

Acts Intro: Signs of Life

Acts 1:1-3

1/31/2026

Custom

Recently, accusations have circulated online concerning our church and the presence of an individual who attends our services and is listed on the sex offender registry. Because these matters are serious and emotionally charged, I believe it is important to speak with clarity and truth. First, let me be unequivocal: Grace Calvary Chapel condemns and has zero tolerance for sexual abuse, sexual perversion, or the victimization of anyone—especially children. These sins are grievous before God, destructive to people, and intolerable within the life of Christ's church. Second, our church has strict, written policies regarding registered sex offenders. These policies are not casual, theoretical, or optional. They are carefully designed to prioritize safety, accountability, and wisdom. They include clear limitations, active oversight, security protocols, detailed background checks for all volunteers, and enforcement, including trained security personnel and camera systems. These measures exist precisely because we take these realities seriously. Third, the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches both justice and redemption. Scripture is clear that repentance does not erase consequences, nor does grace require naïveté. We do believe that Christ can redeem even the most broken sinner. If all sinners can't be saved, then no sinners can be saved. At the same time, the Bible calls shepherds to be wise, sober-minded, and protective of the flock (Acts 20:28; Matthew 10:16). Extending grace to sinners does not mean tolerating ongoing sin, nor does forgiveness remove the need for boundaries. We reject the false choice between being a church that protects people and being a church that believes in redemption. By God's design, we must do both. Finally, I want to say this plainly: slander, half-truths, and fear-driven accusations do not serve truth, justice, or the wellbeing of our community. We welcome honest questions and appropriate accountability. What we will not do is allow misinformation to undermine the safe environment of our church or the integrity of the gospel. We remain committed to shepherding wisely, guarding diligently, and extending Christ-centered grace without compromising truth. If you are part of our church family and have concerns, I invite you to speak with us directly. Scripture is clear that matters of this seriousness should be handled with truth, order, and love—not speculation or public accusation. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)—Pastor Josh Blevins

Introduction

Illustration

Everyone take a breath... How does that feel? Isn't it good to be living?

Quote

— *Jesus*

"I have come that they might have LIFE, and that more abundantly." -John 10:10

And yet, how many people, even Christians, are breathing, but they are not ALIVE? Yes, anatomically speaking, they are living, but spiritually speaking, they are missing on what life is all about!

There is a quality and a character of life that can only be experienced in Christ. And this life manifests itself visibly when a person is living it. When the life of Christ is active inside a person, you can see it because that life takes on a supernatural element.

Scripture

2 Corinthians 4:11 (NKJV) [11] For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

When the world sees this life inside a person, they don't quite identify with it. There is something different about that life that doesn't align with the world's value systems and pursuits. And yet, when you look at this life, there is something more genuine and more authentic that draws you into it. This is a life backed by real power.

THE EARLY CHURCH: This is the kind of life that identified the early church.

Let's make this clear up front: The first church was far from perfect—the church is not, and never has been perfect. When you read the New Testament, you discover they had people problems, leadership problems, church growth problems, sin problems, and ministry challenges. But even amid the problems and issues of the first church, you can't read the book of Acts without clearly seeing that this church was alive in Christ and was manifesting the evidence of that life! There was undeniable power demonstrated from an undeniable source. One of my favorite things about reading the book of Acts is not that it provides the "perfect" model for the church, but that it offers a contrast between how things started and where we've ended up.

Imagine the irony and impossibility of the success of the first church:

A small group of men and women with little prestige, no source of earthly influence or power, and very few earthly resources turned the world upside down (or right side)! One of the best accusations found against the church is in Acts 17:

Scripture

Acts 17:6 (NKJV) [6] But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."

Application

This was the dynamic of those first Christians: Lam people running around, blind people seeing, dead people walking away from their death beds, angels destroying prisons and freeing persecuted Christians, heavenly visions, thousands upon thousands of souls born again day after day, men giving their lives, people offering their treasures, people jammed in houses night after night praying and studying God's Word for hours on end, men and women selling everything they have to meet the needs of other Christians, a Roman government that was left astounded and helpless and a religious system that was left frustrated and weak. This church was alive!

