

Acts I: WAIT
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Dear friends...it is so good to be with you again.

We are about to embark on a journey through the book of Acts. Today I will be talking with you about Chapter 1.

Let me just say, that I used to think the Book of Acts was boring. I didn't read it very much. And then last year I was asked to teach it at SUM.

Let me just tell you...this book that we are starting this sermon series on is one of ACTION...against a constantly shifting scene. (closest thing in scripture to a James Bond Movie)

You know how you can search for an AN ON DEMAND MOVIE. And you are given certain genres to choose from? If the book of Acts was made into a movie...(and it hasn't been done well - I don't know why Hollywood hasn't snatched this one up - but I am glad because they probably would have ruined it) ...if you were looking to watch THE BOOK OF ACTS on Demand...you would choose the genre **Action and Adventure**

That is exactly what it is. Luke wrote it to demonstrate the progress of the gospel, to present a history, and to give a defense because much of Acts is of people explaining why Jesus is real...and alive today...and how we are saved..

But with all that is said about Jesus...Packed into this little book you also have total all out action...

Conspiracy

Intrigue

Ambush

Hostile Confrontations and Fierce Conflicts to the death

Rioting mobs

Incessant travel all over the Mediterranean world

Complete with a shipwreck (which is so detailed an account in Acts 27 that people have used it to figure out ancient sailing practices)

Venomous serpents

Chains and imprisonment

Followed by at least two successful jailbreaks made possible by God's intervention
And more touches of humor than any other book in the NT

One Bible historian put it this way:

“Where, within eighty pages, will we find such a varied series of exciting events – trials, riots, persecutions, escapes, martyrdoms, voyages, shipwrecks, rescues, - set in that amazing panorama of the ancient world-Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus, Rome? And with such scenery and settings – temples, courts, prisons, deserts, ships, barracks, theatres...And in all of them (the historian) sees the providential hand that has made and guided this great movement for the salvation of humanity.” (E.J. Goodspeed)

Don't let anyone ever tell you that Christianity is boring.
Don't ever think that God doesn't work in the concrete events of history, as evil as they may be, as chaotic, and as random...to bring about His divine purpose

Luke, the author of Luke's gospel, is the pretty much undisputed author of Acts. He starts chapter 1 talking about “in my former book” – which was the gospel of Luke – I talked all that Jesus said and did...NOW in order to give us an orderly account of the things that occurred after Jesus was resurrected ... starts this book of Acts almost like a newspaper journalist would
To give an orderly account...factual account...so that we would know in as detailed and as objective a way as he could muster...exactly how Christianity was spread...

So the ascension scene that you read about in chapter 1 is the end of Luke's gospel, and then is mentioned in the first chapter of Acts. So there is this seamless transition.

I often wish that Luke and Acts were side by side in Bible so we could feel the unity between these two books...rather than having John stuck in the middle there.

Luke was a physician so he is well educated.
His Greek is excellent – you can't ask for a better writer, so again **Acts is a well-written Action/Adventure story.**

He writes to someone named **Theophilus** who we think was a high ranking official, perhaps in the Roman court.

Theophilus means "One who loves God" so another theory is that this was a pseudonym for the church in Rome or other places, and that name Theophilus – lover of God – was used to protect the identity of any certain person or church who might then be persecuted if found out to be a Christian... So if this true...right at the beginning you have suspense....intrigue

The other thing Luke does at the beginning of Acts in chapter 1 is a little more subtle. For all of you who love to study the Bible and make connections to the OT here you go...

Luke makes a connection between Jesus and Moses by telling us first that Jesus "**commanded**" the preaching of the gospel and then mentions that there were **40 days** between the resurrection and the ascension.

The combination of the two terms "command" and "40 days" is Luke's connection to Moses because Moses gave the Torah (the commandments) and he spent 40 days receiving them on the mountain. So this is Luke's way of saying – Jesus is legit...he is the new Moses bringing us a new commandment...a new covenant fueled by the Holy Spirit.

Chrysostom centuries ago put it this way, "**The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are a history of what Christ did and said; but the Book of Acts of what that 'other Comforter' (in other words the Holy Spirit) said and did.**"

This is a book about the Holy Spirit folks! Evidently the Holy Spirit loves action and adventure...

It is our book, because you and I never walked with Jesus in the flesh.

But you and I have known Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit – not because we knew him in the flesh, but because the Holy Spirit has touched our hearts and made us Christ's disciples.

