Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Continuing Christ's Work, Part 1
Scripture: Acts 1:1-3
Code: 44-3

Well, we're going to open to the book of Acts, finally, and I'm going to at least read Verse 1.

I do confess to you that I am a firm believer that if you understand the overall significance of a book, you can navigate it. I don't know how you are if you ever use a Google map, but when pop up a Google map on your iPad or whatever it is and you want directions, if you're like me, you want to see the whole picture first. I want to know A to Z, and then I can get down into the details and kind of track along with that if I have some kind of sense of where I'm going.

I think that works really well in studying the Bible, especially when you approach a new book, to get some kind of an overview of the whole thing, to pull back and get the full picture. Now in reading Verse 1, you're going to get enough for us to get started. The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach. Luke is referring – Luke is the writer, the historian. He's referring to his gospel, the Gospel of Luke.

That was the first account that he composed and sent to this gentleman named Theophilus, which means "Lover of God." And first volume of history was about all that Jesus began to do and teach. That's a very important verb. Luke wrote Volume 1, the Gospel of Luke, about all that Jesus began to do and teach. The Book of Acts is Volume 2 about the continued doing, if you will, and teaching of Jesus.

The gospels, you might say in one sense, tell the story of the finished work of Christ. You do remember that he said in his high priestly prayer in anticipation of the cross in John 17:4, "I have finished the work you gave me to do." And then on the cross, according to John 19:30, just before he gave up his life, he said, "It is finished." So it is true that the first volume, the Gospel of Luke, and for that matter, all the other gospel writers, tell us of the finished work of Christ. The long awaited sacrifice for sin that satisfied God fully, he offered.

By the sacrifice and offering of himself, he saved forever those who believed, and of course, he secured their redemption by his resurrection from the dead. Now nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ. Nothing. It was satisfactory to God, and so God raised him from the dead to validate his satisfaction, and then God gave him a name above every name, exalted him to his right hand, gave him the name Lord, restored him to complete exalted heavenly glory, and even added a new dimension now as the savior because he had offered personally the sacrifice.

And so he would then purchase with that work a vast array of redeemed people throughout all of human history who would forever praise and honor and glorify him. This is the work that Jesus finished, but there also was the work that Jesus only began. The work of redemption he finished. The work of doing and teaching he just began. The work of proclaiming the gospel, teaching the kingdom, and living the kingdom he only began.

You might say he began in his ministry to collect the elect. He began to collect them, small group they were as we reminded in our study on Sunday morning in John 6. He began to collect the elect, but he only began that. By the time he ascended into heaven, there are just a few. They're all in one tiny little country in the midst of this globe. A hundred and twenty gather in the upper room in Jerusalem, and several hundred more in Galilee, and that's the beginning. That's what Jesus began.

So Acts, as Luke continues to write, is the story of what Jesus continues to do and teach. This is Volume 2, although it's the first book of church history, it's Volume 2 of the New Testament history of redemption. And if you will, it could be said that it's actually Volume 3 because the first volume of redemptive history is the Old Testament itself. Acts continues the story, the story and the long process completing God's redemptive work through Christ.

So Luke says the first account I composed, the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel, which like the other three Gospels, tells the story of, listen, of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament gives the prophecies of the coming of Messiah, and the Gospels give the record of the realization of those prophecy. The plan of God promised in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament.

God brings the chosen redeemer to save Israel and the nations that was promised throughout the Old Testament. So Luke's Volume 1 is very, very important. Let's go back to Luke 1 for a moment, and let me read the first four verses so you understand something about Luke's writing. By the way, if you ever have the opportunity to listen to the messages that were preached from this section when we went through Luke, you'll find them very instructive.

So Luke writes, "In as much as many have undertaken to compile account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses of servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well having investigated everything carefully from the beginning to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

Now I just want to grab one phrase, the exact truth. Luke is a fastidious historian to start with from the human view. He's a meticulous historian. And you add to that, of course, that he's inspired by the Holy Spirit, and he sets off to write, and in Luke's mind, he doesn't know this will be called Luke, and

he doesn't know Volume 2 will be called Acts. He writes one great, long history, and the goal was exact truth. To provide absolute certainty of the facts of redemptive history, to provide full assurance to believers, like Theophilus and others, that God's promise of salvation was being fulfilled.

