

Good morning! My name is Matt and I want to welcome you all here today as we begin a very exciting series exploring the book of Acts. Hopefully, you all received one of these awesome little books when you came in – These are a gift from Eagle Ridge to each of you so that you take notes, follow along, and write thoughts and ideas down for yourself while we study and learn together. Please bring these each week to church as we go through this series, and then also to your Bridge groups to share ideas and write down things that you learn from each other. By the end of our time going through Acts, you'll have a wealth of personal notes concerning this material available for your future self! Now, just to explain the book a tiny bit, it has the Scripture on the left side of each page and a place for notes. It is written in the ESV, and while we typically read from the New Living Translation or NIV, but it should work just fine for our purposes.

Because of the way we're hoping you take notes going forward, worship notes may also be a little different. We'll try to provide some insight into some places you may want to highlight/underline or take notes on – but that's ultimately up to you. If there is a major theme, point, or idea that we believe the Scripture is pointing to, we may have that on the screen and in your worship notes, and those would be great things to also include in your notes in your book. But I want to challenge you to read through or listen to the entire book of Acts in one sitting.

And then read through a chapter or two at a time with us as we go through it together. I think you'll be surprised at what God will do.

So, let's chat about this book. Why Acts? Out of all the books in the Bible, why are we choosing this one to focus on? Well, to put it simply, Acts is pretty incredible! I love the NIV commentary's introduction to the book of **Acts**:

"Some scholars have regarded Acts as the most important book in the New Testament, or at least as its pivotal book, coming as it does between the Gospels and the letters. It records the origin and growth of the Christian movement, telling us how the first believers lived out Christianity. It describes its message and ministry, and its life – including its triumphs and trials, the passions that drove it, and the source of the power that energized it. Any Christian wanting to know how to be a disciple of Christ in this world should turn to Acts to know how the first Christians lived."

I described it this way to my youth group – If you want to know the Bible, the main points that God wants you to know, then read Acts – it summarizes the whole thing. It's got important points from the Old Testament, references to the Gospels, and what people did about it!

Now, there is a reason why Acts is so phenomenal as a book – and the NIV commentary touched on this when they mentioned “the source of power that energized it” referring to the early church. And that’s because this book is all about the movement of the Holy Spirit. In fact, some people go so far as to quip that the title of the book should be “Acts of the Spirit.” And we’ll see that right away in the first chapter today. But, I’d like to present to you this theme of the book. A grounding statement, so to speak, for everything that follows: **All Christian Ministry depends on the activity of the Holy Spirit.**

So, without further ado, let’s get into the book! I’ll be reading from the ESV, since that’s the same translation your books are in, but if you prefer to use a different translation, that’s just fine. Let’s start with **verses 1-3** – because there’s a lot right there.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,

Ok, let’s pause and take a critical look real quick and make sure we’re all on the same page. The writer starts out by talking about a different book – his first book, which he wrote for Theophilus. So, depending on whether or not this is something you already know, or will have trouble remembering, you may want to jot down

that Luke is the person writing this book for Theophilus, and his first book was the Gospel of Luke. Luke is a doctor and travels with Paul personally later in the story, and does a lot of fact-finding and writing from a historian's perspective. Let's **continue**:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Ok, so Luke is summarizing his Gospel a bit, but notice that he chooses to highlight that Jesus presented himself alive to the disciples after he was killed, and even documents the amount of time Jesus spent with them after he rose from the dead. This is all pretty important because we, as Christians, are often confronted by skeptics and non-believers who like to argue that the Bible is made up or invented. Luke is making it clear that this is objective fact. This happened. It happened in front of witnesses, it's recorded in city and government records, and it happened over 40 days – it wasn't a hallucination!

Ok, back to the **text**:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Ok, so, if you were here last week we spoke about how Jesus asked his disciples to first go to a mountain, then once they got there, he told them to go and make disciples of all nations. But right after he told them this, he told them to first head back to Jerusalem and wait a few days. What!?!? If I was there on that mountain, and I’m looking at God in the flesh, and he commands me to go make disciples... I’m ready to go! Why in the world would I wait a few days!?!? Well, Jesus explained that they were going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit... He was sending a helper, His Spirit, which would work through them to accomplish the mission. Because they can’t do this on their own! This is what we’ve been talking about! **All Christian Ministry depends on the activity of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus knew this – they didn’t. In fact, they were so clueless this **next section** is kind of dedicated to how clueless they were (and we are, by the way):

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Alright, I don't know if you caught that... but Jesus is literally about to be taken up on a cloud and they're still asking him about a physical, earthly kingdom for Israel where Jesus would be the ruler... They still don't quite get that the Kingdom Jesus is talking about is SO much bigger! Ok, let's keep going -

<sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Did you catch that? Power from the Holy Spirit – and then witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (By the way, they didn't really like Samaria very much, so I have a feeling he threw that in there just to drive his point home!)

<sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

And now they're standing there a little dumbfounded, staring at the sky and a couple of angels had to come down and say "Ok, guys, let's get a move on... Jesus is coming back... you've got stuff to do..." They even kind of throw out that "Men of Galilee" title to kind of highlight the fact that these small town guys are about to do some world-wide work.

Now, the rest of chapter 1 is kind of dull. And I want to be clear, just because some Scripture is dull, does not mean it's not important – it can't all be strong men ripping lions apart with their bare hands. But basically, they go back to Jerusalem, sit in a room together and have meetings. AND OF COURSE THEY DO! They haven't been given any power yet – this is what people do when they have something they need to do and have no power... they have meetings! 😊 Sorry... to close to home for some of us?? But here's the point – the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of chapter 1 has the disciples leaving the mountain and going out to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission and they do... almost nothing... I mean, don't get me wrong... they pick an apostle to replace Judas... because... yeah, organizational structure... that's what Jesus taught them... (I hope you're feeling my sarcasm)... But, to be fair, what can they do? They haven't been given the Spirit yet. Remember: **All Christian Ministry depends on the activity of the Holy Spirit.** Which means sometimes we just have to wait until the Holy Spirit is ready to move!

So, when the Spirit does come at the start of chapter 2 – it's like an explosion!

Things take off! And it should be obvious that there is an extreme difference between what they do on their own and what the Spirit does through them. And that's what the rest of this series is about – what the Spirit does through people.

So, you just have to ask yourself – in a world where you have been gifted the Spirit of God - dwelling inside of you – is your life reflective of that explosion?!?

Or are you constantly trying to have meetings and get organized!? Let me ask that another way: Are you submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit? Or are you still trying to control things? Because when we are in control – we get meetings...

When the Spirit is in control – we get an atom bomb of spiritual movement.

Meetings a fine – sometimes we need a period of waiting, and planning – BUT there should be a release of power when the Spirit does move!

So, as you reflect on this chapter at home and in your Bridge Groups I want you to ask yourself these questions:

1. What is the Holy Spirit trying to say to me?
2. What do I need to do about it?
3. What help do I need from others?

AND – if you don't have a Bridge Group...

And please – when you have a moment – write those answers in your book!

That's what the space is there for!