

“The Acts of the Apostles—The Acts of A New Believer”  
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Text: Mark 1:14-23

I remember the breakthrough moment when I read, most likely, or heard that the book of Acts was about *the acts of the Holy Spirit* following the ascension of our Lord Jesus! That idea lent a sense of unity to the whole book which was part two of Luke’s original document. The introduction of the gospel of Luke doubles as the introduction of the Book of Acts. It bears the marks of scientific, historical study centuries before that theological approach burst on the scene (1,600 years later if you select the reformation as the starting point; or 1,800 years if we measure from the emergence of “Higher Criticism,” so-called). For instance there is contemporaneity (Luke consulted living witnesses of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection), the use of authoritative sources (the apostles), and peer review all providing Theophilus with **certainty of those things wherein he was instructed**. There is little reason to doubt that this instruction consists of the same doctrine that Paul refers to as what he **had received and had faithfully transmitted** to the recipients of his epistles. This common body of truth, central doctrine, pre-existed the writing of Acts as well as the ministry of Paul so that both drew on the same tradition, oral, liturgical, sometimes embodied in hymnody and cited as familiar material. And on this basis of these assertions, we know that Luke is accorded first place among the historical of the ancient and classical world. And while polytheistic religions were still on the scene, and temples existed consecrated to Greek and Roman deities—sometimes embodied in state religions with emperor worship and other times blended with pagan and idolatrous local religions. The sacrificial offerings were real enough, but belief in their efficacy, practically speaking, was waning. It was a matter of religious custom, a cultural iteration of faiths that had, perhaps, been believed in sincerely but the clash of so many religions and traditions created skepticism as well as confusion. The religious world was certainly diverse.

*Comparative religion, and religious studies, replicates some of the first century cultural climate.* I haven’t however heard of refusal to practice polytheism results in the charge of being atheistical currently but monotheism is suspect in our day as being presumptuous and arrogant—that is because polytheism, accords with the assertion that the variation proves that there are many paths to God—and that all religions are variants of the same spiritual impulse, and pursuit. The exclusive claims to the truth of biblical revelation and to the supremacy of Christ as King, Lord and Savior still rankle those whose sociological approach to religion precludes the possibility of knowing the truth absolutely. A theory of relativism (not relativity!) seems to have a pervading, dominant influence because to the man-centeredness of our cultural approach. If we do not ascribe to this narrative of relative religious truth, we may be open to charges of proud intolerance and close-mindedness (technically, ethnocentrism!). What is striking about this state of affairs is not the similarity of our cultural postures, but that the proclamation of Christian truth went forth regardless. Christ was proclaimed without apology, or defensiveness and the difficulties with the message did not inhibit the preaching.

*Their preaching was not inhibited because it was actionable.* By that I mean, for instance, when Peter became **a fisher of men**, he gave up a certain skill set (as a fisherman) and adopted a new skill set (that of an apostle). Here is a short list of what Peter's spiritual transition entailed:

- A change of occupation includes a change or preoccupation.
- There's a mixture of renovation, remodeling, restoration, innovation and renewal involved to it, to this transformation/alteration of character.
- One is enriched, empowered and engaged in the process—radicalized.
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To be clear, common, ordinary fishermen living mundane lives in a profane and worldly setting—being productive, doing business, earning their keep!—***came into the presence of the Lord manifest in Jesus and, being captivated by Him, they were deeply altered by God . . . we say, born again, converted and made new to describe this differentiation (yes, they were changed, made different) which distinguished them from others.***

- They were divinely constrained, having taken Christ's yoke upon themselves, and this reconfiguration was confirmed by wonders and signs, healings and deliverances as well as the whole array of their occupational shift which changed their values, goals and actions. All this obtained by following Jesus!
- Following Jesus can mean leaving everything behind—all the trappings of our former life! Paul writes that all the religious advantages he had from his former life, he now considers as dung compared to knowing Christ! Christ's choice of fishermen (God's choice for the vessels to bring the gospel light to all nations), in preference to shepherds(!), or scribes, religious leaders, rabbis, or priests—the wealthy, proud and educated accentuate the difference between how God does things and our approach (union bosses, politicians, professors, lawyers, courts, influencers and businessmen), is quite telling.
- He wanted men who were able to take orders, behave urgently, handle crises and emergencies (both natural and social). He wanted men who could function as a team, working together in concert towards a common cause. He wanted men of dedication to the mission and loyal to their leader.
- He wanted courageous men, men who could brave storms, face dangers, who would ban fear despite persecutions, afflictions and opposition. Hardened, in a good sense, against such perils, threats and conflict. He wanted men who were skillful with their tools and equipment, artful in their application of those skills: teachable, students of the word of God, utterly familiar with the wiles of our enemies and capable of spiritual warfare (prayer, deliverance, faith, healing, forgiveness). Men able to mentor and train up other fishermen/preachers after netting their fish! They were aware of the commodities of the kingdom—our riches and treasure—and were unashamed to advertise them. They were faith promoters, godly and winsome witnesses to Christ. To Whom be glory and honor and power forevermore—Jesus chose those who would worship Him and they worshipped Him by their obedience—cross-bearing even unto death.

Something of the same thing must happen when we become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ! We will act differently because of our identity in Christ; we will hone new skills of interaction and communication and we will continue to develop these aptitudes in the changing social settings we find ourselves in. ***And it will be about Him, about forgiveness through faith in Him; it will be about salvation, resurrection and eternal life.*** Whereas there may have been a time when those terms meant significantly less to us, when we were unbelievers, now that we are ***born again, to a living hope,*** these things are our treasure and bringing others into the kingdom becomes a driving force, a motivation for living.

When we become Christians, we do not take up a new occupation as fishermen *as our primary occupation necessarily*. What we do is become bi-vocational. A tradesman and a fisher of men! A secretary, who spends her down time spiritually mending and repairing her nets in preparation for a catch! A sales associate, logger, farmer, plumber, IT worker—whatever!! Your work becomes the fishing spot. We pray for fish to catch, to bring them to Jesus daily.

Convinced that there is more to life than what ordinarily presents itself, more that is not apparent, we choose to live above, to dwell on things eternal, seeking things which last and do not dissolve, or deteriorate, being reduced to dust and ashes. The cause of Christ becomes our cause. We, the called, want to enlarge the family of God through our witness, service and testimony; it is our duty to fill the tables of the Father's great banquet ***at the wedding feast of the Lamb! Yes, our duty and our burden is to enlarge Christ's kingdom rule.***

**Amen.**