It makes me excited just thinking about it! And all this due to what? A living God, the Holy Spirit, enabling and emboldening a bunch of people who found eternal life and abandoned worldliness to make themselves available to God.

This was a church breathing in and out the life of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit!

Concern:

I'm afraid that, for many Christians today, we are trading true life and power for a form of godliness and a false promise of life, security, and comfort from this world. If I'm honest when I look at the priorities and activities of many people in today's world, I could say:

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

"Much of our activity these days is nothing more than a cheap anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life."

Culturally, many people have a Christian exterior, an appearance of spiritual life—while their marriages are dead, their family's spiritual life is dead, their personal walk with Christ is dead, their witness to the world is dead, their service to the body of Christ is dead, their spiritual fervency and passion is dead, their worship is dead and their faith is dying.

Hey, last time I checked, we serve a Savior who walked out of a tomb ALIVE!

Scripture

Rom 8:11 NKJV - But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

In Revelation 3:1, Jesus writes one of His seven letters to the church in Sardis. He tells them this:

Scripture

Rev 3:1-2 NKJV - "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God."

What do we see here? That a church that is ALIVE matters to Jesus. And it's not the appearance or the reputation of life that matters, but the reality of it.

While speaking once to the religious Pharisees of the day, Jesus said:

Scripture

Mat 23:27 NKJV - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

OUCH! You mean you can have an appearance of nice, clean religion, good works, and spiritual life and be a walking spiritual tomb at the same time?

Illustration

This is a picture of our President. After a little while, you might not feel that something is quite right. That's because it's not. This is a wax statue of him. He will always look the same, but will never experience life. I, for one, don't want to be a wax statue Christian or be part of a wax statue church.

If you haven't figured it out by now, this study in the book of Acts will challenge the core of everything we are as a church and as Christians.

This study in the book of Acts might very well empty out our seats or fill them up. Regardless, as we receive God's Word, I believe the Holy Spirit will spark a revival in these last days, and we will see great things done for Christ's kingdom.

Turn to Acts 1:1-5

So what does all this have to do with the book of Acts? Everything. The book of Acts records the entire history of how the church began and all the things that the Holy Spirit did through this ragtag bunch of early disciples.

The book of Acts has received many titles.

Some of your Bibles might say, "The Acts of the Apostles." Some might say, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." I personally like the title commentator Kent Hughes came up with:

Quote

— Kent Hughes

"The Acts of the Risen Christ by the Holy Spirit working through the church." -Kent Hughes

So let's jump right in and understand the context for this narrative in verses 1-5.

Scripture

Acts 1:1-5 (NKJV) [1] The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach [2] until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, [3] to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. [4] And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; [5] for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So, as we move through these 5 verses, we are going to build a foundational understanding of a few things:

The letter of Acts is: #1 - Historical, #2 - Purposeful, #3 - Practical

Main Point

Acts is Historical

The authorship of Acts is attributed to Luke the physician.

This is the same Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke. It's accurate to say that Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke as a history of the ministry of Jesus.

Some of the evidence of Luke's authorship:

1. The introduction:

The introduction in Acts and the Gospel of Luke are similar in structure and written to the same person, Theophilus.

Scripture

Act 1:1 NKJV - The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...

Scripture

Luke 1:1-4 (NKJV) [1] Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, [2] just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, [3] it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, [4] that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Theophilus:

Some think that he was Luke's master. Unlike today, physicians were typically slaves back then. There's a solution to health care insurance... Own your own doctor! Others believe he was a high Roman official whom Luke encountered during a missionary journey, who was interested in understanding Jesus.

In reality, we aren't sure. His name comes from two Greek words, "Theo" and "Philos," which means "friend of God."

Some think that this is not a real person, but was written cryptically to all those who love God. Because Luke refers to him in the first person, I think he was a real person who happened to have a great name to match these books.

2. The historical accuracy - Understanding the historical authenticity and accuracy of Acts is very important. And Luke is an important part of this:

Luke tells us in his gospel that his intention was not to write a story or a fairy tale or an allegorical work of fiction, but to give "An orderly account from the very first."

Luke and Acts are an orderly account of historical events that come from:

Eyewitness testimony (People who were there in person) Personal testimony (Luke's own experiences)

Now, some would challenge the book of Acts strictly based on its supernatural content.