The prophecies in the Old Testament that came through the prophets to whom he refers as eyewitnesses and servants of the word, those prophecies were precise and exact and identified places like where he'd be born in Bethlehem and details about his life and details about his death. So Luke wants to write a history to show that all the precision of the Old Testament that pointed toward Christ was fulfilled with the same kind of precision.

So Acts then continues the story of the exact truth of God fulfilling Old Testament prophecy with the coming of Messiah, and then after Messiah's resurrection and ascension, God continues to fulfill the story, and Luke writes with the same precision. Why? To provide certainty. To provide certainty so that you may know the exact truth about the things you've been taught so that you may know.

You'll remember that at the end of this book of Luke, as Luke signs off, Jesus opened their minds to understand the scripture, and he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem. You're witnesses of these things, and behold, I'm sending forth the promise of my father upon you, namely the Holy Spirit. Stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high."

And that is how Volume 1 ends, and Volume 2 essentially begins with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is promised in the book of Luke and comes in the book of Acts the way the Messiah was promised in the Old Testament and came in the book of Luke. This is an exact and precise history. The early readers were being taught then essentially that the apostles and the prophets spoke the truth.

Luke writes to give them assurance. The Holy Spirit would come and the work would continue. Luke writes with certainty about Christ from his birth to his ascension in Volume 1, and he writes with certainty from the ascension to the coming of the Holy Spirit to the gospel being proclaimed to the world for the establishment of the church.

That's just kind of a broad overview. As in the Old Testament, all that is going on in Luke and Acts is being done by God. I told you God is the sovereign power behind all of redemptive history, and the spirit works the will of the father, and the son does the will of the father. God is at work redeeming his people in the Old Testament and in the New. An interesting little note. Luke loves to use a particular word in its death in the Greek language, and it means it is necessary. Luke uses that word 40 times in his writings to affirm to us that it is necessary that this happen.

It is necessary that this happened. It is necessary Luke records in his Gospel because the Old Testament profit said it. It is necessary, Luke says in the book of Acts, because Jesus predicted it and promised it. So Acts is Volume 2 of Luke's history, and the first volume of the history of the church written to give believers an exact account so they could have confidence that God is still fulfilling his redemptive promise.

And you might say, "Why do they need confidence? Why do they need assurance?" For one thing, Judas had killed himself, and another had to be chosen to replace him among the 12, and that happens in the first chapter of Acts. Judas was an apostle. Is that a preview of more disaster to come? But the message is that nothing can stop the purpose of God or the power of God from unfolding, not even the apostasy and suicide of an apostle.

Alan Thompson writes, "The dominant feature is that the sovereign plan of God has not been derailed by this most wicket of actions, a betrayal from among the ranks of Jesus' own inner circle." And then subsequently, the suicide of the betrayer. In fact, it is necessary. We're told in Chapter 1 that it fulfills prophecy. Verse 20. God is at work. All the redemptive purpose of God continues.

So what do we call this book? The Acts of the Apostles? The only time the apostles appear is in Chapter 1. Together, as a group, then you have Peter and John together for a while. And then later, you have the Apostle Paul who is really not part of the apostles. So kind of a push to call it the Acts of the Apostles, even though that's probably what's in your Bible.

Some have said it should be called The Acts of the Father because if anybody is at work unfolding his redemptive plan, it is the father, it is God, and you know what, you can make a case for that because the Lord opens the heart of Lydia because in Chapter 14 in Verse 27, when they arrive together, the church together, they begin to report all that God had done.

So you could make an argument that we could call it The Acts of the Father. You could also have an argument and we could call it The Acts of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit separates Paul and Barnabas, so the Holy Spirit is working to separate these men to send them on the missionary trip out of Antioch.

I kind of prefer the Acts of the Risen Lord because the theme of the preaching through the whole book is the resurrection. That's the theme of the preaching. Starting with the message at Pentecost, Christ has arisen from the dead, and all the apostolic preachers feature the risen Christ. You say, "Well, it's one thing to preach the risen Christ, but is the risen Christ acting?" Yes. Let's go back to Verse 1.

