

# What Jesus Did After the Beginning

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon explores the vital role of Dr. Luke and the ongoing ministry of Jesus as depicted in the Book of Acts.*

**Duration:** 33:22

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Luke 1:1, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:1-5, Romans 15:18

**Topics:** "Book Of Acts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being aware of what Jesus is doing in the world and being actively involved in his work. The speaker mentions four things that need to happen for believers to become instruments in the hands of Christ as he builds his church. One of these is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which will be discussed in the next sermon. The speaker also highlights the need for a spirit-authenticating commission and instruction about the kingdom of God. The sermon emphasizes the relevance of the Bible and the ongoing work of Jesus in the world today.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). We empathize with the Apostle Paul who in the last days of his life said, The Lord stood by me. We believe that you're here right now.

I pray that your hand would be on my shoulder, that your spirit would be in my heart and in the hearts of each person here. I pray for unbelievers who are among us, who know not Christ as a personal Savior, and do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, that you would come to them, that you would knock loudly at the door of their heart, that you would speak an irresistible word of invitation, and that you would enter in and save. And I pray for believers who are downcast, that they would be made strong by the word of truth.

And I pray for those who are confused, that their minds would be clarified, and wisdom would be granted for the tasks before them. And I pray that you will build your church with your holy word. Come, we invite you to take over now in this moment.

Guard us from error, and guard us from evil, and lead us in paths of righteousness. For your great namesake we pray. Amen.

I am so glad that God puts it into the heart of many doctors to do more than mend bodies and make bucks. I think I know all the doctors at Bethlehem, and I think I can say that all of our doctors believe that their life is meant for more than mending bodies and making bucks. But I have one favorite doctor that I thank God for more than any other doctor, and for whom I am so thankful that he gave his life to more than mending bodies and making bucks, and that is Dr. Luke, who wrote the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel according to Luke.

Paul in Colossians 4 calls him my loved physician. He was a precious member of the team. We meet him first in Troas in Acts.

We don't know for sure, but in all likelihood he was a Gentile physician and was converted as Paul passed through Troas on his second missionary journey. And from then on, we read him turning up in these little words, we, in the book of Acts. It says, we did this and we did that.

And so you can tell where he's present and where he's not from then on. And he was present most of the time with Paul and Silas and Timothy. He formed a fourth member, probably became the staff physician, you might say, of the traveling missionary band.

And he was precious in that group. More than a doctor. I was so moved in just reviewing the life of Luke by one sentence that just emotionally gripped me, and I thought I'd mention it to you just to give you a flavor of what must have existed between Paul and this man, Luke.

He joined that team and for years they traveled together. In the last book that Paul ever wrote, 2 Timothy, just before he was killed, there's a sentence in chapter 4, verse 11 that goes like this. It's just this statement.

Luke alone is with me. When I read that, I just had to stop and weep. Luke alone is with me.

And I thought, how many times? You know, when Paul listed off his sufferings, he said, five times I was given 40 lashes less one. Picture that. Five times he was whipped, 39 times.

You imagine what your back looks like after 39. 39 times. That happened to Paul five times.

Who do you think tended him as he lay in the dirt at the end of those beatings? Luke. Bathing with his own tears, no doubt, his friend and the apostle. I just cannot imagine what must have existed between this doctor and the apostle Paul and how they must have talked over the writing of Luke and Acts.

How they must have dreamed together about leaving behind a two-volume work that would talk about the deeds and works of Jesus and talk about the beginnings of the great church of Jesus Christ. And he was with him all the way to the end when nobody else, Demas has left me and gone after the world. Luke alone is with me.

Come quick before winter. I want to give you a flavor of what must have existed there between these two. He wrote, as it turns out, more of the New Testament than anybody else.

Did you know that? Paul wrote 13 letters. But you add up all those 13 letters, they don't make up as many pages as Luke Acts, this two-volume work. Luke wrote more of the New Testament than anybody else.

If you put the two of them together, I counted up the pages early this morning, you get more than half of the New Testament, this team of two men. More than half of the foundation of the church written by Paul

and Luke. These beloved brothers in the Lord who cared and tended for one another.