"Those ridiculous miracles are impossible." "Those are just silly invented stories."

So, let's take the "spiritual" content out for a minute and look at the writing from a literary and historical context.

Archeologically speaking, Luke's accounts of places and people are so accurate to that time that archeologists use his writings to discover Biblical places. Modern archeological discoveries in Asia Minor have continued to verify Luke's details.

The late renowned archaeologist, chemist, and Nobel Prize winner, Sir William Ramsay wrote that:

Quote

— Sir William Ramsay

"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... he should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

It's important to note that when Sir William Ramsey set out for Asia Minor, it was with the intention of disproving the Bible's historical accuracy. Instead, after years of discovery and evaluation, he converted and became a Christ follower. There is so much evidence that we don't have time to discuss or present it all. But consider this interesting fact.

Illustration

In Athens, Greece, over 7,500 inscriptions have been found in the Greek Agora [image]. They attest to the large number of inscribed altars, monuments, and buildings that existed in this part of Athens' vast market area. Excavations by the American School of Classical Studies in 1970 and 1981-82 unearthed about 25 statues in the northwest part of this western agora alone.

And what do we read in Acts 17?

Scripture

Act 17:16 NKJV - Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Act 17:22 NKJV - Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; Act 17:23 NKJV - "for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

That's one small sample. From the historical details recorded in Acts, it becomes evident that Luke was far from being an unreliable or irrational witness. Rather, he stands out as an intelligent, learned physician and a meticulous historian.

Luke's dual roles as a physician and historian provided him with a unique perspective: he approached the narrative of God's redemptive work with both intellectual rigor and compassionate insight. His writings reflect an understanding of both the physical and spiritual needs of humanity, echoing Christ's own ministry of healing and salvation (Luke 4:18-19). As an early Gentile Christian, Luke's contributions also underscore the universal scope of the gospel, revealing that the message of Christ transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries (Acts 1:8). Theologically, Luke's accuracy and trustworthiness support the doctrine of biblical inerrancy—affirming that Scripture, in its original manuscripts, is without error and fully trustworthy in all it affirms. As the early church father Irenaeus wrote,

Quote

— *Irenaeus*

"Luke, also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him."

Also consider, what did Luke have to gain by writing a make-believe, contrived account of fake events? At that time, writing anything that had to do with Jesus would get you arrested or killed, not social media followers or influencer status. The church was hated and was being persecuted.

Illustration

For instance, under Emperor Nero's reign beginning in AD 54, Christians in Rome faced brutal persecution—including executions by burning and wild beasts in the arena, as recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus. Even before Nero, followers of Jesus were often ostracized and targeted by both Jewish authorities and the Roman state, as seen in Acts 8 with the martyrdom of Stephen and the scattering of believers. Luke himself traveled with Paul, who endured imprisonments, beatings, and eventual martyrdom for preaching Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). Luke's Gospel and Acts were likely written when such dangers were widely known.

Surely Luke had nothing to gain and much to lose by sending out an account of this nature, especially if it was to a Roman official. This historical backdrop illuminates the sincerity and courage required to write such a testimony.

As the early church father Tertullian stated in his Apology,

Quote

— *Tertullian*

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

The message of Christ spread not because it was safe or advantageous, but because those who witnessed it were convinced of its truth—just as Luke was. This tells me that Luke was personally convinced of its truth.

In the middle of Acts (chapter 16), Luke stops referring to the third person “They” and starts referring to “We.” This is when he joined the missionary journey and experienced these truths for himself.

So I say, if we can trust the letter's historicity, archeology, and the author's intelligence and motive, then we can also trust its content, even if it's supernatural and miraculous.

Main Point

Acts is Purposeful

Scripture

Acts 1:1-2 (NKJV) [1] The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach [2] until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen.

What is Luke's purpose in writing the letter? Would you circle the words “Jesus began”?

What does it mean when you begin something? That you're not finished yet. Luke has a purpose in writing the book of Acts, and what is it?

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

“To prove that Jesus was still alive and working by the Holy Spirit through the Church.”