The first account, the Gospel of Luke, was about all that Jesus began to do and teach, and so we could conclude that what he began, he would also complete. Alan Thompson, whom I quoted a minute ago, says this. This is his title for the book. “The Acts of the Lord Jesus through his people by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the father’s purposes.” So write that just under Acts in your Bible. That’s it. The Acts of the Lord Jesus through his people by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of the father’s purpose.

Is Jesus involved in the Book of Acts? Is he continuing to be involved? Yes. He has gone back to heaven and been placed at the right hand of God, given a name above every name. He is the Lord. He is identified as the head of the church. Several times in the epistles, he is the head of the church, reigning from heaven as the head of the church as the king over his spiritual kingdom, he extends his kingdom through the history of the Book of Acts.

It is the Lord Jesus at work. You begin to see that in Chapter 2, Verse 47. And the Lord was adding to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. The one who is Lord, the one who is the Lord of the church, he is still at work. He is saving. He is adding people to the church. He is after all, remember now, the head of the church and the king over his kingdom.

In Chapter 11, I’m just giving you some illustrations, we’ll see it as we go, there were some of them, men of Cypress and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks, also preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them, and the large number who believed turned to the Lord. So they were preaching the Lord and hand of the Lord, same Lord, was there.

They were preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord Jesus was causing people to be saved. So again, the king is on his kingdom. The king is over his kingdom. He is the head of the church. He is building his church. He is saving his people. One other illustration just for the sake of time would be in Chapter 16 in Verse 14.

A woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, was listening, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. Some might argue that’s God. I would argue that where Lord appears in this book, given that it was the name of Christ, he is at work. There’s a negative indicator, too, of Jesus’ involvement. If you go to Chapter 8, you find Paul persecuting the church, ravaging the church.

And we all know the story. Who stopped Paul? Who stopped him? Jesus. Showed up on the Damascus Road in Chapter 9. Stopped him dead in his tracks. Now Jesus is engaged both in the growth of his church and in stopping the destruction of his church. Jesus appears in the 18th Chapter in a vision to Paul and says, “Don’t be afraid any longer. Go on speaking, and don’t be silent, for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in the city.”

Jesus, the head of the church, says, “I’m going to reach people in this city who belong to me, and I will protect you. I will protect you. You have nothing to fear. Go on preaching.” So here is the Lord building his church, and the Lord of the church protecting his church. Chapter 23. Things are getting very difficult for Paul. Persecution amping up with a conspiracy to actually kill him. Verse 11, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage, for as you have solemnly witnessed to my cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also. I’ll protect you until you reach Rome.”

So in summary, the Lord Jesus reigns over his kingdom from heaven. The Lord Jesus is engaged in building his church by adding people to the list of redeemed, saved souls. He is fulfilling the father’s plan, and he’s doing it by the preaching of the Gospel and the power of the spirit working through the preaching. But make no mistake, it is the Lord continuing the work he began.

The gospel is preached, sinners are saved, the church is established, leaders are chosen, saints are edified, witnesses given for Christ, and all along, the believers are suffering for their noble effort and being rejected by the world, but the Lord is protecting them so that the gospel can be preached, and the elect will be gathered, and this is the history of the church until he returns.

Acts is the first volume in that history where Christ continues the work that he began when he was on earth. By the way, we’re writing Volume 21 if we just count centuries, but it’s the same work. What’s going on? The Lord Jesus is reigning from heaven. He is the head of the church. According to the father’s plan and by the Holy Spirit’s power, he is continuing to do what he began when he was on earth.

The Gospel is being preached, sinners are being delivered, the church is being established, leaders are being chosen, saints are being edified, witness given for Christ, and all along, the saints are suffering but being protected so that they can do the work of bringing in the elect. This will go on until he establishes his rule on the earth when he comes to reign.

Now Luke is not an apostle, but he’s a close friend. Essentially, he was a close associate of the apostles for 30 years from 30 AD to 60, it appears. And he knows the story. He knows the history. He knows the history, from the death of Christ on. He was part of it. So he knows what happened in Jerusalem and Judea and Sumeria and beyond because he was there.

