

“1 The former treatise have 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 that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: 3 To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:” (Ac 1:1-3)

Today I am beginning a series on the first chapters of Acts. I do not know how far I will go into Acts, and how long it will take. I plan every sermon to be complete in itself, but obviously, there is design and movement in the book that it will profit us to know. I urge you to be present as much as you can for this important series. These sermons will be doctrinal, practical, and designed for the people of God.

I have looked into a number of books, and have found Calvin most useful. I have taught the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in New Geneva Seminary for many years and I think I have profited a great deal from these studies. There are some good modern books on the Holy Spirit, but the old master is hard to beat.

I. The Nature of the Gospel. II. The mission of the Apostles. III. The Things Pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

I. The Nature of the Gospel: “The Things Jesus began both to do and to teach.” The Gospel is contained in two basic teachings of Scripture:

- A. The Doctrine of the Person of Christ. Luke passes over this in this passage, having included that in the “former” treatise, the Third Gospel. Luke. I would summarize the Person of Christ in the following:
1. He is the eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, but also both God and man; the doctrine I developed in a sermon on Ro 9:5 where the apostle named Jesus “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.” This was a Christmas Message on December 2 and is on sermonaudio.
  2. With respect to the flesh, He lived a perfect sinless life, fully kept all the commandments of God and fulfilled all the requirements of the law on our behalf.
  3. Being truly man, He could really suffer and die as the last Adam, suffering on behalf of His people; As God He could suffer in a few hours all the wrath of God for the sin of the whole human race, as HC No 37. I love this question: notice that the word “sin” is singular, because God is One the offense is one and encompasses all the evil in the world. Hence, the sin of one condemned the whole race, and the obedience of One is sufficient to put away sin forever; hence, God can save as many wicked sinners as He intended, and the one sacrifice is sufficient. His sacrifice is one sacrifice because it is offered up to the One infinite Father in Heaven. HC questions 12-20 deal with the doctrine of the nature of Christ’s person.
  4. Christ did a great many things, and taught a great many things that are not recorded in Scripture; but the Gospel writers by the Holy Spirit wrote those things that we

need to know, passing over most of the first thirty years of the life of Christ, and we should not engage in vain and empty speculation. The time of the Gospel is from His baptism until His ascension. “Until he was taken up.” Luke and the other three record “all” that Jesus began to do and teach....

B. But the Gospel also includes the work and the teachings of Christ.

1. This is the substance that Luke passes by briefly in our text: “all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day he was taken up.”
2. The works and teaching of Christ that are called the Gospel were accomplished during the time of His public ministry, commencing with His baptism and ending with His Ascension into Heaven.
3. During this time, by the power of the Holy Spirit He taught us the things of the kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, for the words are used interchangeably, and represented us before God in fulfilling both the requirements of the law with respect to obedience and with respect to its punishment.
4. He lived under the law, subject to the curse placed upon Adam, and died under the law, taking the curse upon Himself, gathering together into His own bosom all the arrows of the wrath of God, drinking the cup to its bitter dregs, being made sin for us. He knew the pain of birth, the opposition of sinners, suffered slander and hatred and betrayal; He knew hunger and thirst and poverty; He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; He was made a sacrifice for sins both in body and in soul. This He did as our High Priest.
5. But He was also our prophet, explaining to us the meaning of His words to the prophets since the beginning of the world. He magnified the law and made it honorable. He constantly pointed to the Scriptures, explaining their meaning in those great sermons and parables that are recorded in the Gospels. Even His smallest acts were instructive; writing in the dust, put mud on the eyes of the blind, walking on the water, stilling the storm, teaching Mary at His feet as a disciple, going up on a mountain to teach; withdrawing to pray.
6. He also promised that He would be a faithful king, sitting on the throne of David, ruling His people. He accomplished this after His resurrection, ascending to the right hand of the Father, sending the Holy Spirit to be the administrator of His kingdom, and promising that someday His kingdom would encompass the whole world, his enemies would be made his footstool and God would be acknowledge to be Lord of All.

