

The Handoff - Acts 1:1-11
Argyle – 7/2/17 – Studies in Acts

Introduction to Scripture

Today we begin a five week series in the Book of Acts. We'll be using the *Discovery Bible* reading guide's schedule as our guide. Each week Bryan and I will select one of the passages from that week's *Discovery's* readings to preach on. That was easy this week, because this study in Acts only started yesterday and so there was only one reading to choose from.

One of the things Bryan and I will be doing each week as part of this series will be to share some of the Bible study methods and tools that we use in preparing our sermons. We want you to not only understand the Book of Acts better, but, also, how to better study the Bible on your own.

This morning's Scripture passage introduces us to the major players and material that will be covered in Acts. If this passage sounds familiar, it is because we studied it back in March as part of our Lenten series on "Encounters with Jesus." Our focus back then was on the significance and implications of the ascension. Our focus today is on the handoff of Jesus' ministry from Jesus to his disciples.

Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, also wrote the book of Acts. We know that partially because both were written to a man named Theophilus. Luke wrote.. (Recite)

The first and most important tool we have for understanding the Bible is prayer. God inspired Luke to write these words and now we want to ask him to help us understand and apply these words to our lives. (Pray)

Introduction

In addition to prayer, a tool that I have found helpful in knowing and understanding God's word is memorization. When I was in college I was involved with a ministry called the Navigators and they were big on memorization. So, I memorized a lot of Scripture in college. Then I basically stopped memorizing Scripture until we started doing Growth Groups here about 10 years ago. Memorization is an important part of that curriculum. In recent years I have started occasionally memorizing the Sunday morning preaching text. I don't find memorization easy, but it is very helpful. The psalmist wrote, "How can a young man keep his way pure. By keeping it according to your word. ...Your word I have treasured in my heart, so that I might not sin against thee."(Psalm 119: 9 & 11) The more we "treasure" God's word in our hearts through memorization, the better we will understand it and the better equipped we will be to live holy lives.

Introduction

(Picture) In football the handoff is when the quarterback hands the ball to the running back who then is responsible for moving the ball forward down the field until he is tackled. The handoff seems like a pretty easy thing to do when you are watching it on TV. The reason it looks so easy is because they practice it over and over again during the

week before the game. Getting the handoff right is one of the keys to a successful running game.

Lord willing, in 5 years I will be retiring and handing off my pastoral responsibilities to my successor. One of the tasks for my sabbatical is to study pastoral handoffs to see what I can learn about doing this well, so the ministry continues to flourish.

It had come time for Jesus to handoff the ministry to the apostles he had been preparing for 3 years. He was down to a little over a month to when he would physically leave this world for good until the time of his 2nd coming. These 40 days took place between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension. Most of what we know about this time is recorded here in Acts 1:1-11. These were Jesus' final instructions to his disciples. The *Discovery* Bible reading guide points out that Jesus needed them to understand two important things to ensure that the handoff was a smooth one - wait and go.

This illustrates one other Bible study tool that I would like to highlight this morning and that is Bible study guides like (picture) *Discovery* or *Encounter With God*.

I want to put a plug in for these kinds of Bible reading guides. (Discovery outline) Each day they have you begin with prayer and then read several verses of Scripture. Then they share some insights with you about the passage, ask an application question for you to think about and then there is a closing prayer. You can do this in as little as 10-15 minutes, so it is doable on a daily basis. They will have you read through a section of Scripture so you can understand the context of what is going on. The *Discovery* study in

Acts covers Acts 1-8 during the month of July. Then they will spend a couple of weeks in Joshua and Judges before returning to the New Testament for a study in Mark in late August. So, they have you learning about different parts of the Bible, but you aren't jumping around so much that you don't get the flow of what is going on.