The Book of Acts, I want to tell you, sometimes people ask the question – in fact, I was asked this question recently. Is the Book of Acts descriptive of prescriptive, which his a technical way of saying is it just history for the sake of information, or is it theology for the sake of edification? The answer is yes. Of course it’s descriptive. Like all narrative texts of scripture, it is descriptive history, but it is also prescriptive theology because its history is our theology. It is our ecclesiology. It is our pneumatology.

It is our soteriology because they preach the gospel we preach. This is the church of which we are a part. So in a sense, what began to be in the Book of Acts still is, and on the same basis, we're living this history, which while not written down in the New Testament is written down with the same exact precision in heaven. Kind of exciting to be a part of that. Isn't it? I think there's another message that you need to understand was very, very important to be communicated in this pattern of growth, and it is this: That the gospel is universal, and it goes beyond Israel.

Even the disciples were pretty stuck on the fact that all the promises of God were theirs and maybe theirs alone. They had the traditional, typical attitude toward gentiles that the Jews had developed through centuries, and toward half-breed Samaritans, it was even worse. And Jesus, after all, came to Israel and really never went beyond Israel, other than journeying a little bit into Decapolis, an area around Galilee where gentile towns had developed.

The Jews were very provincial about the promises of God belonging to them, but the Book of Acts just blows that to pieces. You could go back to the Old Testament, and I could show you passages in the Old Testament where the messianic promises relate to the world and the nations. There are many of them. Somehow the Jews missed that.

You're not very long into the Book of Acts until you realize that Philip is preaching to the gentiles, but a gentile eunuch is converted, that Peter is preaching to a gentile soldier named Cornelius, that the church is established after Jerusalem in a gentile city called Antioch, and that Paul takes the gospel to the gentiles all over the Mediterranean world of Asia Minor.

And that leads to a discussion in Acts 15 about, wait a minute, how does this work. This is such a hard sell that when the first gentile conversions happen, God allows the same miraculous phenomena of tongues to occur so that the Jews don't think this is some kind of a second class event to Pentecost. So there was a very important message to proclaim to the Jews through the Book of Acts, and it starts in the very first chapter in the eighth verse.

"Go preach in Jerusalem, Judea, Sumeria, and the world, that Christianity is global." And we will see that. You could divide the Book of Acts into six sections. You won't remember this, so I'm not going to give you detail on it, but Section 1 ends at Chapter 6, Verse 7 tells the story of the church at Jerusalem and the preaching of Peter.

And it finishes by saying the word of God increased by the number of the disciplines multiplied in Jerusalem, a great multiplication, a great number of priests were obedient to the faith, and that's the end of Section 1, and the gospel expands. From Chapter 6, Verse 8 through Chapter 9, Verse 31, the gospel spreads throughout Israel, Judea, all the way to the martyrdom of Stephen, all the way to the preaching in Sumeria by Philip.

And that section ends this way, Chapter 9, Verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Sumeria enjoyed peace, being built up, and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. So Chapter 6, Verse 7 ends the first section by saying the church increased.

Chapter 9, Verse 31 moves the church throughout Judea and into Sumeria and says at the end, the church increased. You come to the third section. That would be from 9:32 over to Chapter 12, Verse 24. That section ends – and by the way, that section includes the extension of the church to the gentiles, Antioch, and that ends with these words. “Let the word of the Lord continue to grow and be multiplied.”

This is the story of the building of the church, the developing of the church, the addition of the church from the beginnings of Jerusalem then to Judea and Sumeria, and then into the gentile world as far as Antioch. And that also includes the salvation of Cornelius through the instrumentality of Peter. So the gentiles are adding.

The next section is Chapter 12, Verse 25 to Chapter 16, Verse 5, and this tells the story of the church going way beyond Antioch, jumping into Asia Minor, and the preaching tour through Galatia by the Apostle Paul. And that section ends in Chapter 16, Verse 5, so the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily.

