important to me there in chapter 1 is verse 14.

Just before that, you have a list of disciples, and then you have the interesting story how Matthew was chosen to step into the shoes of Judas, who, of course, took his own life when he realized the evil he had done against Jesus. And then we have these words, they all met together continually for prayer. How can it be that in so many churches today, there are no really dynamic prayer meetings? I'm not saying there's

no prayer, only God knows that.

But really dynamic prayer gatherings like we read about in the book of Acts. And later on, we'll see, you know, Acts chapter 12, Peter was in prison, but the church was gathered together praying. And then Acts 13, five men were fasting and praying, and the Holy Spirit sent out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. And I want us to move in to chapter 2, which is so important, especially as we look toward Pentecost Sunday. I had the joy a few years ago of speaking to 5,000 German young people on the Pentecost weekend.

That goes on every year, sponsored by the Eileen and Sisters. You may have read about it in my book, *Messiology, More Drops*. And they need our prayers at this time because they cannot have that great event.

They may be doing something through the internet I haven't heard. But that was one of the more encouraging meetings I've ever had in Europe, because when I gave a strong message, an invitation from Isaiah 6 to pray, here am I, send me. About 4,000 of those young people, many of them teenagers, stood and prayed that prayer, here am I, send me.

You can be sure the devil counterattacked in every one of their lives, as it's so difficult for young people to be radical outspoken believers here in post-Christian Europe. What an enormous prayer challenge to pray for young people, to listen to them, and to do everything we can to encourage them. But let's read these words from the second chapter of Acts.

On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly there was a sound from heaven, like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then what looked like flames of tongues of the fire appeared and settled on each of them, and everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

They began speaking in other languages as the Holy Spirit gave them ability. They were not speaking in an unknown tongue, which is something separate. In this particular occasion, Pentecost, somehow in God's providence, again I believe very much linked with God's plan for the nations, suddenly these people were speaking in other languages.

Godly Jews from many nations were living in Jerusalem at the time. When they heard this sound, they came running to see what it was and what it was all about, and they were bewildered to hear their own language being spoken by the believers. They were beside themselves with wonder.

How can this be? They explained, these people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking the languages of our lands where we were born, and then they give a list of languages. I'm running out of time, so I'm not going to read that list of all those languages, but we really believe that we're not just to experience the new birth, but we're to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and we'll see that emphasized later on in verses like Acts 4.31, when they pray, the place was shaken where they were gathered together. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and went forth and spoke the word of God with boldness, but I cannot, excuse me, close without looking at those last verses of chapter 2, where we have this picture of the local church in such a powerful way, and we have such an example of how God works in the local church and the reality of the life together there toward the end of chapter 2, verse 43.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miracles, signs, and wonders, and all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds of these needs. They worshiped together at the temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, shared their meals with great joy and generosity, all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people, and each day the Lord added to this group those who were saved.

This so clearly indicates that the spirit of life will lead to generosity, will lead to unselfish living. It will lead to sharing. We need to really read the preceding verses.

In fact, it would be good to pick it up at verse 41. Those who believed what Peter and were baptized added to the church about 3,000 in all. They joined with other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing of the Lord's table and prayer.

I remember our brother Buck Singh would say that this is God's table. It has four legs, and if you have a table and you have three legs, the table will fall over. You have to have four legs.

And so he would share the four principles of a dynamic local church found just in this one verse. What are they? As we bring this to a close, first of all, they joined with other believers, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, biblical teaching, as we're engaged in right now. And that is the vital part of the Christian life a vital part of having a Christian life in which you're strong, in which you're growing, in which you can deal with problems and suffering and temptation.

The second item is fellowship. This is more difficult in terms of face-to-face fellowship right now, but praise God for the technology that's enabling us to fellowship. I pray with people on the phone, even this morning with a man who was a pastor in this area, praying with him on the phone.

So we're able to have fellowship. And of course, we're praying for the day when we'll be able to gather together again. And then it talks about sharing the Lord's supper.

Some are doing that, which is actually in their own home, but through the internet, they're linked together with others. But this fourth leg on this table, of course, is the emphasis on worship and the centrality of the Lord Jesus himself, to honor him, to realize what he has done on the cross. This past Sunday, I listened to the message from all souls, and the whole message was the reality of the cross of Christ.

And of course, when we gather in true breaking of bread in communion, not just a formality, it's deeply focused on the Lord himself and his reality in our lives. And then the fourth leg on the table is prayer and in prayer. I'm wondering, do you have those four things functioning in your life? And when those four things are functioning, then you'll be able to fulfill that command of Acts 1A and be his witness, whether it's locally, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth.

May you be excited about studying together with us the book of Acts in these days. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the reality of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for Pentecost and for what you have accomplished ever since then, as really the book of Acts continues to go across the world. The book of Acts reality, the work of your Holy Spirit continues to spread across the entire world more than ever before in history. Guide us, Lord, as we continue to study together in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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