I want you to turn with me just to see the connection between Luke and Acts. Back to Luke 1 at the very beginning, you have to go back beyond John, that's the book just before Acts. And then Luke is next, and you go back to the first chapter of Luke.

I want you to see for whom he wrote the book and why he wrote the book. The double volume book I have in mind. In Luke 1, he gives a prologue, which was probably meant to be an introduction to both volumes, but let's just read verses 3 and 4 of Luke 1. It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

Now there's the man for whom these books are immediately written. That you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. There's the purpose of the book.

So he's got this man, Theophilus, in view. And the reason he's writing for him is because Theophilus has learned some things about Jesus and about the gospel and about the church, and they're not all right. Or they're not complete and they're not accurate.

So he wants to clarify and make certain and complete the knowledge that Theophilus has. I don't know whether Theophilus is a believer, whether Luke is writing to convert him or simply to establish him. We're not told.

What we can know about Theophilus with relatively high degree of certainty is that he was a Roman official. The reason I say that is because of this title, most excellent, most excellent Theophilus. And the reason I think that refers to a Roman official is because Luke uses it only for two other people, Festus, most excellent Festus, and Felix, most excellent Felix, over in Book of Acts.

Those were two governors of Judea. And so I assume, on the basis of what we have, that most excellent signifies some kind of standing in the Roman Gentile world, which accounts for some of why this book is written the way it is and why it might be written by a physician to one of this social standing. I'm beginning today a series of messages on the Book of Acts.

And as far as I know, I'll preach through the whole book. But I'm open to being interrupted by the Lord at any time. I've often thought that if war were to break out in the Middle East, I would have to say something.

Just like when that devastating earthquake happened out in Oakland, I broke into the series and talked about an unshakable kingdom. So please, when I announce that we're going to be in Acts for a long time, don't say, oh my goodness, what if something else happens in the church or the world? I'm willing to adjust. And if you say, good night, at three verses a shot, a short comment, well, it's going to get worse because I'm only going to take two verses next Sunday.

But then I will take longer portions after that. And we'll just see. I have them planned through the end of this year.

And then we'll plan the spring. And as the Lord leads, we'll just keep moving. And if he says no, we'll stop.

We did first volume, by the way, for three years at Bethlehem back in 80 to 82. Anybody remember those days in Luke in the Sunday evening? I'm going to begin here without any apology or explanation for why I chose Luke, because I think it's going to become obvious in the first three verses for why this is so

relevant for us. So verse one, Acts chapter one, verse one.

In the first book of Theophilus. I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when he was taken up. The word in that sentence that is all important for your grasping the purpose of this book, the meaning of our church and the nature of this age is the word began.

Now, in case you read over it too quickly, let's read it again. In the first book of Theophilus, that is in the gospel of Luke. I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up in the ascension into heaven.

Now, let me restate what that means. That means I have told you a story beginning with the virgin birth and ending with the ascension of Jesus into heaven. I have told you many things that Jesus did and many things that Jesus said.

And now I'm telling you that was the beginning of the teaching ministry of Jesus. Not the end. That was the beginning of the doing ministry of Jesus.

What he began to do up to the ascension, what he began to teach up to the ascension, I told you in the first book. Therefore, the meaning of this book is the rest of what he will teach and the rest of what he will do. And as one of my good friends said on the telephone yesterday, the book of Acts ends with a comma.

Not a period. Now, I realize there's something risky about stressing this, and so I want to back off and qualify something I believe very much. And I want you to believe very much, namely, the finality of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in the resurrection.

I know and I cherish the teachings of the book of Hebrews, for example, that say, when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. I love that, don't you? For all time, one sacrifice, it is finished. The debt is paid.

The sins are covered. The guilt is lifted. The throat of Satan is mortally slit at Calvary.

It is done. So nothing that I say this morning or in any subsequent weeks should be thought in any way to minimize the once for allness of the finished work of Jesus for your sin and mine. We do not have a high priest who must offer himself daily in the temple.