So Acts...which comes after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is our 21st century PLUS book...the Holy Spirit is still at work in the same way among his people and in his church as he was in the ancient world

So, you could say that our study of Acts is a study on learning to recognize and appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit – in our midst

Which brings me to a very important theme for us today; and you will hear me say this over and over...

Churches today are fraught with people who are burnt out, running around trying to do good things, feeling unappreciated and exhausted

They are good moral people

They are doing good things

But the early church was not simply about doing good things

There is a difference between being simply moral – and by that I mean doing “good things” – and I am not saying that we shouldn’t be moral people

However running around doing good things is very different from

Being mystical – and by that I mean “listening” to the Holy Spirit

Figuring out what time it is according to God’s plan for you; and then

responding to that

Working out of your area of giftedness...not doing everything but maybe just doing one thing well

I am as guilty of burning myself out as anyone

But if you read Acts you find out that people in the early church, built the church and spread the gospel by listening and obeying the Holy Spirit...

They were not simply moral – those early disciples/apostles

They were mystical

Are you simply moral, or are you mystical? By that I mean are you listening and responding to the Holy Spirit.

We live in a very humanistic age

Corporations and nonprofit organizations are doing all kinds of good things for humanity

Back-packs, canned food drives, shelters being built, elimination of world wide hunger initiatives

All of that is wonderful...and God will use that

But then why do we need the church? What distinguishes us?

What distinguishes us is that we are a mystical people – not simply a moral people

We listen to the Holy Spirit, and we are dependent upon God’s initiative and guidance to do the moral things in His timing and in his way...

So I find it very ironic that in this first chapter that launches us into the Biblical James Bond ACTION/ADVENTURE book of ACTS

That the first command of Jesus is **WAIT**
Don't do anything
Just wait...Wait until you have been clothed with power from on high
Meaning, you guys need the Holy Spirit
You can't really make this work until you are filled with the Comforter, the
Convictor, the Healer...the Holy Spirit;

"WAIT in the city until you are clothed with power..."
"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father has promised..."

They obey. They wait. If they were simply moral they would have run around doing good.

But they aren't simply moral...they are mystical. They are obeying the first command in Acts to WAIT. But they aren't doing nothing. They are in prayer... constantly in prayer as we read in verse 14. They are in prayer because they are waiting for God to act, to instruct, to fulfill his promise and purpose. And because they obeyed, the church happened...

I am a terrible waiter.
I am always looking for the shortest line, at Safeway, at tollbooths – you name it. I have actually tried as a spiritual discipline to choose a longer line intentionally to slow myself down – and then to pray for the people in the longer line.
I got to tell you...that spiritual practice challenges me to all the time...I don't ever want to do it...

I am a terrible waiter
I want to show you something
Sitting in the line at the Mexican border...coming back from RSM...I was going nuts
We sat in that line and waited to cross for 2.5 hours!
I couldn't stand it. I kept running out of the van and buying things
(SHOW PICTURE OF MEXICAN BORDER)
At the border you have all these vendors and people coming up to the car saying buy this poncho, get this bobble head...
Well I didn't wait for them to come to me...I kept popping out of the van to go shopping
I bought this...and I bought this...and I bought churros for all the vans and with the little lady who made them all fresh for us walked down the long line of vans and delivered them with her
Because I don't wait well

I need to tell you though, it is when *I have waited* and sought God first

And not just jumped on the bandwagon of the next good thing
That I have seen the Holy Spirit at work most powerfully

It is when I have taken to heart my need for the Holy Spirit's power
It is when I have recognized that if I don't have the Holy Spirit I am sunk

And I have waited, and tried to the best of my ability to discern God's timing
and will

And I have synched up with his plan

It is when I have moved beyond simply being a good moral person to being
mystical....listening to the Holy Spirit

That things that have really made a difference start to happen

Friends, without the Holy Spirit we are sunk as a church

But with the Holy Spirit -we are launched into the adventure of a lifetime -

That's what the Book of Acts is - Action/Adventure - amazing story

Are you excited? Read chapter 2 for next time (two Sundays on it)

I want to share with you are story that happened at the ECO conference.

I am at the ECO conference that you heard about earlier; and I am inspired
already, kind of more tuned into God perhaps than usual because we've had
these great worship experiences.