These sections that all end with the same sort of summary of the development of the growing church. Sixteen six begins to tell the story of Paul reaching the great gentile cities, like Ephesus and beyond Asia Minor even into Corinth, and this ministry goes on all the way into Chapter 19, and it ends in Verse 20. So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

That’s how all the sections end. Final section, Chapter 19, Verse 21, goes all the way to the end. Tells the story of the final years of Paul’s ministry before his imprisonment in Rome. And how does that section end at the end of the book? He stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness unhindered.

So that’s the overview of the history of Acts. Got it? It’ll be on the quiz. The quiz will be in 20 minutes. I wouldn’t do that to you. But it’s important, isn’t it? Does that get your arms around this book that could just be a lot of stories that you couldn’t quite grasp? It ends with Paul in prison, and so Luke stops there.

Luke had lived through 30 miraculous years from the resurrection to the imprisonment of Paul. He’d lived in those 30 years of the first fulfillment of the great commission by the first force of apostolic

preachers to the point where churches were established, and the next generation was put in place by placement of elders. In fact, Luke wrote a history, started in Jerusalem, and ended when the gospel was penetrating Rome, the capital of the world, their world.

So I'd like to think of this as 30 years in which Jesus continued his work ordained by the father, energized by the Holy Spirit, and brought to fruition through the means of apostolic preaching of the gospel. It's a magnificent story. It's an incredible account. Let's go back to the first chapter for a few minutes we have. And in Chapter 1, we have some very essential foundational elements given here because the father's plan worked through the spirit's power by the son, has some requirements.

And it's quite interesting that Chapter 1 sort of lays these foundational truths. The narrative part doesn't really start until Verse 12 when it says, "Then they returned from the Mount called Olivet. So before we get into the actual action here, there are some things that precede that, very important things. Let me read 1 through 11.

"The first account I composed to Theophilus about all that Jesus began to do and teach 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. To these, he also presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of 40 days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God."

"Gathering them together, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the father had promised." By the way, that's how he ended Luke, and that's how begins the next volume, which he said, "You have heard from me." In other words, the Lord had promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. "For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." "So when they had come together, they were asking him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It's not for you to know the times or epics which the father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Sumeria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.'"

"After he had said these things, he was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received him out of their sight, and as they were gazing intently into the sky while he was going, behold two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.' And with that, they went back to Jerusalem. School was over. Initial lessons were taught."

Six things appear in those 11 verses that I read to you. In what you would call the final lesson, the final preparation, this if you would like to call it is the last will and testament of Jesus. This is the last

talk he ever had with them before he went back to heaven. Very critical. Very important. And in these words here, and they are few, really, he gives to them all that they need. He reminds them of all that is essential, and let me just suggest there are six things here.

The first is he says you have to have the proper message. You have to have the right message. You have to have also the right confidence. Thirdly, you have to have the right power. And then, interestingly enough, you have to have the right mystery. You have to have the right mission, and you have to have the right motive.

These are timeless. These we need to know because we're just continuing to be the instruments that he uses to finish what he began. We need to make sure the message is right. We need to make sure we have confidence in that message. We need power beyond ourselves. We need the right mystery, and I'll explain that. We need to have a clear vision of the task or the mission, and then an overwhelming and overarching motive.

Now we're not going to cover all of this tonight, we never intended to. This is for us to work on over the next few, but let's just take a look at the message. To effectively carry on Christ's work, you have to begin with the message. The message has to be right. And if I can piggyback on what we were saying this morning, it all starts with the words of Jesus. Correct? It all starts with the words of Jesus.

That's why there are four gospels. So we can get as many of the words of Jesus as the Holy Spirit wants us to have. Plenty of people running around with the wrong message. They are wearisome. Aren't they? Cults and corrupt versions of Christianity, misrepresentations of Jesus and the gospel. It's important to have the right message. I'm not talking about biblical ignorance here. I remember there was a test given to college students some years ago to try to find out how they – what level they were familiar with the Bible.

The answers were really incredible. Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers on some answers. Who were Sodom and Gomorrah? Lovers. Who was Jezebel? One answer was Ahab's jackass. Who was Eve? She was a woman created from an apple. One college student said Jesus was baptized by Moses. I'm not talking about that kind of ignorance. That's everywhere and far worse today than it's ever been. Biblical ignorance is at an all time high.