It is finished. When we celebrate the communion, we do not offer a fresh sacrifice for sins. We commemorate a grand once for all transaction between the father and the son.

It is finished. Your sins are covered. All you need to do is get in Christ by faith.

Clear. Now I'm going to go back and say the same thing again. Nevertheless, I'm going to say what Luke says.

It was only the beginning. It was only the beginning. When he incarnated into the world, when he died, when he rose, when he reigned, while he establishes himself until he puts all of his enemies under his feet, that work until the ascension was only the beginning.

And so we need to believe that he's alive. That's what you've been hearing through the worship service this morning. And as we begin the book of Acts, I hope you realize that the title given to this book could just as easily have been the acts of Jesus.

Not just the acts of the apostles, which is what it's called in most of our versions. It could be the acts of Jesus. He's going on.

He's got more to teach. He's got more to do, more to show. And the great challenge for Bethlehem is to discover how to be the kind of people who stay clear of Jesus in one sense and let him work.

And who become the kind of people who can become instruments of the living Christ so that right now in this room he can do his work in your lives. God is going to do work in your lives this morning. While I preach, Jesus is here.

I get letter after letter after letter, because the Lord must know how unbelieving I am, to tell me that that's the case. That God comes down and touches people during these services. From the choir, from a reading, from a prayer, from the sermon, or from someone else.

A priest in the community touching. God is at work here. Jesus is alive.

That's the point of verse one. He began to do. He began to teach.

Now he's continuing to do and continuing to teach in our church and all the churches where he is named around the world. I want to illustrate this and how it can be from the life of Paul. Instead of having you look it up, let me just quote for you Romans 15, 18.

Listen to how Paul articulated his ministry in view of the life of Jesus doing the ministry. Paul said, I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has worked through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed. Mark that.

Isn't that an amazing correspondence to what he did and taught in Acts 1. What he began to do and to teach. Now he continues to do and teach. Note the two words do and teach.

And here in Romans 15, 18, I will not venture to speak of anything except what this Jesus has worked through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed. He's still working. He's still speaking in Paul and in you.

That's the whole point of verse one. I believe in that little word began. He is speaking and he is acting.

He is alive. And that's why I believe this book is so relevant for us, because I believe Jesus is moving in the world in fresh new ways all around the world today. And I'll tell you, I don't want to miss any of it.

I want to be on the cutting edge of everything Jesus is doing in bringing to a consummation this age in finishing the Great Commission and reaching all the unreached peoples in awakening and quickening his church in the word and in prayer. And if that's what Jesus is doing, then I want to know what kind of people we should be. And I think that's what the rest of these verses are about.

So let's look at verses two and three and we'll pose that question. What must happen to us so that we become instruments in the living Christ hands as he builds his church? Now, there are really four things if you take into account versus four and five. But I'm going to take the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is described in verses four and five or promised in verses four and five, and deal with that next week.

So there are three things left. They are mentioned in verses two and three, and I want to take them one at a time. First, deal with them as they were experienced by the apostles and then ask, how do they apply to

you and me? First of all, in order to be an instrument in the hand of the living Christ, we need a fresh spirit authenticating command or commission.

Verse two, picking up on verse one, I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach. Now, verse two, until the day when he was taken up after he had done something, namely after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. So that's the first thing that had to happen to these apostles.

They needed a fresh spirit authenticating command or commission. Now, let's focus on this little phrase through the Holy Spirit for a moment. It might be that all that Luke means is that the Holy Spirit prompted Jesus to give the command.

And in that sense, his command was through the Holy Spirit. But that seems not enough to me to really give an account for why Luke would include this here. To just say that the Holy Spirit prompted Jesus to say it doesn't seem to me to amount to much.

And so I started poking around looking to see if I could find any illustration of where this happened. And I want to direct your attention to a place where I think it did happen. And in my Bible, it's only one page to the left.

So see if it's one page to the left in your Bible. Namely, John chapter 20 verses 21 and 22. John chapter 20 verses 21 and 22.

The situation here is Jesus is risen from the dead and he has not yet ascended and he is giving a commission to his apostles. Let's read this now. Jesus said to them again, peace be with you.