C. So to understand the Gospel, we must consider both the Person and the Teachings/work of Christ. Acts will consider those works that are being done by Christ after His ascension into Heaven through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is the administrator of the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is now both present in the world, and promised to be fulfilled at the return of the King.

II. The Mission of the Apostles. They were to fulfill the mission given to them: “after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen”

- A. Jesus, by His ascension into heaven did not leave the church alone, as if there was no earthly care to be given to them.
  - B. No, by the Holy Spirit the Apostles were given commandments. He speaks to us through the Apostles and governs us by their teachings.
  - C. This is said specifically by Jesus himself and by John, by Paul, by Peter.
    - 1. Matthew 28:16-20. Turn to and read. He is with us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of the Apostles.
    - 2. Commanded by the Holy Spirit: See 1 Cor. 2:9-16. The divisions in the church since the apostles show that this applied only to the apostles, and not to every minister.
    - 3. This is the gift of Christ to the world: Ephesians 4:1-16. It is not every man for himself now that Christ has returned to heaven. We are placed under the authority and discipline of His ministers so that we might grow up to Christ in all things; in other words, to put off the old, put on the new, and be sanctified.
    - 4. John says the same thing: 1John 1:1-4
    - 5. So also does Peter: Acts 10:34ff.
    - 6. So does also the writer of Hebrews: Heb. 13:7, 14-17. We are called to remember and obey those that have the rule over us. God has placed us under government and supervision. We should not be wiser than God. Your sinful flesh will rebel against this and you will have a lifelong struggle with this; but it is the word of God.
    - 7. We will have occasion to speak of this a great deal as we go through Acts.
- III. The Things Pertaining to the Kingdom of God. A review of what He had been teaching them, about His government and presence in the world by the Holy Spirit while He is absent from us.
- A. The Apostles taught what Jesus commanded them to teach. No more, no less.
  - B. The end of the doctrine: that God might reign in us.
    - 1. The kingdom of God: as to the person: God is our ruler and king.
    - 2. The kingdom of Heaven: as to the location: it is not of this world. Our conversation; our citizenship, is in heaven. “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,” our master said.
  - C. In my concluding remarks, I will paraphrase what Calvin says on this passage, putting it into simple, modern English, but you can check it online in the many places that you can find Calvin’s commentary on Acts 1:3. This is not only Calvin, it is biblical and sensible.
    - 1. The kingdom begins with our being born again, for until then we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. It ends in immortality, and in between we grow in grace, being renewed in the image of Christ.
    - 2. Our first birth does not bring us into the kingdom; God must make us new, but that can happen at any time, and does not require our participation. Even infants can be born again, although this is not the ordinary thing.
    - 3. We live as strangers and aliens from God, even in the church, until we are born again by His word and spirit.

4. The world, the flesh, and the devil are contrary to the kingdom of heaven which has nothing in common with them. Hence, man’s own nature, until he is renewed by the Spirit is an enmity with God and is not subject to the rule of God and the kingdom of God.
5. Because we seek our happiness here, we are alienated from God, who is our true happiness and contentment.
6. It is through the preaching of the true Gospel that we are lifted up to think of the life to come. By this our thoughts and affections are transformed and we seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. This is only by the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, according to the command of Christ.
7. This includes taking away our sins and iniquities and the vices of our heart so that we hate and reject them more and more, that we be like Christ.
8. Eternal death is prepared for those who live after the flesh; so eternal life is prepared for those whose conversation and citizenship and affections are in heaven, who live according to the Spirit.. The kingdom begins in us, progresses by sanctification, and is fulfilled in eternal glory.
9. Therefore God reigns in us now by the Gospel so that He may finally make us partakers of His heavenly kingdom.
10. Finally a direct quote: Christ “did principally [speak] of the corruption of mankind; of the tyranny of sin, whose bond-slaves we are; of the curse and guiltiness of eternal death, whereunto we all are subject, and also of the means to obtain salvation; of the remission of sins; of the denying of the flesh; of spiritual righteousness; of hope of eternal life, and of like such things. And if we will be rightly instructed in Christianity, we must apply our studies to these things.”

There is no better application that I can make of these things, than what I just said. So let us pray. May God bless you. Amen and Amen.