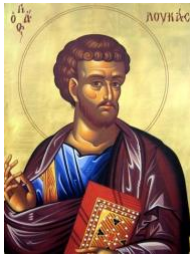


**"Acts of the Apostles: Lesson 2" by Faber McMullen,
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"The Beginning of it All"



Thirty four years had passed since the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. At some point during that time period a Greek boy named Luke was born. He heard the story of Jesus and he believed. That little boy grew up and became a medical doctor. Perhaps as he heard of the healings of Jesus he decided to learn all that he could about giving medical care to others. He had a heart of compassion. It is believed that along the way he somehow was introduced to the now aging Mary, the mother of Jesus, and she told Luke all about her amazing son. Maybe she came to him as a patient. The truth is lost in time. She told him about the birth of Jesus. She told him about the life of Jesus. And, she told him about every detail of His death and resurrection. Maybe it was Mary's testimony that first caused Luke to utter in his heart, "I believe Lord and I accept you as my Messiah".¹

As Luke wrote his Gospel account, he included detail that none of the other writers mentioned. Luke was a scientist. He was a detail person. So, it was fitting as well that God would ordain him to write that precious account of the time period between about AD 30 and AD 64. If Luke had not chronicled this time period, we would have great difficulty piecing together any of the history of the early church. Please open your Bibles to the first chapter of Acts and read along with me.

I 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. (NKJV).

Verse 1, 2, 3 Again, like the Gospel according to Luke, these verses mention this person "Theophilus." We learned last week that this means "Lover of God." We don't know whether this was a real person or if it is just addressed to any "lover of God," which would include those of us who are reading this. Luke reminds the reader of his full gospel account as he repeats the outline of the crucifixion and resurrection story.

The story of Jesus' resurrection was repeated by many who saw Him. It is interesting that the scientist, Luke, states, "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs." Two resurrection Sundays ago I gave a detailed account as to why

¹ This paragraph is the conjecture of the writer. We don't have enough detail to know how Luke came to faith but it could have well been in this manner.

even lawyers who have examined the evidence, state that there is enough evidence in the historical record to support the validity of the claim of Jesus' followers. This is not a fairy tale. This happened. In review, there are several key events that give great credence to the resurrection story:

1. Almost two thousand years have past and there is no credible evidence disputing the story. No one has come out of the woodwork to reveal some great hoax that was perpetrated on mankind in the story of Jesus. Surely if something existed it would have come out of the darkness into the light within years after the resurrection. Instead, these two thousand years have passed with no substantiated story that reveals any of it was false.

2. The disciples continued to insist, until they were all killed (except for the disciple John), that what they had in fact seen *had* happened. It was against all of their interests to maintain a lie to the point of their own deaths. Conspiracies inevitably break down when the pressure comes. This corporate story was never changed or abandoned by any of Jesus' followers. Judas never changed his story, he just was confused about who Jesus was and probably disappointed that Jesus failed to be a political deliverer. After he had betrayed Jesus, he demonstrated his remorse by returning the money to the temple and hanging himself. The story of Jesus continued unabated throughout the ages.

3. Paul, who described himself as a "Jew of all Jews" was a brilliant, privileged, thoroughly educated person unto whom Jesus appeared in a vision. Paul had been a chief instigator of persecution against the early church, and after seeing Jesus, his life turned around 180 degrees. Paul's steadfast support of what he had seen resulted in him being beaten, tortured, and going through every other kind of human misery. It makes no rational sense that he would have gone through all of that for a lie.

4. Those who desired to promote a lie would never have written major testimony by women witnesses into the story. A woman's testimony was not admissible in court at that time. It would have discredited the story, but instead it lends great credibility to the story because it was against the interest of the story itself to be included in the story. A person promoting a lie would not have included female witnesses.

5. The gospel accounts tell us that after His resurrection Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. That's a lot of people. It is too great a number to ever hold a conspiracy together.

6. Lastly several Jewish scholars over the ages have written that they believe Jesus lived and died and was a real person. Some have even written that, given the evidence, they believe He was raised from the dead. They do not believe He was divine, but they believe that God raised Jesus to somehow bring gentiles into an understanding of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings that are called the *Tanakh* in Hebrew and which we now refer to as the "Old Testament".² It is of great interest that they fully support that

² The writings of Pinchas Lapide, an Orthodox Jewish Theologian https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinchas_Lapide, and the great Mamonides who was a revered Arabic writing Jewish rabbi of the middle ages.

Jesus was a true historical figure that lived and died and taught the principles that He taught.

Let's now read on to verse four of our text this morning.

The Holy Spirit Promised

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." (Acts 1:4-5, NKJV).



There is much talk about the Holy Spirit. The great *Shemah Israel* states, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God is one." So just what is the Holy Spirit? If God is One how can He be three? Christian orthodoxy teaches that God is indeed one, but He is three persons in one. This is called "The Trinity" or the "Holy Trinity." Scripture supports that the persons of God have distinct and separate roles. This is a concept that we are unable to fully grasp with our human minds. Saint Patrick explained it through

the principle of a Shamrock which is a single plant containing three distinct lobes. The

persons of the Trinity are, of course, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Luke explains that Jesus promised His followers that soon they would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Let's talk about this for a minute.