Sadly, there's an awful lot of ignorance about the message, the gospel message, even in, quote unquote, the church, evangelicalism. I don't need to belabor the point, but when Jesus began his work, it included teaching Verse 1. It included teaching. And Luke is a great model for this because Luke wants the exact truth. I love that about him. He is the precise historian.

"I'm writing," he says, "So you have the exact truth." And the only place we can go for this is the scripture. And when you have that confidence in the scripture, that it is the exact truth, you're

launched as an effective communicator of the gospel. When you know the word and you believe the word, you're powerful because you're not equivocating. There are all kinds of people who write books that critique Christianity, call things into question, deny the inspiration of scripture. These are from so-called Christian writers, Christian scholars. I would remind you that those kind of people are impotent. They're just another guy with another opinion.

When you hear powerful preaching, when you hear powerful representation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you know one thing for sure: There is a preacher who believes in scripture because he boldly proclaims it. That's where the ministry has to start. If we're going to build the church, we can only build the church on the truth of the gospel. Right?

Faith comes by hearing the truth concerning Christ, the word of Christ. Romans 10. How will they hear without a preacher? But the preacher has to preach the message concerning Christ. So I don't need to beg that issue any further. You get that. You know that. Everything begins with the teaching. That's why there's a seminary across the patio because you have to get it right.

If anybody preaches another gospel, let them be what? Let them be damned, cursed. If anybody preaches another Christ, let them be cursed. But there's another little word there, too, and it says that Jesus began to do and teach. And while we can't do what Christ did, miraculously, that's not what it's talking about. What it's talking about is the power of his life to draw people. You remember it was he who said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself." He was attractive not only because of his teaching, but because he personified what he taught. He was consistent with his message. And I simply want to make that an issue for your thinking that if the Lord is going to use us, there's going to have to be the right message in the right package, the right messenger.

And always remember that statement by the German philosopher. Show me your redeemed life, and I might be inclined to believe in your redeemer. Pretty hard to make the gospel believable unless it's believable when somebody looks at you. Not that you have to be perfect, but you have to demonstrably be committed to the truth you teach. There are lots of people who talk about Christ but don't live a life that points to his power.

I remember reading an article year ago where a writer said, "Personally, I've discovered that Jesus probably had a lot more class than most of his agents." It is a familiar knock on Christianity that I wouldn't want to be a Christian because there are so many hypocrites, and while that's a pretty lame excuse, and it won't stand up before God, there's some truth to it.

Powerful preaching comes from the overflow of powerful demonstration of the transforming gospel. So that's where you have to start. You have to start with the right message, clearly. And so Jesus, until the day he was taken up to heaven, Verse 2, after he had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom he had chosen. What is that saying?

That is saying that Jesus continued to live the message and teach the message until the ascension. Until the ascension, he was the personification, the incarnation of everything he preached and taught. This was the priority. I just would like to make the point that Jesus didn't spend those final 40 days feeding poor people, although that's a noble thing to do.

If you look at the next verse, end of the verse, for 40 days, he was speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. This school was in. I would have loved to have been in that seminary, 24/7 for 40 days with a risen Christ. You'd hang on every word. You'd absolutely hang on every word. But this is where all of our work begins. It begins with the right message.

Understanding the truth of the gospel, the truth of the kingdom, and living it as we proclaim it so that from the time that Jesus arose and met with his disciples in that upper room on the resurrection night, for the next 40 days, he had those chosen apostles with him, instructing them in the things concerning the kingdom of God. That's what they're going to be doing if they're faithful.

They're going to be instructing others. That is discipleship at its most profound point. And they had a lot to learn. Didn't they? You go back and look at how they lived and how they were so confused all the time and how he taught them lessons – the same lesson, again and again. They didn't seem to get it. They were so ill prepared for what was going to come that even when Jesus was arrested, they all fled and scattered.

They were hard pressed to believe even when he appeared to them risen from the dead. Thomas who wasn't there said, "I'm not going to believe that." They didn't believe on the road to Emmaus. They were beleaguered. John's gospel ends with them going back to their fishing nets even after Jesus had appeared to them and taught them, to some degree, some of those 40 days.