The movement of Acts:

I believe the book of Acts is a recording (a history) of the Church accomplishing, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the mission that Jesus promised them in Acts 1:8

Scripture

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) [8] But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Application

1. Acts 1-7 - From Jerusalem: The risen Jesus commissions His apostles, and the church is born in Jerusalem. Through the preaching of Peter, the Apostles, Phillip, and Steven, the gospel takes root among the Jewish people and also garners enemies among the Jewish religious establishment. 2. Acts 8-12 - To Judea & Samaria: Persecution scatters believers, and the gospel leaps cultural and ethnic boundaries, reaching Samaritans and even Gentiles like Cornelius. No barrier is too high for God's grace—the good news is for outsiders, too. 3. Acts 13–28 - To the Ends of the Earth: The Apostle Paul's missionary journeys carry the message to the furthest reaches of the known world, Asia Minor, Greece, and finally Rome—the heart of the empire. 4. From Rome Onward: The book ends with Paul in Rome, but the mission doesn't end there—the story continues through us today. The Spirit still sends us out.

Jesus began - and He is still going. To this day, the chapters are still being written. Yes, the apostolic age has ended, and the Word of God has been canonized, but Jesus is still at work through the Spirit in His church today.

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

While the Spirit-inspired scripture is a closed book, the Spirit-filled church is an ongoing story.

Scripture

Eph 3:21 NKJV - to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

How long? Until the book of Acts is over? No forever and ever to every generation until this age ends. That is, as long as time and the church exist.

I don't ever doubt that the Spirit is still working today, but I fear that many times we quench Him or grieve Him, therefore limiting that which He desires to do in and through us. This is why Paul warns the church:

Scripture

1 Th 5:19 NKJV - Do not quench the Spirit.

Scripture

Ephesians 4:30 NKJV - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

What if the Spirit stopped working? Would we ignorantly continue on as though nothing had changed? It's been tragically observed:

Quote

— *Unknown*

"If the Holy Spirit stopped working in the book of Acts, everything would have come to a screeching halt, but if He stopped working today, things would continue on 'business as usual.'"

Just as much as ever, we need to be aware of this fact—Jesus wants to work through us today by the Holy Spirit. And there is nothing that we need more than Him. Do we need other things? Yes, of course, but without Him, none of it is eternally worth anything.

Main Point

Acts is Practical

Scripture

Acts 1:3-5 (NKJV) [3] to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (The resurrection of Christ has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt. He appeared to 500 eyewitnesses at once, Thomas touched his wounds, he made his disciples breakfast, etc.)[4] And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; (Luk 24:49 NKJV - "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.")[5] for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

NOTE: Next week, we will go in depth here on receiving power from on high, but because this is an introduction, we will summarize.

Jesus practically told His disciples that a new baptism was coming, one of the Holy Spirit and power. This baptism would be essential for followers of Christ to continue His mission on earth.

It all starts with the Holy Spirit. And as the Holy Spirit works, I see a very basic progression of the church in the book of Acts in its entirety:

The Holy Spirit arrives - The Promise of the Spirit is received
Local witness - Many people are saved
Community development - they all go from house to house sharing meals, praying, learning, and meeting each other's needs.
Leadership appointment: Leadership is appointed within the local church to meet growing spiritual and physical needs.
Missionary activity - Missionaries begin to take the gospel outside the local church (Paul, Silas, Barnabas, Phillip, Steven, etc)
Discipleship & Church planting - More churches are planted and begin to grow.

You know, I wonder if God doesn't want to still work in this same way today?

To fill us with the Spirit and power from on High. To take our witness into our community by loving people and sharing the gospel in our workplaces and neighborhoods. To put us in meaningful relationships and a Christian community with one another. To raise up leaders who will teach and serve the growing needs of God's people. To send out missionaries from those churches to take the gospel to other unreached areas of the world. To effectively raise up and disciple men and women, and to see churches planted in every area.

SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD PLAN TO ME!

CONCLUSION:

Just like you, I want to be a Christian who is alive in every sense of the term. Over the next many weeks, we will look chapter by chapter at some of the characteristics that made the first church alive.

But as we go, we have to understand that none of it is possible without the Holy Spirit. We must confess our genuine need for Him to work in us. Let's ask God to work through His Word, by His Spirit, to breathe new life in us!