As the father has sent me, even so send I you. There's the commission. Here comes the Holy Spirit.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. What's going on here? He gives them a commission. You go as I came.

And receive the Holy Spirit. Now, I've read lots and lots of commentaries and for myself had thought for years that basically this is an acted out parable of what was going to happen later at Pentecost. So that when he said receive the Holy Spirit and breathed on them, nothing happened.

Except to say it's going to be like this in a few weeks at Pentecost. Then you'll get the Holy Spirit. Because operating under the assumption that the Holy Spirit comes in nice, definable packages.

There's a Pentecost package and there can't be anything, you know, messing that up beforehand. It's got to be neat, clean with borders around it. See, Pentecost.

And if he were to come here, that would get us all goofed up. And I just thought yesterday, what big deal? I mean, the Holy Spirit is free. He's a person.

He blows where he wills. What's this package deal? And I thought to myself, why not? I mean, why not just let it be like what it looks like? And say when he breathed on them, the Holy Spirit ministered to them. A special needed ministry for that moment.

And you know what they needed at that moment? They had just heard something absolutely awesome. As the Father sent me, and I got killed and crucified, I'm going to send you. Well, they need some help at that

moment, right? I mean, they need some help to believe it.

They need some help to accept it. They need even more help to be glad about it. And he says, now, I know you need help.

This little physical statement. And the Holy Spirit comes and ministers to them, helps them. I think that happened.

I'm not locked in to saying the Holy Spirit can't touch anybody till Pentecost. John the Baptist was full of the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit in the wilderness.

Jesus did all of his works by the power of the Holy Spirit. I think the disciples did their works by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's all over the place in the New Testament.

He's not just packaged up in little pieces. You only get a little piece here. And you can't have any more until you get the Pentecost piece.

And so I think when Luke says they received a command, a commission through the Spirit. It not only refers to Jesus being enveloped and guided by the Holy Spirit. But at that moment when they received that command, they were helped by the Holy Spirit.

It came through the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit bore the commandment right into their heart, right into their minds. Helped them understand it.

Helped them accept it. Helped them get ready for it. And maybe even said, and if you wonder by what power you're going to be able to do this.

You just wait and see what happens in two weeks. I think that's the sort of thing that happened when he gave them the command. Number two.

The first one was we all need a fresh Spirit authenticating commission from the Lord. Second thing we need that's mentioned in this verse is verification that Jesus is alive. To them, I'm reading verse three to them.

He presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs appearing to them during 40 days. He presented himself living alive after his death, after his passion. And he did it with many proofs for 40 days appearing to them.

Now, here's the point. You can't be an authentic instrument in the hands of the living Christ. If you are not persuaded in your mind and gripped in your heart that he's alive.

You can't do it. You're just utterly inauthentic. If you try to do the work of the ministry or try to be a Christian or try to bear witness.

And you don't even know if he's alive and reigning and powerful, triumphant over death. That's what had to happen to these men. They had to see and know deep down, no more doubts, no more discouragements.

He's alive. He triumphed over death when he was the rejected stone thrown on the trash heap of Golgotha, lying in a slump, hump of bloody flesh at the foot of the cross. The last thing he looked like was triumphant king of the universe.

It took a lot of proving to get them to believe this man reigns. This man is the Lord of the universe. I mean, if you think you've got problems believing it.

Had you seen what he looked like at the foot of the cross when they pulled him down like a piece of wet spaghetti at the bottom, all red and torn. You wouldn't have said this man is coming to nothing here. And for 40 days, you know what he said? He did things like this.

Go back to Luke's first volume and read chapter 24. It says he came to them and he said, see my hands and my feet that it is. I myself handle me and see for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.

And this is what they did. And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and he ate it before them. He did that sort of thing again and again and again for 40 days until they persuaded themselves.

This is no vision. This is no ghost. I'm not hallucinating.

Our mind is on straight. He is alive. He will reign.

His cause is unstoppable. We can lay our lives down for him. Let's go.

That's what had to happen. And it's got to happen for you too in measure. And the New Testament is perfectly aware that you will never see Jesus in the flesh until he comes.