They were hard to communicate to, but these were desperate times. This was it. This was it. When the 40 days were over, it was over. How urgent it is that the message be communicated. That's the priority. So for 40 days, he taught them the message they would have to preach. But by the way, even with the right message, they weren't ready to go yet. They weren't ready to go. That's why he had previously said, "Don't go. Stay where? Stay in Jerusalem until you're empowered from on high."

So the message is essential, and the living of the message is essential, but I will promise you one thing. Even with the right message and doing your best to conform to that message, your own human power isn't going to make the difference. I love what Spurgeon said. "We might preach until our tongue rotted, until we exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit uses the word to convert that soul."

So it is blessed to eat into the very heart of the truth until at last, you come to talk in scripture language, and your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord so that your blood is bibline, and the very essence of the Bible flows from you. But you still need the Holy Spirit. School was in, and the truth was taught. There's one other thing that I would add, and then we'll stop. A second point. You have to have the proper confidence.

Now remember, they didn't have a Bible, except the Old Testament. They knew now because they had the gospels that the prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled. And what did I tell you was the marked characteristic of the early apostolic preaching in the Book of Acts? Their use of what? The Old Testament. They get it. Made that point in the first message we talked about Acts. You see quotes from the Old Testament all over the place that you never see in the gospels. They didn't know that the Old Testament was being fulfilled until here. Now they know.

And so you – they all of a sudden start using Old Testament prophecies and saying, "They're fulfilled, they're fulfilled, they're fulfilled." So they did have confidence now for the first time that scripture was fulfilled in Christ. But where was their confidence that the plan of God would go to the next generation, the next level of fulfillment? Here it is. Verse 3.

"To these, he also presented himself alive after his suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over 40 days." Where did their confidence come from? The what? What event? The resurrection. The resurrection. Over a period of 40 days between his passion and his ascension, Jesus appeared to them. Not all 40 days, but in intervals during those 40 days. And manifested himself to them not as some kind of apparition, not as some kind of ghost, not as some kind of ethereal being, not as some kind of a vision, but he appeared to them alive after his suffering with the wounds by many convincing proofs.

He really was alive from the dead. He really did live. Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 15 the urgency of the resurrection. If Christ is not risen, we're of all people most miserable. If Christ is not risen, all gospel preaching is foolish. If Christ is not risen, we have no hope. Everything is lost, and that's what they were saying on the road to Emmaus. "We thought he was to be the one."

So he keeps coming back over 40 days and appearing to them in infallible, incontrovertible convincing evidence that he is alive. That's a critical reality. That's their confidence. And you say, "Well, what does that do for me?" What it does for you is it gives you the very same confidence because the record of those proofs and appearances are given in holy infallible scripture. So you have the same experience.

Only difference is you, loved one, you have not seen, whom having not seen you love. Is there ample proof in the New Testament for the resurrection? Yes. If you have any questions about that, go look at the litany of sermons on resurrection Sunday that have been preached here in the last 40 some

years. The proofs of the resurrection are all recorded in the gospels, written down for us.

That was an absolutely essential confidence. They were so exploded into joy by the resurrection of Jesus Christ that that's what elevated them. That's what loose them from the despondency and the fears and the doubts and the questions and all the wondering about whether Jesus was the messiah. So if you're going to be effective in carrying on the work that Jesus began on his own and then passed onto the first generation and every other generation until we got to century number 21, you start with knowing the message, the right message, which is of course the word of God and the gospel, and having the right confidence that Christ is alive.

And he is building his church, and he wants to use you to do that. That's how the history goes. Well, that leads us to the next and really what is the compelling point. You have to have the right power. We'll keep that for next Sunday. Let's pray. Father, thank you again for your word to us. I say that almost every time because I'm so overwhelmed with gratitude for the shear blessing of scripture. No matter how I search it and search it and mine it and think about it, study it, it never disappoints. Never.

It always fulfills its promise to be alive, transforming truth. We're so blessed to be a part of what you're continuing to do of your unfinished work. We thank you that you finished the redemptive work, but you're not finished with the redeeming work. You continue to do it through us. May we be useful and faithful. Thank you for such a privilege. Amen.

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