St. Patrick's Analogy



St. Patrick, the evangelist to Ireland, tried to teach about the Trinity by showing the shamrock, a three leaf clover, to the ancient residents of the island [Ireland]. The Trinity is composed of three persons (the 3 leaves) who are in nature one being (the shamrock itself). Each has a distinct function in relation to humanity.

The Holy Spirit is given to every believer upon putting one's faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

1. Baptism of the Holy Spirit = the **one**-time receiving of the Holy Spirit for each believer. After Pentecost, with just a few exceptions in Acts of a delay, every Christian receives the Holy Spirit immediately upon his or her moment of salvation. Receiving the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" is not a second blessing somehow received after salvation. It is promised and received at the point of salvation. Paul's letter to Titus explains "5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7 NKJV).

Briefly let me explain how the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is different from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

2. Filling of the Holy Spirit = the daily empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and the yielding of oneself to the positive will of God. All Christians receive the Holy Spirit at salvation as part of their act of salvation. The filling of the Holy Spirit comes through a believer giving him or herself over to the will of God and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit that lives within each believer.

Also note that Luke quotes Jesus in saying, "wait for the Promise of the Father." Often we have to wait for the promise of the Father. This is a good reminder to us that our timetable may not be in line with God's timetable. Sometimes we have to wait. Let's read on.

⁶ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 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." (Acts 1:6-8, NKJV).

This account of the dialogue between Jesus and His disciples teaches us several things. First, it tells us that as His followers we do not know the time or seasons which the Father orchestrates. God does things in His own time, but He has a timetable for all things. We should leave the unfolding of history up to God and we should concentrate on the task He has left us with.

Special Functions of the Holy Spirit

- Brings us into a loving relationship with God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ.
- Brings conviction into our lives through God's word (John 15:8)
- Effects a new life in believers – He is the agent of transformation.
- Gives us power to be witnesses to the work of Christ in our lives.
- Empowers us with Spiritual gifts to serve God and His Church.
- Helps us in prayer (Rom.8:26).



The text clearly tells us that this gift of the Holy Spirit that we will receive is the energizer that gives us great power. You can read a brief listing of some of the special functions of the Holy Spirit in the overhead, but Luke quotes Jesus as promising that this Holy Spirit will empower His followers to be "witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." This means that as God takes care of His business, we should be in the business of being

witnesses who give our testimony to the world of what He has done in each of our lives. We give this testimony wherever He takes us. Let's put this in our own geographical context. We are to be witnesses to His glory and grace in Whitehall, in Grimes County, in Texas, in the United States, and wherever we go in the earth. We don't have the power to do this on our own, but we have the power to do this through the Holy Spirit that has been placed in each and every one of us as believers.

Jesus Ascends to Heaven

⁹ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, ¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11, NKJV).

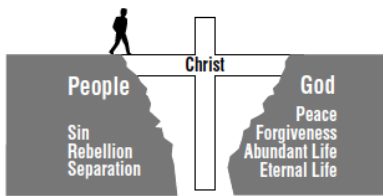
These verses describe not only Jesus' ascension, but they also describe His return. You see, believers truly believe that He will come again. I believe that. Do you believe that? He will come back in a cloud in view of all the people of the earth. ⁷ Behold, He is

coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen." (Revelation 1:7, NKJV).

These verses also tell us exactly where He will return. He will return to the Mount of Olives from which He left. "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west," (Zechariah 14:4a, NKJV).

The Ascension of Jesus marked the end of His bodily ministry on earth. At that moment His followers had only a hope of receiving that Holy Spirit that He had promised. Scripture tells us that He ascended and took His place at the right hand of the Father. (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 12:2) Just imagine the scene as Jesus arrived in heaven. Daniel describes it for us. ¹³"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14, NIV). Who was Daniel talking about? He was talking about our risen Savior and Lord Jesus. Praise His holy name! If that passage doesn't cover you with chills then you are spiritually dead. Amen?

His ascension leaves His continuing work on earth here in our hands. That's the part we just covered concerning our work as His witnesses here on earth. For me, one of the most inspiring parts of the resurrection is the assuredness that we too will one day be resurrected in glory.



All that I have spoken of today is gibberish and nonsense if you do not know Him as your Savior and Lord. Knowing Him is a simple act of belief. Serving Him is obeying His will for your life. The Bible says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect desire for us. (Romans 3:23) The Bible further tells us that the

consequence of that sin and separation is eternal death. (Romans 6:23) This means an afterlife separated from Jesus who truly desires to be the lover of your soul. The beauty is that even while you and I were in this lost condition God made marvelous provision through the death of Jesus on the cross. He died so that you and I might live. I don't pretend to understand all of this, but I choose to believe it, and the Bible says that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son that if we believe in Him we will not eternally perish, but that we will have precious eternal life.

Do you have this assurance today? Have you believed? Will you be one of those He comes to claim as His own when He returns?

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.)