



Message #1

“BETTER TOGETHER – ACTS Introduction”

Acts 1:1-3

Remember....If you want to hear the message again, or watch the message presentation again, you can always catch up with the audio & visual presentations of the sermon each week on our Faithlife site.

This past year has been one of great challenge for everyone, including the church. In fact, many of the things that we say are important to us as a “community of believers”- things like gathering together for worship, prayer, fellowship – for a period of time were not allowed due to the lockdown restrictions placed upon us by COVID-19.

For many, it was a time of frustration and, even, disconnection. In as much as we have tried to foster connection and engagement, compassion and care, during this time we have still seen some of our church family become more distant and disconnected....and some even drift away.

At the same time, I do believe that the restrictions placed upon us have highlighted very strongly the things that are important to us...even though we have done the best we can (thanks to technology) with streaming of services and zoom catch-ups, there is nothing like being together!

And we believe strongly that what we are called as a church to be/do (Loving God, Loving Life, Loving People) is always done...better together!

“Better together” is our theme for the year. It is not just a catchy slogan...it is a BIBLICAL MANDATE! So, to help us understand what it means to be a church, a true community of believers, we are going to work our way through the book of ACTS....and, hopefully, see the Holy Spirit work in, and through, our midst as was the case with the early church.

It may well be challenging and unsettling at times, but it is timely for us to rediscover what God wants His church to be like...and not to just settle for what we are comfortable with it being.

May God bless us as we study His Word.....together.

The Book of ACTS:

AUTHORSHIP:

External evidence (gleaned from the writings of the Church in the first few centuries) is unanimous that the author was Luke.

Internal evidence (found in Scripture itself) notes that ACTS is linked closely with the third Gospel, indicating common authorship.

Both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

Acts begins by summarizing the contents of the “first book” whose contents correspond with Luke’s Gospel.

DATE OF WRITING:

Scholars date it from the early to mid-60s of the first century to much later in the century. However, the majority of scholarly opinion is that the book was written in the early 60s AD.

The Book of Acts covers a span of about 30 years.

MAJOR THEMES OF ACTS:

The first 12 chapters of Acts cover the formative stages of the early church and the impact of Peter's ministry.....this is the "church together".

The other 16 chapters follow the ministry of Paul...this is the "church in motion".

We encounter many major themes throughout Acts. Some are:

- The church together
- The centrality of Christ
- The power of the Holy Spirit
- Community life
- Prayer
- Teaching
- The priority of evangelism/mission
- Breaking human barriers and strongholds
- The place of suffering
- The sovereignty of God
- The Jewish reaction to the Gospel
- The legal status of Christianity
- and many more

THE RADICAL CHALLENGE OF ACTS TO THE CHURCH:

- Instead of individualism, Acts presents a radical community where the members had all things in common.
- Instead of selfishness, Acts presents a group of Christians, so committed to Christ and the cause of the Gospel, that they were willing to sacrifice their own desires for the good of others.
- Instead of pluralism, Acts presents a Church that based its life on objective facts about God/Christ that compelled them to share the "good news" with the world.
- Instead of wishy-washy compromise, Acts presents a Church convinced and convicted of the truth of the Gospel and proclaiming Christ as the supreme Lord.
- Instead of specialization, Acts presents a Church that ministered completely to everyone.
- Instead of resources focused inwardly, Acts presents a Church that released its best (people and resources) for reaching the lost.
- Instead of success coming from excellence of methods and techniques, Acts presents a Church that depended totally on the Holy Spirit and that gave top priority to prayer.
- Instead of avoiding suffering and discomfort, Acts presents a Church that was willing to suffer discomfort and persecution for the cause of Christ and considered it a basic cost of discipleship.

FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY:

How have the events of this past year affected you...physically, socially and spiritually?

Have you ever studied ACTS before? If so, what was most memorable for you?

Verse 3 talks of "many convincing proofs". What evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus?

Do you think the church can benefit from studying Acts? If so, how?