Some of you use devotional guides that have you read just one verse and then there is an inspirational story related to that verse. Those devotional guides are encouraging to us and I use them from time to time, but they don't help us get to know the Bible better. One of the best ways to get to know and understand the Bible better is to read a section of it every day using a Bible reading guide like *Discovery* or *Encounter*. *Discovery* is a good guide to start with. When you are ready for something deeper, *Encounter* is a good option. Many of us have found these guides to be the tool that helped us establish a regular Bible reading habit that has led to us knowing the bible better.

As I was reading the *Discovery's* insights on this passage this week, it helped me see a structure for this sermon. I want to focus on Jesus' commands to wait and to go.

Wait!

In order for there to be a smooth handoff from Jesus to his apostles they needed, first of all, to wait. Jesus said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

When we arrived in Arcadia, FL in January 2005 for our first disaster response trip we were anxious to get to work. But we were told to wait. Wait? There was

work that needed to be done and 16 of us who had just flown from New York to help with that work. We were eager to get to going. But before they could assign us to projects, they needed to assess our skills and then see what tools and supplies were available for us to use. Waiting can be frustrating, but it is often necessary.

That was especially true for the first followers of Jesus. They were given the task of carrying on the work of Jesus, particularly of being his witnesses. Although they may have been anxious to get to work, it would have been disastrous to move ahead until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was essential to the work Jesus had entrusted them with. The Spirit would provide them the power they needed to do this work. As we read through the Book of Acts we can clearly see how true that is. When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers as promised, they were given courage to proclaim the gospel, even in the face of opposition and imprisonment. The Spirit enabled them to speak the gospel in languages they had never learned and guided them where to go and where not to go. The Spirit gave them courage when they were being persecuted and grew the church in numbers. The Spirit gave the believers the words to speak in particular situations. It is clear that the Holy Spirit was crucial for the mission of the early church.

But what about us? Is the Holy Spirit crucial to the work that our church is doing? How well do you understand the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? To what degree do you depend on the Holy Spirit to guide, empower and equip you? If

the Father was to withdraw the Spirit from our church today, would we notice any difference?

The Holy Spirit is so crucial to the work of the church that Jesus told his followers to wait until the Spirit had come before leaving Jerusalem.

Go!

Once they had received the Holy Spirit, they needed to go. That was the next step in the handoff from Jesus to his apostles. Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The mission of the church is to be witnesses starting where we are and then expanding out in concentric circles. And our responsibility to be witnesses extends to the ends of the earth.

So, starting in Argyle, Greenwich, Hartford or wherever you live, we are to go to our neighbors, to coffee shops, to schools, to businesses, to jails, to nursing homes, to group homes to bear witness to Jesus Christ. We can’t just sit at home or in our churches and expect people to come to us. We need to go!

But our responsibility doesn’t end with our local community. We have a responsibility for the greater Washington County and Glens Falls areas. So, we go and are involved with the Open Door Mission and Young Life at SUNY Adirondack and Upstate Jail Ministry and New Creation Church in Granville. This is our “Judea.” Our “Samaria” includes our partnership in ministry with InterVarsity at

local colleges and in the refugee community in Albany. Our “ends of the earth” circle includes missionaries we support in the Czech Republic, Zambia, East Africa, Pakistan, India, Albania and Belarus. Folks from our own community have gone to Montreal, Jordan and Papua New Guinea and folks from our own church have gone to Morocco, Uganda and France. It’s all about going to be witnesses to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. That going may be next door or to Glens Falls or to Lake Champion or across the world. In order for us not to drop the ball of mission that Jesus has handed us we need to go.

Conclusion

We don’t need to wait any longer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Since Pentecost 2000 years ago, the Spirit has come to live in every Christian when they came to faith in Jesus. We each have the Holy Spirit. We need to learn about the Spirit’s ministry in our lives and draw on that power he has given us. Jesus has handed the ball to us.

And we need to go. We need to obey the command of our Lord and step out of our comfort zones to go to those who need to hear about Jesus. We have been saved by God to be witnesses to his world about who Jesus is and what he has done in our lives. I challenge you to ask God for an opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus this week and then be alert for his answer to that prayer. Jesus has handed the ball to us.

Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”