And I walk into the sanctuary to put my stuff down and there's almost a whole
row free, and the Holy Spirit tells me "sit down". (you know the urging, the
prompting, the still small voice easy to ignore)

I don't want to sit down. I just wanted to put my stuff down, save a place
because its way before the session is going to begin, and I want to go to the
book table to see if there are any resources for you guys that will help us grow
spiritually as a church...that's a good thing to want to do, right? *It's a good
moral thing.*

But the Holy Spirit says "**Sit down**".

Darn it. So I sit.... And I wait...what are you doing God? I am just sitting here.
This is dumb.

I wonder if the disciples got impatient waiting in Jerusalem. I don't know. I
just know I did sitting there for ten minutes.

Finally, I realize that to my right (who I didn't see before) sits a woman who
looks Armenian several seats away from me. I look vaguely in her direction

and she starts to talk to me. I don't want you to talk to me...I don't know you... leave me alone (my first reaction)

But the Holy Spirit again says, "**Listen**".

So I listened. She isn't a pastor or an elder or even a church leader like most everyone else there was.

She is a single parent, works cleaning offices. The Holy Spirit is always so attentive to those who struggle and who are bowed down

And she begins to tell me how much she has sacrificed to raise her son Alex, how she is financially in a difficult place but she is trusting God and so grateful that she can be here tonight...

She tells me what good kid Alex is but Dad wasn't around to help her raise him (so she worked two jobs). And then she tells me that 9 months ago she walked into her apartment living room after a long day at work and she sees Alex, now a teen of about 19, lying on the couch.

She thinks he is taking a nap and goes over to rouse him. He doesn't respond, and she realizes that he stopped breathing. She finds out later that he is dead because of a heroin overdose. She calls 911 and they come and they are able to miraculously revive him. He is in the hospital for 7 days recovering.

Evidently, his brush with death also was a time when he had a vision of Jesus, telling him that he was deeply loved, and assuring him that his life had purpose and meaning.

So Alex returns home jazzed about the Lord and excited to turn his life around. He enrolls in Teen Challenge, an organization that helps kids break their drug addiction and depend instead on the Lord.

Rosalie Banta, (are you here?) our former seminary intern here at WVPC is actually interning right now at Teen Challenge.

Teen Challenge was formed 30 years ago by a guy named David Wilkerson, who also was mystical, not just moral, and heard the Holy Spirit call him – a white suburban pastor – to minister to gangs in New York City. Bizarre...kind of calling...not what he would have chosen or thought was in his gift mix...but he obeyed and Teen Challenge is now an international organization... ..that has helped thousands of kids. 87% long term success rate...

So I am next to this woman who is telling me all this, and unbeknownst to me, this was the evening session where the teen challenge choir was going to sing.

(SHOW IMAGE) 200 kids were up front. And then she said to me, I am here today because Alex wanted me to come and hear him singing for Jesus. He is so excited! *Of course, he told me the wrong time so I've been waiting here for an hour.*

Then she says, "Are you a pastor?"..."Will you pray for me and for my son?" By now Bob Harrison has joined us and he wisely says, "let's pray right now." And we do. When we are done, I ask her, which kid was her son, and she points to the shortest kid up front who I can barely see.

But then I can see him because, as the choir begins to sing, is jumping up and down with his hands in the air praising Jesus with all his heart. Every time he jumps up I get a better view of his face.

And while I am watching him jump, his Mom is next to me is weeping as she lifts her hands in the air and worships God. When the offering plate comes around, she dumps in all the money from her wallet. "I am just so grateful!" she says to me. "God saved my son."

And I thought, this is what the church is supposed to be about. Saving lives, blessing one another (she blessed me with her story, Bob and I blessed her by praying for her) and jumping up and down with joy because the risen Christ has saved us.

The next chapter of Acts...Acts 2 describes the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples are so full of joy that people say "they are filled with new wine"....there's a little bit of the humor I mentioned before....that peppers the book of Acts.

Now what if I hadn't listened and sat down and waited? I would have missed all that blessing. I wouldn't be sharing this story with you today, because I wouldn't know about it. (better than the book table!)

How important it is folks to not just be a moral church, but to be a mystical one....waiting on the Lord, devoting ourselves to prayer...and then when the time is right responding to what the Holy Spirit calls us to do...not what we think we should do

And that posture launches the adventure...When we wait on the Lord, and surrender fully to God's call, his power and his timing...we live the Book of Acts...and the church comes alive with power. TGBTG...