Remember what he said to Thomas? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Remember what it says in first Peter one eight, where it says, having not seen him, you loved him and rejoiced with joy, unspeakable and full of glory. There is a verification granted by God through his word.

That he is alive and you need that. And you need to pray that God would give it to you if you don't have it already. We need to be persuaded.

He is alive. Because he is. Lastly, number three.

We've seen first that he's alive and that he's doing his work. And then we saw that we need a spirit authenticating commission. We need a verification of his life and victory.

And finally, we need instruction about the kingdom. You see that at the end of verse three. Appearing to them during 40 days and speaking of the kingdom of God, speaking of the kingdom of God.

Do you remember how slow of heart these disciples were to believe all that was written by the prophets? You remember how hard it was to get a handle on that? He is the king and yet he's going to suffer and they couldn't figure it out. And so this is a 40 day crash course in post resurrection kingdom theology. And we need it.

Because we're often as confused as they are now. How was the kingdom prophesied Jesus in the Old Testament? And he explains in Luke 24. And how did the kingdom come in you and yet not yet come fully? And how is it supposed to look when it comes in the form of the church in our secular age? And how will it come at the end of the age? Would you give us a 40 day crash course in kingdom theology? So that we understand how much of your kingdom is to be here and how much of your kingdom is not to be here.

And when you're going to heal people and when you aren't going to heal people. And when you're going to do miracles and when you're not going to do miracles. Because there's an already of the kingdom and there's a not yet of the kingdom.

We need your help Jesus. Give us this course. That's another reason I think this book is really important and valuable for us.

Because I think Luke wrote the book to demonstrate for us the sort of mixture. The sort of failures. The sort of futility that we're up against in a fallen sinful age.

Mixed with a lot of wonderful work of the living Jesus. Something that will constantly keep us questioning. Will he do it here? Will he do it here? Will it be this way or will it be this way? And I think the book of Acts is going to give us a careful weather vane.

As to how the wind of the spirit is blowing on this side of the ascension. And my prayer this morning really is that you'll all want this very much. That you'll want a fresh spirit authenticating commissioning.

And I'm going to pray that you're just receiving it right now. That you feel welling up in your heart. A fresh commissioning for your job.

Or your calling whatever it's been. Or your task in this church. Or your family commitments that have been threatened.

A fresh empowering commissioning from Jesus this morning. And secondly that Christ is opening his reality to you. So that there's a verification coming to you.

Even as I preach. He's alive. He really is alive.

When I walk out of here he's going to be in the car with me. He's going to hear how my wife and I or my husband and I or my friend and I talk to each other. He's going to hear the argument.

He's going to hear the way I address my kids. His hand's going to be extended from the back seat of the car over the front. Full of forgiveness and blessing and kindness and willingness to help.

And abundance of all that you need. He is alive. And then the third thing I'm praying for is that God will be teaching us about the kingdom.

And that we'll be growing together about how it was present in Jesus. And how it should be present now. And how it will be present in the age to come.

And the book of Acts is going to give us good guidance in these things. And keep stimulating us to grow. Let's pray.

Father, that's my prayer now. That right now in this room. Your Son's presence by His Spirit.

Would be commissioning people afresh by the Holy Spirit. Let's speak to them Lord. About the work to which you've called them.

And would you right now verify your life. Some came in here really doubtful that Jesus is alive. Some came in very unbelieving that Jesus reigns.

Right now in heaven until He puts all of His enemies under His feet. And every nation in the world will bow one day. And that He is exerting His power through His church.

I pray that their eyes would be opened like you opened the heart of Lydia. To believe the glory of Christ in the gospel. And finally Father, I pray that all of us would be taught.

By what I've shared and by what we will read in Your Word. By books we will read, radio we will listen to, TV's we will watch. And the ongoing instruction of the book of Acts.

Oh, make us a people hungry for the Word of God. Lord, we look in the coming days and weeks. For the evidences of Your powerful grace in this hour.

In Jesus name. And all the people said, Amen. Thank you for listening to this message.

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